

REDUCING EMISSIONS BY SUPPORTING FRONTLINE BIPOC COMMUNITIES

The Problem

Serious climate funders are grappling with the existential question of our time: how do we cut carbon emissions in half by 2030? The science is clear: emissions must drop 7.6 percent each year to keep temperatures from exceeding 1.5°C.¹ If we're going to meet this goal, we must decrease fossil fuel production by approximately 6 percent per year.² We know this—myriad credible reports verify it, numerous heads of state admit it—and yet, global production, if all goes according to plan, will increase annually by 2 percent, which is double what we need to keep to the 1.5°C limit.³ To be clear, instead of reducing emissions, governments and fossil fuel companies are planning to increase oil and gas production by 120 percent with the vast majority of expansion located in Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities. The industry invests billions in infrastructure and consolidating political, legal, and media power in the locations where their upstream and midstream operations take place.

At the same time, local opposition to these operations is what ignites the passion and power of national and international campaigns, and is what oil and gas industries fear most.⁴ Indeed,

the majority of fossil fuel projects live or die based on the strength of support or opposition from local communities, media, labor unions, government officials, and state agencies.

The fact that this resistance is often led by BIPOC communities makes it impossible to ignore the racial disparities in the siting and permitting of these projects. We cannot rely on governments to curtail production or construction of related infrastructure that locks in future growth, emissions and warming; to the contrary, G20 governments, as of November 2020, had committed roughly 60 percent more COVID recovery funds (\$233 billion) to support fossil fuel production than to renewables or low carbon alternatives (\$146 billion).⁵ Investing in the power of those living where fossil fuels are extracted, transported and burned—whose rights, health and safety depend immediately on stopping industry expansion and abuse—is a critical missing piece of the climate solutions equation. As one local landowner from the Atlantic Coast Pipeline region recently stated: “Every pipeline, refinery, or export terminal is an existential threat to anyone who lives there.”

While the philanthropic sector has steadily increased its climate giving,⁶ approximately half of climate funding in the U.S still goes to a small number of large national organizations located far from the source of the problem, and most of which (90+ percent as of 2019) lack diverse leadership.⁷ U.S. climate philanthropy has been slow to recognize the importance of “supply side” campaigns led by frontline communities that target upstream (extraction) and midstream (transportation) activities. Rather, the philanthropic sector has prioritized political solutions, and scientific, policy, and technocratic expertise⁸ while the crisis has only deepened. It is time for climate philanthropy to recognize the links between racial injustice and climate change,⁹ and embrace the reality that funding the BIPOC communities who have long been impacted by, and fighting against, fossil fuel expansion are essential to any winning strategy. Racial justice is both a precursor to and outcome of lowering greenhouse gas emissions: investing in the power of those communities, leaders and movements at the forefront of those integrated struggles addresses each crisis to the mutual benefit of both.

To reduce emissions and keep oil and gas in the ground, we need to support frontline communities and grassroots organizations on the ground. Experience shows that when frontline, primarily BIPOC groups are properly resourced, they win seemingly insurmountable battles against the oil and gas industry. They have faced the first and worst effects of both fossil fuels and climate change with creativity, strategy, and perseverance, and, most importantly, they emerge victorious.

Frontline Successes in Emissions Terms

Communities where oil and gas pipelines are located or planned have become sites of contestation where fossil fuel corporations overwhelm local residents with money and power. So-called critical infrastructure laws passed in U.S. states with powerful fossil fuel lobbies (like Texas, Louisiana and South Dakota) were specifically designed to silence indigenous, Black Lives Matter, and climate activists and have been gaining momentum since the historic mobilization at Standing Rock. The latest wave of laws targeting environmental and racial justice advocates in the United States is the result of coordinated planning, drafting, and implementation strategies¹⁰ by industry supporters, such as the American Fuel and Petrochemical Manufacturers and the secretive American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC).

Notwithstanding these enormous corporate advantages, communities and organizations proximate to industry have succeeded against the odds in stopping fossil fuel infrastructure expansion or new construction in several locations, and are poised to continue if they receive the support they need. These are not symbolic or political victories; their consequences for the climate crisis are real and concrete.



Every fight to delay or shut down a pipeline, LNG terminal or petrochemical facility yields a measurable amount of greenhouse gas emissions prevented. Some important examples include:

- ▶ **Keystone XL oil pipeline** (Alberta to Nebraska): On June 9, 2021, following years of campaigning rooted in the resistance of local ranchers, farmers and tribes (the self-proclaimed “Cowboy and Indian Alliance”), TC Energy announced the termination of its tar sands pipeline resulting in the prevention of an estimated **180 million tons of CO₂e**.¹¹
- ▶ On September 27, 2021, **PennEast Pipeline** announced the cancellation of its proposed 120-mile natural gas pipeline from New Jersey to Pennsylvania, citing outstanding permits as the rationale. They had, however, recently won a Supreme Court victory but faced growing community opposition all along the route. The total lifecycle emissions from PennEast would have led to estimated annual emissions of **49 million metric tons of CO₂e** equivalent to an additional 14 coal plants or 10 million passenger vehicles.¹⁴
- ▶ **A total of fourteen fossil fuel infrastructure fights across Canada and the U.S.** (including Keystone XL) have been cancelled or delayed by indigenous communities, preventing or postponing greenhouse gas pollution **equivalent to at least one-quarter of annual U.S. and Canadian emissions**.¹² Of these, eight fights have definitively stopped **779 metric tons of CO₂e** pollution, representing 12% of annual emissions from the US and Canada.
- ▶ **Annova LNG** abandoned its plans for a **6.5 million metric tons/year**¹³ fracked gas export project in March 2021, following fierce local resistance led by Carrizo Comecrudo Tribe of Texas, and their local, state, and national NGO partners.



The Work Ahead

These victories are important not only for their concrete contributions to lowering greenhouse gas emissions, but also because they demonstrate that resistance by frontline communities works. Given that the world's largest oil and gas companies are still sinking billions of investment into expansion projects (including those who have made “net zero” commitments), we can anticipate many new site fights, most of which will be located in communities of color or on indigenous lands, and all of whom will require critical financial, legal, political, and other resources.

The Trump administration approved numerous new oil and gas pipelines during its tenure, and the consequent devastation to the environment, climate, health, and property rights of those affected did not end with Trump's departure from office. Despite President Biden's revocation of the Keystone XL pipeline permit and expressed commitment to a clean energy economy and ambitious climate goals, the struggles to keep oil and gas in the ground continue. If just these five major pipelines approved by Trump are not cancelled—the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL), Line 3, Line 5, Mariner East 2, and the Mountain Valley Pipeline—their combined emissions annually will equal 126.5 typical U.S. coal plants, or about 100 million gasoline vehicles on our roads.¹⁵ 458 million metric tons of annual CO₂e will be prevented if the frontline movements to end these 5 pipelines succeed.¹⁶ Stopping DAPL alone would prevent an estimated 101 million

metric tons of CO₂e pollution annually, and halting the Line 3 oil pipeline expansion would stop an additional 175 million metric tons of annual CO₂e.¹⁷

We know how to stop these projects, and so do oil and gas companies, which cite “delays from opposition groups” as their chief impediment to expansion.¹⁸ But frontline and grassroots groups cannot do this work alone, nor can they continue to do it on a shoestring; they need the support of the philanthropic sector. Genuine, deep relationships between donors (often in the form of smaller intermediaries) and those working on the frontlines ensures that funding gets to groups in the best position to respond early and effectively.¹⁹ By bolstering grassroots communities and organizations, largely led by and composed of BIPOC individuals, donors can address the urgent need to reduce emissions while simultaneously demonstrating their commitment to racial justice and climate justice.



Endnotes

- 1 UN Environment Programme (hereinafter UNEP), Emissions Gap Report 2019, available at <https://www.unep.org/resources/emissions-gap-report-2019>; see also UNEP press release, Cut global emissions by 7.6 percent every year for next decade to meet 1.5°C Paris target - UN report, November 2019, available at <https://unfccc.int/news/halving-emissions-by-2030-is-new-normal-race-to-zero-anniversary>.
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- 3 Id.; see also UNEP press release, World's governments plan to produce 120% more fossil fuels by 2030, November 2019, available at <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/press-release/worlds-governments-plan-produce-120-more-fossil-fuels-2030-can-be>
- 4 Black & Veatch, 2019 Strategic Directions: Natural gas, available at <https://www.bv.com/resources/2019-strategic-directions-natural-gas-report>
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6. ClimateWorks Foundation, Funding trends: Climate change mitigation philanthropy, September 2020, available at <https://www.climateworks.org/report/funding-trends-climate-change-mitigation-philanthropy/>
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- 8 For example, see Washington Post, Katherine Ellison, Philanthropies flow funds to climate technologies, October 2020, available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-solutions/2020/10/14/climate-change-philanthropy/>
- 9 Supra note 7; see also Environmental Protection Agency, Annual Environmental Justice Progress Report FY 2020, available at https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2021-01/documents/2020_ej_report-final-web-v4.pdf
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- 11 Indigenous Environmental Network and Oil Change International, Indigenous Resistance Against Carbon (Appendix), August 2021, available at <https://www.ienearth.org/indigenous-resistance-against-carbon/>
- 12 Id.
- 13 Natural Gas Intel, Canceled Anova LNG export project signals potential headwinds for U.S. FIDs, March 2021, available at <https://www.naturalgasintel.com/canceled-annova-lng-export-project-signals-potential-headwinds-for-u-s-fids/>
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- 15 Supra note 11.
- 16 Oil Change International, Briefing: Greenhouse gas pollution estimates of proposed U.S. fossil fuel infrastructure, October 2021, available at: <http://priceofoil.org/2021/10/12/biden-ghg-fossil-fuel-projects/>
- 17 Supra note 11.
- 18 Supra note 4.
- 19 Devex, Catherine Cheney, Could the pandemic drive more climate funding to grassroots organizations?, November 2020, available at <https://www.devex.com/news/could-the-pandemic-drive-more-climate-funding-to-grassroots-organizations-98470>