

THE WEEK

The Arkansas oil leak: Proof the Keystone pipeline is dangerous?
Opponents of the controversial pipeline proposal say, "Told you so"



Spilled oil is seen in a drainage ditch near evacuated homes in Mayflower, Ark., on March 31, 2013.

By Harold Maass
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Exxon Mobil is busy cleaning up a Mayflower, Ark., neighborhood where thousands of barrels of heavy Canadian crude oil spilled last week, forcing the evacuation of 22 homes. Exxon officials are still trying to figure out what caused the leak from the 40-year-old Pegasus pipeline, which is buried two feet underground and can transport more than 90,000 barrels of oil per day from Patoka, Ill., to Nederland, Texas.

Environmentalists, however, aren't waiting for the final report to call the accident proof that it would

be dangerous for President Obama to approve the controversial Keystone XL pipeline, which would be able to carry 800,000 barrels per day from Canada's tar sands to refineries on the Gulf Coast.

"Ruh roh," says John Aravosis at America Blog. "For all those worried about the safety of the proposed Keystone Pipeline, Exxon-Mobil's oil spill this weekend in a small Arkansas town isn't allaying anyone's concerns." A massive spill in an inland area is a scenario that the State Department "openly fretted about, then ignored," says Aravosis. The Obama administration's attitude seems to be "environment, schmirnment."

"These oil pipelines inevitably spill again and again, fouling our rivers, neighborhoods and wildlife habitat," says Jerry Karnas at the Center for Biological Diversity. "Building even more pipelines like Keystone XL across the heart of the American Midwest is only courting more trouble and more terrible spills."

Last week, Exxon was fined \$1.7 million for a 42,000-gallon spill in the Yellowstone River, and the State Department has said the 1,700-mile Keystone pipeline, which would pass through habitat for more than 20 endangered species, could leak up to 100 times. Obama should make a harder push for clean energy instead of making the planet and the American people pay for "the costs and risks of Big Oil's disastrous drive for ever-greater profits," says Karnas.

Keystone's defenders, however, are pointing to the leak from this aging pipeline as another reason the new one is a no-brainer. "Perhaps in a strange kind of a way this makes a strong case for having new pipe infrastructure for moving this product around," Cal Dallas, Alberta's international relations minister, tells Canada's Globe & Mail.

Canadian Energy Minister Joe Oliver says the Arkansas spill should have no impact on the Keystone project — which Obama is expected to decide on this summer. America needs oil, Oliver says, and there are risks no matter how you move it around.