

For immediate release

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(Photo Attached) Unreclaimed land following a brine spill. Photo courtesy Daryl Peterson.

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PRESS RELEASE

Americans Call on Congress to Address the Oil and Gas Industry's Contamination of Surface and Groundwater

Testimony exposes the industry's pollution and abuse of land and water resources

WASHINGTON, D.C. – What do a farmer, a geologist, and a lawyer have in common? Well today at a House Natural Resources Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee, they all agreed that the oil and gas industry's impact on our lands and waters is under-regulated and that both current state and federal regulations are under-enforced. Daryl Peterson, a Dakota Resource Council member and farmer from Antler, North Dakota; Dominic DiGiulio, an environmental scientist at Stanford; and Emily Collins, an attorney in oil and gas law, called today on the subcommittee to address the damage that oil and gas development causes to water resources.

The message was clear: our lands and waters are invaluable to the economic wellbeing of our country. Hydraulic fracturing, a driver of increased North American oil production, is a water-intensive industry. Use varies widely, based on geology and construction, but a hydraulically fractured well can use [between 1.5 million and 16 million gallons of water](#). Where this water comes from, whether it is confined to the formation during operations, and what is done with the produced water, or brine, are all critical questions in the protection of our water resources, the witnesses said.

Mr. Peterson, who has experienced more than twelve documented brine water spills on his farm, each equivalent to at least roughly two thousand gallons of released brine or more, acknowledged the benefits that oil and gas development can bring, but emphasized that “responsible development means protecting the land from the destructive impacts of brine spills.” Brine is a toxic byproduct of crude oil production, primarily consisting of sodium and chloride. These compounds can change the structure of the soil so that the plants are unable to take up nutrients and water. “Any accidental release can result in devastating damage to agricultural land and the contamination of water resources,” said Mr. Peterson, who has personally experienced well over a million dollars in lost land value.

A national expert on the impacts of hydraulic fracturing on underground sources of drinking water, Mr. DiGiulio noted that “exemption from federal regulation and often inadequate state regulation has caused serious impact to groundwater resources across America as a result of oil and gas development.” Mr. DiGiulio was a lead investigator for the EPA during the investigation into oil and gas operations’ [contamination of groundwater in Pavillion, Wyoming](#).

“Because of exemption of produced water from Subtitle C of the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, there is no “cradle to grave” tracking of produced water,” DiGiulio stated. [In a recent study](#) conducted by DiGiulio and his team, 35% of the produced water from oil and gas operations lacked a reported final destination.

DiGiulio expressed concern, in light of increasing [drought and freshwater scarcity](#) across the United States, for protection of the water and arable land which oil and gas operations remove from further use.

[Subcommittee Hearing: Oil and Gas Development: Impacts of Water Pollution Above and Below Ground](#)

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The Dakota Resource Council (DRC) is a grassroots statewide organization based in North Dakota with 700 members. DRC was formed in 1978 by farmers and ranchers concerned with the impacts of coal development. Since its formation DRC has expanded its areas of focus to mitigating the impacts of oil and gas from the Bakken oil boom, preserving family farm agriculture, and promoting clean energy.

The Western Organization of Resource Councils (WORC) is a network of grassroots organizations that span seven Western states with 15,000 members. Many WORC members live on lands overlying and neighboring federal, tribal, state and privately owned oil and gas deposits, and experience impacts of oil and gas production. Headquartered in Billings, Montana, WORC also has offices in Colorado and Washington, D.C.