

September 25, 2013

# THE HUFFINGTON POST

THE INTERNET NEWSPAPER: NEWS BLOGS VIDEO COMMUNITY

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## Keystone XL's Ugly Toll on America's Endangered Species

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Much of the debate over the Keystone XL pipeline has rightly been focused on the staggering damage it'll do to our climate.

But often overlooked in the controversy is the ugly toll this pipeline will take on some of America's most endangered species.

These are animals and plants that live right along the pipeline's path or are directly affected by the production of tar sands oil in Canada -- species like whooping cranes, northern swift foxes, woodland caribou, black-footed ferrets, pallid sturgeon, western prairie fringed orchids and a delightful little bird called Sprague's pipit. (You can see some of them in [this video](#).)

If Keystone's built, they'll be put directly in harm's way by oil spills (the government estimates Keystone could spill 34,000 gallons of tar sands oil each year), collisions with 378 miles of new power lines, and habitat destruction to make way for this 1,700-mile pipeline.

Troublingly, the two government agencies that are supposed to be looking out for these species as they review this project -- the U.S. State Department and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service -- have virtually ignored the fate of these animals.

This week the Center for Biological Diversity issued a new report exposing the flaws in the government's review of Keystone's expected impacts on endangered wildlife.

Our analysis finds that at least 12 endangered species will be put in harm's way by the proposed Keystone XL pipeline.

Take the whooping crane. There are fewer than 300 of these 5-foot-tall endangered birds left in the wild. And yet nearly all of the pipeline's route is within the migratory corridor used by 90 percent of these cranes. The government's own scientists have identified 74 places along the pipeline path where the risk of power line collisions will increase for lanky whooping cranes.

Rather than consider the impacts of all these power lines, which are only being constructed to service the pipeline, the State Department argues it doesn't have to disclose or mitigate whooping crane deaths because the power companies will instead. This all but ensures that the full impact of Keystone on these magnificent birds will never come to light.

Or consider the pallid sturgeon, an ancient-looking fish protected by the Endangered Species Act since 1990. Keystone XL would pass right through some of the sturgeon's prime habitat on the Missouri, Yellowstone,

Platte and Niobrara rivers. An oil spill would be devastating -- yet the two government agencies dismiss concerns by saying spills are unlikely and if they did occur would simply be cleaned up. It's hard to reconcile that cavalier dismissal with the deadly damage to wildlife we saw with the BP spill in the Gulf of Mexico or the oil spill in the Kalamazoo River a few years ago.

There's disturbing predictions for other species too, like black-footed ferrets (habitat disturbances where they're trying to recover), interior least terns (disturbance of breeding habitat, power line collisions, oil spills), piping plovers (power line collisions, increased exposure to predators, oil spills), greater sage grouses (oil spills near strutting grounds, construction noise) and American burying beetles (loss of vital grass habitat, smashing during construction, oil spills).

Failure to truly evaluate and consider the danger that Keystone XL poses to wildlife is no mere bureaucratic oversight. These are flaws that will have real and tangible and potentially deadly effects on some of America's most precious imperiled species.

Keystone XL would be a disastrous for so many reasons -- not the least of which is the cost to some of our rarest wildlife.

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