

## Greenpeace Found Liable for Supporting Unlawful Protests

Article By:

Michael Toth

---

A jury in North Dakota [recently ordered](#) the environmental group Greenpeace to pay more than \$660 million dollars in damages to a Texas-based energy company. While commentators have focused on Greenpeace's tenuous future in the wake of the decision, the more important outcome is that the trial set an important precedent that violent protests cannot be excused as a form of free speech.

The trial centered on protests surrounding the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline, which was the subject of months-long protests that involved violent threats, attacks, vandalism, and property destruction. In the aftermath, the company operating the pipeline, Energy Transfer, sued Greenpeace International, its US affiliate, and its financier the Greenpeace Fund for damages.

During the trial, Energy Transfer presented evidence demonstrating Greenpeace's well-coordinated efforts to encourage and organize the protest efforts. Most notably, Greenpeace provided funding and training to the Red Warrior Society, a resistance group that led the most destructive and violent actions during the protests.

Although [Greenpeace leadership testified](#) that the group would never direct a campaign that supported violence, the evidence presented brought those statements into question. Energy Transfer pointed out that Greenpeace continued to lead supply drives for the Red Warrior Society through the middle of September 2016, more than a month after that encampment began some of its [violent confrontations](#) with law enforcement and construction workers.

As part of its coordination efforts, Greenpeace [reportedly provided](#) the protesters with \$21,000 as part of a "rapid response grant," and sent them other materials such as lockboxes which were used to help protesters tie themselves to equipment, and propane canisters that could be lit and thrown at security and construction workers.

In addition to training and funding protesters, Greenpeace spread baseless accusations about Energy Transfer as part of a bid to shut down financing for the pipeline's construction. The group [circulated statements](#) claiming the company had "deliberately desecrated documented burial grounds" and was building the pipeline across tribal land.

In fact, the [pipeline does not cross](#) any of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's land or encroach on the tribe's water supply. During the trial, it was also revealed that Energy Transfer had [attempted to meet](#) with the tribe to discuss their concerns before the pipeline's construction. The tribe's leadership

refused but other tribes accepted the invitation, leading to 140 modifications to the pipeline's route to accommodate cultural sites.

During the trial, Greenpeace attempted to downplay its role in the protest efforts. But Energy Transfer presented the jury with an email from Greenpeace USA's executive director in 2016 to its board members saying the organization had played a "massive role" in the protest efforts "since day one."

Throughout the months-long protests, moreover, Greenpeace was eager to claim credit for its role and raised millions of dollars spreading misleading claims about Energy Transfer and the pipeline project.

While the pipeline was eventually constructed, [Energy Transfer cited the protests](#) as the cause for a five-month construction delay. Greenpeace is finally paying the price for costing the company millions of dollars in lost profits and shareholder value.

Greenpeace has argued publicly that this case could have a chilling effect on protests and free speech, but as I [wrote](#) before the trial "it's not Greenpeace's speech or public positioning that the lawsuit questions—it's the organization's conduct."

The jury has now spoken: perpetrators of violence and vandalism cannot avoid accountability merely by claiming it's their First Amendment right. It's a powerful reminder to radical environmentalists and other groups that destroy property and stoke violence in a misguided attempt to draw attention to their causes.

*The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of The National Law Review.*

Copyright ©2025 The National Law Forum. LLC

---

National Law Review, Volume XV, Number 84

Source URL: <https://natlawreview.com/article/greenpeace-found-labile-supporting-unlawful-protests>