

Protecting Lake Superior

Line 5

The 73rd district runs from Superior to Bad River, covering nearly the entirety of our state's Lake Superior shoreline. Protecting the lake is one of the central issues of my campaign because if those of us who live here and love the lake don't fight to protect it, who will? There are practical reasons to protect the lake: it provides drinking water for most of the people in the district, and recreation and fishing represent enormous parts of our economy and our culture.

Today I'd like to spell out my position on Bad River's legal battle against Line 5. When people say that pipelines are safer than other forms of transport, or that our communities could do a lot of good with the money Enbridge has offered, or that we need good union jobs, they are right. All of those things are true.

But the bottom line is that the entire 73rd is in ceded territory, defined by legal documents that preserve Lake Superior Ojibwe's rights to maintain their cultural practices, including gathering wild rice and fishing. The pipeline—on or off the reservation—is a threat to the watershed, and so it is a threat to the rights that we guaranteed in 1842 and 1854. Those legal documents are as relevant today as are other legal documents of the past, like the Constitution and the various amendments signed into law over time. We live on treaty lands and we are legally and ethically responsible for living up to the promises that our government made.

Yes, I drive a gas-powered car and use propane in my home. Yes, I'm reliant on pipelines to move fuel across the country. I hope we continue to quickly move toward a carbon-free future. But in the meantime, we live on the lake that represents 10% of the world's freshwater, and so we have a special obligation to be thoughtful stewards of these lands and this water. We are fortunate to be home to water protectors who feel responsible to future generations. We have to work together to forge a sustainable future that protects culture, land, and water, and where we create jobs and opportunities that don't come at someone else's expense.

Apostle Islands National Lakeshore

Tom Tiffany's proposal to convert our National Lake Shore to a National Park is being sold as something that would be great for our region because it would allegedly boost tourism. But in my conversations with local tourism officials, we're completely maxed out in our capacity to absorb tourists during our peak season; we don't have the infrastructure to handle more visitors, and there are no additional funds available to help develop our infrastructure under this proposal. In addition, it's not at all clear that a National Parks designation would meaningfully change anything during the winter and spring as there are reasons that tourism is lean during those times.

My biggest problem with the proposal is about the process. As someone working hard to be this area's next state representative, I cannot imagine bringing a fully formed proposal to local leaders—tribal councils and local units of government—and asking for support without meaningfully including those leaders in the proposal's development. Even worse? I can't imagine lying and saying that I did consult with my constituents along the way! How are we supposed to trust this proposal? How are we supposed to have any faith at all that this idea is in our best interest when we were kept in the dark

until the last possible moment and then our representative lied and said we were included? This is a shameful example of why so many people don't trust elected officials.

While all units of government should have been consulted, tribal governments are particularly critical to include because they are sovereign nations to whom we have a legal obligation as defined in the 1842 and 1854 treaties. Lake Superior Ojibwe retain particular rights in ceded territory, which includes all of the land and water in the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore. That federal obligation, which the state also must honor, means that a failure to consult the tribes with changes to land policy in ceded territory is a violation of the treaties. Either Tiffany didn't know or didn't care. It's unacceptable either way.

Whenever we're dealing with an issue like this we must ask ourselves: what problem is this trying to solve? A re-designation of our National Lakeshore to a National Park does not solve any of the actual problems in this district, but it very well may create more. Given the information I have available at this point, I'm opposed to the Tiffany proposal and I encourage others to make their voices heard on this important issue.

NTEC

Protecting Lake Superior is the number one issue in this campaign, because if we don't protect it, who will? When I think about threats to the lake there are two key sources of contamination that I'm currently most concerned about: PFAS (known as forever chemicals) and the risks of burning and transporting petroleum products in our watershed. These are complex issues that make clear how protecting water is connected to honoring tribal sovereignty and caring for all people in the district.

While many people in the eastern part of the district are aware of the threats posed by Line 5, they are often less familiar with the proposal for a Superior-based gas power plant known as NTEC. (For a thorough summary, you can read more [here](#).) This topic is considered controversial for Democrats to take on because it is thought to pit a few labor unions that would benefit from the build against environmentalists, key constituencies that support our party. But is this really the best way to think about this project in this location?

NTEC would burn fracked natural gas, but is also permitted to burn diesel, and won't come online until at least 2027. Science is clear that we have to stop burning carbon if we are to have any chance of slowing down climate change. Should we be investing \$1 billion in a brand-new carbon-burning facility? Even if this is a necessary part of transitioning to renewable energy—as is claimed—should it be built at this site, adjacent to a residential neighborhood? The noise and air pollution that will be ongoing byproducts of this plant are risks to local residents and will lower property values for all homes in the area. The estimated three-year construction will be extraordinarily disruptive to nearby neighborhoods. Even if you don't live close to the plant, once it's online, prevailing winds will drive particulate matter and other toxins across the entire district.

In addition, there are risks to building on the banks of the Nemadji River, less than a mile from Lake Superior. Not only is the bank so unstable that gravestones from the nearby cemetery are tumbling into the river, but the proposed site is also 500 feet away from where nearly 200 Lake Superior Ojibwe were buried after being moved from their original location to make way for a steel company. And tribal

nations in our watershed weren't consulted about this project, a clear violation of treaty rights and their sovereignty given the threats to the watershed.

One of the biggest reasons that I'm concerned about this plant has to do with the way utilities are compensated for new construction, which is why I asked whether "we" should invest in this plant. I recently learned that traditional energy utilities in our state have the full costs of any construction plus a guaranteed 10% return on those costs paid for. By whom? Their rate payers. This is true no matter how much the project costs and regardless of whether the project ever comes to completion or produces any energy at all. This means that the company has no incentive to keep expenses down. The more the project costs, the more the company makes. But it's the public that is paying the bill! I can't help but wonder if this is why NTEC is being proposed on an eroding river bluff, perhaps the most expensive location possible. Last year the project was estimated to cost \$700 million, the most recent figure I've seen is \$1 billion. I was even more troubled to learn that this same financial structure does not apply to renewable energy infrastructure.

What are the true costs of NTEC? Let's try to add up what we know: approximately \$1 billion to build the plant *and* a 10% guaranteed return paid for by the public; plus a 4-11% reduction in home values for anyone living within one-half to two miles from the plant; plus projected increased healthcare costs due to particulates; plus the opportunity costs of Superior moving away from polluting industry and toward jobs that promote clean air and water; plus the enormous costs of contributing to climate change; and finally, we must include the incalculable consequences of dismissing tribal sovereignty and failing to act as true partners. These cumulative costs to the district are staggering.

Good union jobs are critical if we're going to rebuild the middle class. But unions are powerful and important because they act collectively to stand up to those who would benefit at the expense of others. Putting profits over people is always wrong, and there are too many threats to our watershed, to the public, and to tribal sovereignty for me to support this project in this location.

If there is more I need to learn about this issue, or if you disagree with something I've stated here, please be in touch and share your views. I'm always curious to learn more and will always listen to any and all perspectives as we work to find the best path forward on these and other complex issues.

There is work to do to make sure that the wellbeing of our people and our ecosystems are prioritized when decisions are made in Madison, but there is also work to do to build coalitions across our district. We are home to mighty [water protectors](#), [renewable energy organizations](#), [concerned citizens](#), and [conservation groups](#). My greatest hope is that we work together to make positive changes for people throughout the 73rd.