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Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Update on Line 3 Aquifer Breach Investigation and Enforcement

The Minnesota DNR has completed its investigation of three aquifer breaches that occurred during the construction of Enbridge's Line 3 Replacement Project. This update outlines the results of the investigation and the status of restoration work at each site, building upon the information provided by DNR in the fall of 2021. The DNR continues to work on a comprehensive enforcement resolution, with the goal of addressing restoration, mitigation, and additional penalties associated with the three breach locations. The DNR will not be providing further detail regarding the comprehensive enforcement resolution at this time, but will release a statement upon completion of any final action.

Background

[On September 16, 2021, the DNR announced](#) that it had ordered Enbridge to pay \$3.32 million for violations associated with the breach of the confining layer of an artesian aquifer, during the construction of the Line 3 replacement project near Enbridge's Clearbrook Terminal.

[On October 15, 2021, the DNR announced](#) that Enbridge had agreed to additional penalties for lost groundwater at the Clearbrook site and that DNR was pursuing a comprehensive enforcement resolution with Enbridge to address the Clearbrook site and any other uncontrolled groundwater flows. The DNR stated that it was also investigating two additional sites of uncontrolled flow due to breaches of the confining layers of artesian aquifers. Due to the ongoing nature of the investigation, the DNR was not able to share the locations of the additional sites at that time.

Over the course of the last several months, the DNR has also conducted additional investigative work, including an aerial inspection, to assess whether there were any other unidentified aquifer breach sites. Thus far, the DNR has not confirmed any additional aquifer breach sites. To ensure thoroughness, we will finalize our assessment of the potential for any additional aquifer breaches following the spring thaw.

Clearbrook Terminal Aquifer Breach Site, Clearwater County

On January 18, 2022, Enbridge informed the DNR that it had successfully stopped the flow of groundwater at the Clearbrook site. The DNR has determined that from October 16, 2021, through January 18, 2022, there was the additional discharge of approximately 32,600,000 gallons of groundwater. The discharged water was first directed to a treatment structure to remove sediment and then returned to the environment. The DNR has inspected the Clearbrook site repair and has determined that the corrective actions have successfully stopped the uncontrolled flow at this time. DNR is implementing ongoing monitoring of the aquifer breach repair to verify long-term effectiveness.

LaSalle Creek Aquifer Breach Site, Hubbard County

On August 5, 2021, the DNR learned that an aquifer breach had occurred during the construction of Line 3 near LaSalle Creek. The investigation indicates that the breach occurred on or about August 2, 2021,

during pipeline construction through the river valley's eastern slope, where sheet piling was installed prior to trench excavation. Sheet piling was used during the construction to minimize the trench width and maintain trench stability. Enbridge stopped construction work at the LaSalle Creek site and the DNR outlined the immediate actions that Enbridge needed to take to address the uncontrolled groundwater flow.

On August 18, 2021, the DNR approved a remedial groundwater investigation plan to gather hydrological information needed for the development of a corrective action plan to stop the flow. Following completion of this study, on September 29, 2021, the DNR approved the Corrective Action Plan to stop the uncontrolled flow of groundwater at the site.

On December 20, 2021, Enbridge notified the DNR that it had successfully stopped the groundwater discharge at the site. A report from the company further indicated that the total volume of groundwater discharged at this site was 9,800,000 gallons. Initial monitoring of the site by Independent Environmental Monitors has confirmed that the discharge at the site has been stopped. The DNR will conduct additional onsite monitoring to verify conditions after the spring thaw and continue to monitor the aquifer breach repair for long-term effectiveness.

Mile Post 1102.5 Aquifer Breach Site, St. Louis County

On September 15, 2021, the DNR learned of an aquifer breach resulting in the uncontrolled flow of groundwater near Mile Post 1102.5 of the Line 3 pipeline construction. This site is located on county land in southern St. Louis County and is just west of the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Reservation. The DNR has partnered with the Fond du Lac Band, St. Louis County, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) and Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) in investigating the site and reviewing corrective action plans to stop the uncontrolled flow.

The investigation indicates that the aquifer breach was identified on or about September 10, 2021, when groundwater began upwelling during the removal of sheet piling following completion of pipeline construction in the area. The DNR outlined the immediate actions that Enbridge needed to take to address the uncontrolled groundwater flow at the Mile Post 1102.5 site and approved an initial groundwater investigation plan on September 29, 2021.

The Mile Post 1102.5 site is located in a wet forest complex that gently drops in elevation eastward toward the Fond du Lac Reservation lands. The aquifer breach at this location resulted in high pressure flow of groundwater, with the potential to impact Dead Fish Lake on the Fond du Lac Reservation, a valuable wild rice water for the band. To date, it is estimated that 219,600,000 gallons of groundwater have been released by this aquifer breach. The hydrogeology at this site is particularly complex, resulting in a challenging groundwater investigation and corrective action planning process.

Between October 2021 and February 2022, the DNR, Fond du Lac Band, St. Louis County, MPCA, and MDH provided regulatory oversight of the groundwater investigation and development of the Corrective Action plan for the site. State, tribal and county governments approved the plan by February 16, 2022. Enbridge has informed the DNR that initial corrective action at the Mile Post 1102.5 site has substantially reduced the flow of groundwater, from approximately 330 gallons per minute (gpm) to 6 gpm. Additional work is ongoing and the DNR and its partners continue to monitor progress.



The DNR appreciates the close working relationship with the Fond du Lac Band, St. Louis County, MPCA, and MDH to investigate this site and agree upon the Corrective Action Plan.

For Additional Information

[Please visit the Line 3 Replacement Project webpage to view groundwater investigation plans and corrective action plans associated with the three sites.](#)

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