

Dr. Tom DeSutter
Professor of Soil Science
North Dakota State University
January 28, 2025

Neutral testimony regarding SB 2313

My name is Dr. Tom DeSutter, and I am a Professor of Soil Science at North Dakota State University (NDSU). I have been with NDSU for over 18 years, with a 10% teaching and 90% research appointment. My teaching responsibilities have allowed me to instruct a variety of courses, including Introduction to Soil Science, Soils and Land Use, Field Sampling, Hydric Soils, Soil Genesis and Survey, and, in Spring 2026, a new course titled *Soil Reclamation*. Currently, the majority of my research focuses on the reclamation of disturbed soils resulting from the extraction of energy resources such as oil, gas, and coal. I am providing neutral testimony on the state of soil reclamation, based on my observations, interactions with stakeholders (midstream and upstream operators, consulting groups, ND DEQ and ND Dept of Land Trust, USDA Forest Service and NRCS, and landowners), and my commitment to fostering understanding and improvement in reclamation practices. In my role at NDSU, I do not engage in private consulting within the state of North Dakota.

The purpose of this neutral testimony is to give my perspective as a technical expert with expertise in reclamation. The testimony simply offers my observations on the status of soil reclamation in the state.

Through my research and collaboration with stakeholders, I have participated in numerous reclamation projects, including but not limited to accidental releases of oil and produced waters, pipeline corridor reclamation, herbicide runoff management from well pads, and the improvement of coal-mined soils. During these projects, I have engaged in extensive discussions with stakeholders, who consistently express a shared concern: "How can we maintain or improve soil productivity?" Throughout these interactions, I have never encountered stakeholders unwilling to prioritize proper soil handling or reclamation. On the contrary, stakeholders recognize the importance of maintaining strong relationships with landowners, which is frequently a key topic in our discussions.

Empowering stakeholders with knowledge is a critical mission of the ND Agricultural Experiment Station and NDSU Extension teams. To support this goal, our team has established a Reclamation Advisory Group (RAG) consisting of over 50 members representing diverse stakeholder groups. We organize field days and workshops to educate participants about soil management and the handling of accidental releases of oil and produced waters. Additionally, we disseminate our research and extension materials both in written form and verbally at the North Dakota Reclamation Conference, which last year attracted approximately 320 participants. Upon request, we also meet with landowners on-site to provide guidance and specific recommendations.

Sustainable reclamation benefits everyone, and I have dedicated my time at NDSU to helping all parties improve or maintain soil productivity. I firmly believe that our involvement since 2015 has enhanced reclamation practices for disturbed lands. Moving forward, we will continue conducting independent research to develop scientifically based approaches to improve reclamation, empowering those involved in reclamation efforts, and consulting with North Dakota stakeholders upon request.