



SERVICES AVAILABLE

- **Risk Communication**

Building trust through engagement and open communication of unbiased technical information to agencies and the public. Ensignt staff have participated in over 300 open houses and meetings to discuss risk.

- **Pipeline Risk Assessment**

Nationally recognized risk assessment program, evaluating failure probability, release volumes, and range of environmental consequences. Emphasizing early identification of HCAs to proactively mitigate risk and lower operational costs for integrity management programs.

- **NEPA Permitting**

Preparation of third-party Environmental Impact Statements and Environmental Assessments, particularly for the Bureau of Land Management. Coordination with US Forest Service, US Fish & Wildlife, and US Army Corps of Engineers.

- **Expert Witness**

Providing deep technical expertise and experience to address complex issues.

Pipeline Permitting, Social Media, and the Rise of Social Licensing

Over the past 20 years, the time required to permit pipelines in the United States has increased dramatically as issues related to social licensing have amplified. Until the mid-2000s, the time to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) often required 18 months or less. Pipelines permitting process were largely unnoticed by the general public. While opposition groups existed at that time, these groups were generally isolated, often misunderstood the permitting process, lacked outside funding, and often were focused on a single project in close proximity to their homes. The landscape for permitting pipelines began to dramatically change after a series of high-profile incidents, including but not limited to Bellingham, Washington (1999); Carlsbad, New Mexico (2000); San Bruno, California (2010); Yellowstone River, Montana (2011 and 2015); and Kalamazoo River, Michigan (2010). These incidents received major media coverage that elevated public awareness and concern regarding pipeline safety. Concurrently, the use of social media elevated the significance of social licensing as a part of the pipeline permitting process. Social media has fundamentally changed the permitting process, providing a unifying forum for previously isolated groups to exchange information and intervention tactics. In many cases, the increased public participation resulted in a positive, more robust analysis of projects and examination of mitigation measures. Since 2010, however, an increasing number of projects are being delayed or cancelled due to negative intervention. As a result, the time to prepare and approve an EIS now frequently exceeds five years. This trend is likely to continue as the pipeline permitting process has provided a focal point for rallying environmental groups to address broader societal issues, such as climate change, and a regulatory forum for tribes to address issues associated with sovereign lands and treaty rights. Facing these formidable challenges, operators that plan to permit projects must consider pre-emptive communication tactics, such as early public engagement, detailed discussions regarding pipeline safety, and active dissemination of technical information to inform and educate the public.