

News release Final

Officials, the public invited to tour salted lands in Bottineau County

Landowners say state officials are violating public trust

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Keene, ND -- Donny Nelson, a third-generation farmer and rancher in McKenzie County invites the public to tour 1,000 acres of salt damaged and destroyed farmlands in Bottineau County on October 21.

Rapid, unchecked oil development has damaged thousands of North Dakota farms and ranchland acres, many permanently destroyed. Of all counties in North Dakota, Bottineau County shows the most serious and widespread damage caused by salt spills, broken pipelines, and leaching of salts and other chemicals left behind in evaporation pits. On average this is an accumulation of 250 tons per site.

Nelson says very similar and serious cropland damages from saltwater are evident all across North Dakota's northern counties from Bottineau to the Montana border. Destruction of acres is increasing because of obsolete equipment still in use and the speed of Bakken oil and gas development.

"The purpose of the Bottineau County Salted Lands Tour is to wake up the State of North Dakota," Nelson said. "Our elected and appointed officials, who are public trustees, have breached their duties to protect the State's water and the sustainable productivity of farm and ranch land. We ask that trustees do their duty and honestly account for the destruction of public trust properties. At minimum, we insist trustees inventory damaged lands. Some of the lands can be remediated. The bad news is that some lands have been sacrificed."

Invitations for the tour have been sent to North Dakota state officials, including Gov. Jack Dalrymple, Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem, Secretary of Agriculture Doug Goehring, and North Dakota State Engineer Todd Sando.

Organizers of the tour are farmers, ranchers and other residents of Northwest North Dakota. Nelson said, "No further damage needs to happen. Modern technology for pipelines allows land and water to be protected by gauging the exact quantities of freshwater used, contaminated produced water, and disposal of waste water. Gauging must be made mandatory on pipelines."

State Geologist Ed Murphy and his Montana Bureau of Mines colleague hydrologist Jon Reiten have authored scientific papers warning that tons of salts left behind imperil the state's farmland. Reiten found that salts have travel as far as a mile underground and then reappeared to contaminate land. Murphy warns the longer we delay the more costly will be the civil judgments against responsible parties.

Interest in doing a better job comes from many different places. Attorney Fintan Dooley in conversation with his friend Dan Vogel of the Vogel Law Firm in Fargo, which represents oil interests, found agreement with our concern about what 50 years of salt spills has done. Vogel said to Dooley, "If we don't fix it now when we have Bakken revenue, North Dakota will never get it fixed!"

The tour will begin at 10:30 a.m. Monday, October 21, 2013 at Renville Corners, Junction US Hwy 83 and ND Hwy 5, 35 miles north of Minot.