

CORNFLAKES AND SALMON – AN UNLIKELY COUPLE¹

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Patrick Daniel, Enbridge's embattled Chief Executive, might need an extra helping of corn flakes for breakfast. In July, his company spilled more than 4 million litres of heavy oil into the Kalamazoo River in Western Michigan. Unfortunately, corn flakes may be in short supply in Western Michigan after pollution from Enbridge's ruptured Lakehead pipeline forced Kellogg's famous corn flake factory to shut down.

Enbridge's Michigan oil pipeline spill, and BP's Gulf Coast rig disaster are the largest spills in the Midwest and US history. **So, what can Canadians and British Columbians learn from the resulting factory shut downs, and crude-covered critters, wetlands and beaches?** There are cautions to be learned from both oily screw ups, but also from the clean up decisions Enbridge has been praised for.

The obvious lesson is that *wherever oil is being drilled or transported, spills happen*. No amount of new technology can prevent accidents caused by human error, mechanical breakdowns or inadequate maintenance and oversight. A corollary is that *once a spill happens; forget about new technology*. Clean up efforts are decidedly old school: minimum wage workers armed with nets, garbage bags, shovels and pumps.

The biggest political lesson is that *people need to be very wary of the safety assurances* made by oil companies and petro-dollar obsessed governments. But there are less obvious lessons related to corn flakes and real estate that should concern British Columbians potentially impacted by the new proposed tar sands pipelines that would bisect BC en route to the coast. **What do corn flakes and salmon have to do with oil?** Be patient, first some background. Enbridge got off to a bad start in Michigan:

- Their first mistake was technological: Enbridge's sensors failed to detect the 4 million litres of spewing oil, leaving it to local residents that smelled the oil fumes to report it.
- The next mistake was executive: Michigan media reported 16 hours passed between when local residents first smelled the spilled crude and when Enbridge finally reported the oil spill to authorities.
- Their third mistake was economic: Enbridge had too few resources to deal with the scale of oil dumped into the river. As a result Michigan's governor castigated Enbridge saying their "response has been anemic" and "wholly inadequate."

Patrick Daniel, Enbridge's Chief Executive, tried to regain the high ground by apologizing for "the mess we made." While Mr. Daniel no doubt genuinely regrets his company's mistakes, the damage was done. Fifty-six kilometres of the Kalamazoo River were polluted with thick Tar Sands oil. Birds, fish, wildlife and wetlands were killed or oiled. Residents were evacuated from their homes because of high levels of benzene. Finally, just when Patrick Daniel thought the media spin was subsiding, the news reported that iconic industries, like Kellogg's famous corn flake factory, were being forced to shut down.

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Besides denying Enbridge's CEO some breakfast options, the closing of Kellogg's corn flake factory is particularly relevant to northern British Columbians facing Enbridge's proposed Northern Gateway pipeline and supertanker proposal. Enbridge is seeking approval for a twin 1173 km pipelines to ship 525,000 barrels of heavy tar sands crude each day to Canada's West Coast. The project includes a new super tanker port in Kitimat to fill 225 Exxon Valdez-sized super tankers with heavy oil to then travel 240 km of narrow and treacherous inland fjords en route to the open ocean and ultimately China and other ports in Asia.



Enbridge's plans for a west coast pipeline have been under siege, and not just from the usual suspects. Polls show over 80 percent of British Columbians oppose the project and support a federal legislated ban on tankers in Canada's northern Pacific coastal waters. The federal wings of the NDP and Liberal Party also support a legislated ban and have pledged to work together to make it a reality. Communities, first nations, and environmental groups have been lining up in opposition.

Surprisingly, the CEOs of Kinder Morgan and TransCanada, both of whom have pipeline proposals that are in competition with Enbridge, have gone public challenging Northern Gateway with aggressive statements that there is too much pipeline capacity already coming out of Alberta. Tar Sands oil producers publicly support the project, but have been unwilling to commit any oil to it. This shaky economic case of the project is illustrated by Enbridge's unprecedented decision to initiate the National Energy Board- Canadian Environmental Assessment approval process without any committed oil supply contracts.

To counter the growing opposition, Enbridge launched a multi-million dollar advertising campaign that saturated northern BC residents with promises of safety. Enbridge went so far as to even claim that they are "making BC's north coast safer for all vessels." Enbridge also inflated claims of how many jobs will be created if their pipeline-super tanker proposal is approved. But conveniently absent from Enbridge's safety ads is any mention the potential impact a spill would have on existing jobs.

That brings me back to cornflakes. Like salmon in northern British Columbia, corn flakes are the icon industry of Western Michigan. Kellogg's, the world's leading cereal producer, has been making cornflakes at its Battle Creek factory since the company was founded in 1906. **Kelloggs is the industry that defines the place, just as salmon is the foundation of the northern British Columbia culture and the economy.** Salmon contributes \$100 million annually to the region.

The oil-soaked birds in Michigan make it easy to imagine what a rupture on the proposed BC pipeline would do to the Skeena and the Fraser, the two largest salmon ecosystems in BC. A spill on a pipeline near the headwaters of either the Skeena or Fraser would bring utter devastation, not only to the ecosystem, but to entire industries and ways of life. It wouldn't just be a matter of Kellogg closing its corn flakes factory for a few days.

But Enbridge's problems didn't end with the spill. News is leaking out that Enbridge was aware of corrosion problems on the ruptured pipe for a year before the pipe burst. The media is also reporting Enbridge has been cited for failing to properly inspect equipment, document inspections, properly train employees and perform adequate repairs. In fact Enbridge was cited by US regulators 31 times since 2002, including two "corrective action orders," the most serious of the regulator's citations.

But Enbridge's problems didn't end there. The U.S. agency responsible for pipeline safety rejected Enbridge's plan to restart the ruptured Michigan pipeline because they were concerned that immediate threats were present elsewhere on the pipeline. Subsequently the Michigan media has reported hundreds of defects were found in adjacent segments of Enbridge's pipeline. And recently, the U.S. congressman from Battle Creek, Rep. Mark Schauer, D-Battle Creek, asked that Enbridge be required to "repair all the anomalies that were found in 2007 and 2009, as well as any additional problems found prior to a restart." Schauer went on to say, "based on Enbridge's past performance, I don't have any confidence this company can operate their pipelines safely." Two more Enbridge pipelines have sprung leaks since July.

Compare these facts with claims Enbridge has made in their multi-million dollar advertising campaign blanketing British Columbia earlier this summer before the Michigan spill. In their newspaper, television and radio ads, Enbridge claimed their Northern Gateway project is raising "the bar for marine safety" and "doing it to the highest standards of safety and environmental responsibility." Patrick Daniel regained some good will with his well-publicized offer to buy all the real estate along the Kalamazoo River that had been affected by their spill. Reportedly, three Michigan residents sold their land, with forty plus more still engaged in negotiations.

But even this well-intentioned offer should give British Columbians pause. For many British Columbians, their land isn't a commodity to be sold to the highest bidder. For first nations the land that could be damaged by Enbridge's proposal is part of a historic territory, the foundation of their culture, the roots of family for generations. In other words, their land is not just real estate, it is home. Coming from Alberta, Patrick Daniel just doesn't understand that British Columbia is not for sale. Most British Columbians were already opposed to Enbridge's oil super tanker-pipeline proposal bisecting northern BC; the recent spills in the United States just cement that opposition. No amount of money, no promises of jobs or safety measures can compensate for the potential damage done. It is just not worth the risk. And the final lesson that is crystal clear from the disasters in Michigan and the Gulf Coast: Citizens can't rely on company and government promises to pay the bills, protect their homes or the air, land and water on which the critters, fish and our children depend.

