Today the State Department announced that it had completed its Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for the Keystone XL pipeline. Although the document is not decisional to approve or deny the project, it completes the agency's technical environmental review which found that it did not significantly alter greenhouse gas emissions or the extraction of Canadian oil sands or heavy crude refining in the U.S.

The project, which has been under State Department review for five years, had to be resubmitted for in 2012 after the President objected to a decisional timetable inserted in a legislative rider intended to speed up the on-going review process. The Administration supported the southern leg of the project which ran from the nation's pipeline and oil storage hub of Cushing, Oklahoma to Gulf Coast refineries in Texas. The northern portion, which crosses the Canadian border, requires a National Interest Determination decision and a Presidential permit which is coordinated by the State Department.

According to an excerpt of the report, “approval or denial of any one crude oil transport project, including the proposed project, remains unlikely to significantly impact the rate of extraction in the oil sands, or the continued demand for heavy crude oil at refineries in the United States.” This was the same conclusion a draft EIS reached last March and today’s findings bolstered supporters of the project in the oil and gas industry. The CEO of the American Petroleum Institute, Jack Gerard, said

"This final review puts to rest any credible concerns about the pipeline’s potential negative impact on the environment. This long awaited project should now be swiftly approved."

Reaction to the Final EIS was met with concern and skepticism by Congressional opponents and environmental organizations. The Chair of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, Barbara Boxer, was quoted

"I will not be satisfied with any analysis that does not accurately document what is really happening on the ground when it comes to the extraction, transport, refining and waste disposal of dirty, filthy, tar-sands oil."

Officials from the State Department were very careful to note that today's action does not mean the project will necessarily move forward. It must now begin its consultation phase under the National Environmental Policy Act that includes the Departments of Defense, Justice, Interior, Commerce, Transportation, Energy, Homeland Security, and the Environmental Protection Agency to determine if the project is in the nation's interest. According to a departmental release, a 30-day public comment period will begin with the publication of the Final Supplemental EIS in the Federal Register on February 5, 2014 and will close on March 7, 2014.