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## Tar Sands, Americas Drug of Choice

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## Tar Sands, Americas Drug of Choice

Course: ENSC230

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When your cousin's drug dealer is thrown in prison, the first thing you do shouldn't be finding a new drug dealer, it should be finding help for your cousin. But here in America instead of looking at scarcity as an opportunity, we just find someone else to supply our "fix". We need to look at the dwindling supply of accessible oil as a countdown timer for when we can function without the use of oil. The Keystone XL pipeline is another way to hit the "snooze" button on oil, with our current need of oil we have resorted to using tar sands to prolong our dependency on oil.

According to Doug Struck, The Washington Post, It takes almost five barrels of water to produce one barrel of oil, along with 2-4 tons of raw tar sands to make one barrel of oil. Does our want of another oil "fix" trump our need of fresh clean water? Is the oil produced worth the waste produced? It's bad enough that we are continuing our dependency on oil, but sacrificing clean water to do it seems ridiculous. We should have enough foresight to see that we will always need clean water, and we will eventually need alternatives to oil.

TransCanada the company planning the Keystone XL Pipeline, have made many promises guaranteeing pipeline safety. But in the recent past oil pipelines have been far from safe. What makes this pipeline different? In April of 2013 one of TransCanada's state of the art pipelines leaked over 5,000 of oil in Mayflower, AK.

In 2013 alone four separate oil spills on U.S. soil shows their "guarantees" might just be wishful thinking. According to TransCanada's website there are more than 50 conditions they must meet, but for how long can 2,100 miles of pipeline be kept to those standards?

The current proposed route goes right over the Nebraska sandhills, where the groundwater level can be less than 5 feet deep. If the pipeline is as safe as claimed, it wouldn't be an issue. But because of the sandy soils in that area paired with the shallow groundwater is vulnerable to chemical spills. With the groundwater table being close to the surface, it gives a direct route for what is spilled a direct link to the groundwater. Here, the groundwater is the main source for drinking water, so that oil inevitably ends up in our teacups, coffee mugs and baby bottles.

In a state like Nebraska where our groundwater is, the quality of groundwater is essential to the quality of that produce. Those crops account for a 24% of our economy. Why are we risking it for something that lowers gas prices in the Gulf and could according to Anthony Swift of the Natural Resources Defense Council, increase gas prices here in the US? It is true that the construction and maintenance of the pipeline will create some jobs, but the economic gains are only a small fraction compared to the risks.

The Keystone XL pipeline, in theory, has the potential to benefit Nebraska in the short run, but that is outweighed by the risks associated with the proposed route. There is a need of a new route for the pipeline to divert it away from Nebraska natural groundwater supply, for the protection of our produce production. We need to look at the long-term costs of using tar sands as a means to continue our dependency of oil. And finally we have to take Keystone's safety conditions with a grain of salt, in those 2100 miles of pipeline there is bound to be some errors in construction. If all of those issues can be addressed and we still come to the conclusion as a state that we are willing to risk our livelihood for a few cents off at the pump.