

# "Bad River" documentary follows tribe's fight for sovereignty

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Richard Schult

Man and his son at Waverly Beach

A new documentary about the Bad River tribe's ongoing fight for sovereignty will be out in select theaters.

Much of the film focuses on the tribe's fight to protect Lake Superior from a potential oil spill from the Enbridge Line 5 oil pipeline.

"We got our first review, official Rotten Tomatoes critic review. And it was like, you never know, right? Sometimes... but it was like 10 out of 10!" said Mary.

That's Mary Mazzio, the director of the new documentary "Bad River".

The film, narrated by Academy Award nominee, Edward Norton, and Quannah ChasingHorse, is already popular.

"We're hearing that theaters in Madison opening night may be sold out or close to sold out. Same thing in Ashland, in Detroit, also in Minneapolis. So there's some magic happening," says Mazzio.

"Bad River" details the tribe's fight for sovereignty over time, eventually bringing us to the modern day fight for land and water sovereignty.

Enbridge's Line 5 oil pipeline runs through 12 miles of the Bad River reservation.

The pipeline carries 22 million gallons of crude oil and natural gas liquids from Superior, Wisconsin to Ontario.

However, the rights to pass through this land expired in 2013.

The year before that, another pipeline operated by Enbridge had [recently failed](#), leading to environmental catastrophe.

Concerned about the potentially devastating impacts of a Kalamazoo-style pipeline rupture, the tribe started an environmental review and ultimately decided to not renew Enbridge's rights.

But Enbridge said they wouldn't leave, so Bad River took them to court.

The documentary explores that legal fight, as well as the tribe's history.

"Here you have this small community of Native people fighting this fight for all of us, and that they're doing so in a way that is so community oriented," commented Mary.

Mazzio's team showed a work in progress of the film to the community over the holidays and she said the response was humbling.

"That night, we had a jammed theater, we had back to back screenings, and I had an elder come up to me, and she grabbed my elbow, and she wouldn't let go. And she said, 'You have no idea what just went up on the screen. And I didn't know so much of my history, or our history, and we've never seen anything like that,'" said Mazzio.

The Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals recently heard arguments from Enbridge and the tribe.

Mazzio said she was concerned by the line of questioning in that case, since there was the argument that a 1970's transit treaty between the US and Canada should apply.

"What's troubling about that line of questioning is that Judge Conley had dismissed that argument in the lower court, basically saying, 'Look, you know, the federal government has this treaty with the Bad River Band from 1854. Right, this other thing in the 70s, you know, the band was never a party to it,'" explained Mazzio.

The documentary will be airing in Park Falls on March 15, as well as in Ashland, Madison, and Milwaukee.

50% of all profits at theater screenings will be donated to the Bad River Band.

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