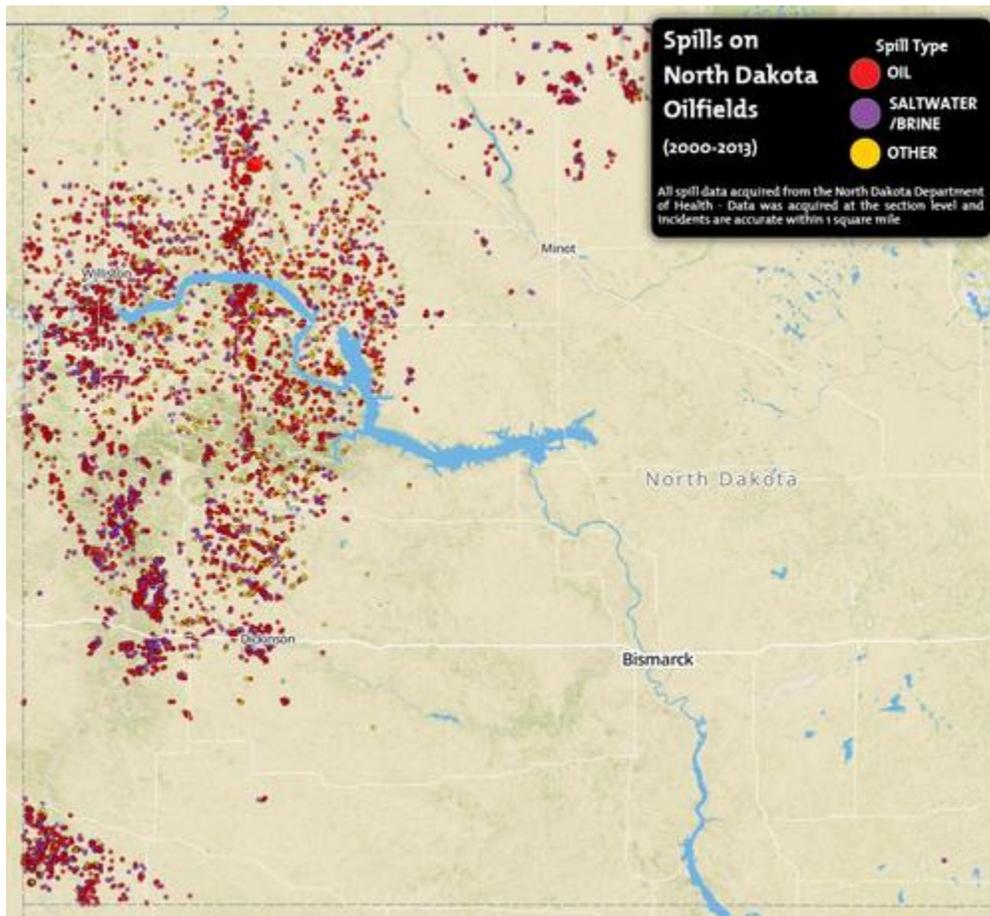


Salt Contaminated Land and Water Council’s Question is: How many surface acres of North Dakota farm, ranch, wet and wilderness lands have been poisoned by the North Dakota Oil Industry’s saltwater spills?

Article from Prairie Business Magazine

[New map makes ND oil, saltwater spill data interactive](#)

Katherine Lymn - 01/27/2014



gagecartographics.com

DICKINSON, N.D. -- An independent cartographer has put 14 years of oil field spill data in a new format, but not everyone says it tells the whole story.

Bozeman, Mont.-based geo-developer Josh Gage said he took North Dakota Department of Health data online to make an interactive map of spills because it’s a large, interesting set of data that’s readily available.

The map shows spills with a circle size corresponding to the number of gallons spilled, and a color corresponding to what was spilled — oil, saltwater or “other.” On a map of the state, the circles are placed within 1 square mile of where the spills occurred.

Upon clicking on a circle, a user can get right to the original oil field environmental incident report from the health department.

The Dakota Resource Council publicized the map after Gage reached out to them thinking they'd be interested in it.

The DRC was in fact interested, senior field organizer Scott Skokos said, because the map gives a visual portrayal that shows almost exactly where the spills are.

"I think a lot of people for a long time have no idea what happened in their area," he said.

North Dakota Petroleum Council spokeswoman Tessa Sandstrom said the map does not distinguish between two very different types of spills — contained and uncontained.

Often compared to spilling liquid on a dinner tray, contained spills stay on a well pad. Uncontained ones don't.

The map also doesn't show how much of the spilled material was recovered in the cleanup process.

"I think people should remember that this is a collection of ... 14 years of data and, you know, click on each one of the things and look at the report that goes with it," Sandstrom said. "While looking at a map, while it may be visually striking, there are those things to consider."

In one spill, for example, 140 barrels spilled in a contained area and all the material was recovered.

"So, it really had no impact to a farmer's land or anything like that — it was within their well pad," Sandstrom said.

Skokos said what scares him most is how close and concentrated spills are to Lake Sakakawea.

"It shows the state of the industry over the last 13 years," he said.

But Sandstrom emphasizes the industry does have measures for cleanup and preventing spills from getting off-site.

"The industry never wants to have a spill. These things are not things that benefit us or benefit landowners," she said. "We want to develop these resources as responsibly as possible, so we hold ourselves accountable, too. ... I just hope that people dig a little bit deeper into the map and find that these are things that are being done."

The data is accurate and verifiable since it's all linked to the original reports, said Dennis Fewless, director of water quality for the State Department of Health and overseer of the spill page. But he too brought up how it "doesn't readily jump out at you" whether a spill was uncontained or contained. They were contained in about 75 percent of the cases.

“The other aspect would be that ... around 75 percent of these events are less than 10 barrels,” he added. “So, you know, it certainly is accurate, and these are all events, but as with any statistics, when you start digging into it a little more, it gives you a better, clearer picture of all the situations.”

Gage hopes people become better informed with his map, which he hopes makes it easier to understand data otherwise in a list on the state health department website. In Montana, he said, well spills are only recorded on a physical piece of paper.

“I hope that Montanans see this information and they ask our oil and gas officials, ‘Why can’t we see the data?’” Gage said. “Let’s hope it inspires Montana to contact the state and try to get our data.”

Skokos said the data left out of the immediate picture didn’t bother him — to him, “a spill is a spill is a spill.”

Gage is a geo-developer and makes similar maps for government entities, nonprofits, publications and more.