Oil Company Eyes Site Near Roosevelt Ranch

MEDORA, N.D. (AP) — An oil company has staked out an area near the site of Theodore Roosevelt's historic Badlands ranch in western North Dakota, alarming those who oversee the popular tourist destination.

"We certainly can't put oil wells right next to the Elkhorn Ranch. We are concerned," Valerie Naylor, the superintendent of Theodore Roosevelt National Park, told The Bismarck Tribune. She called the prospect the worst threat to the park in its history.

"Just imagine all the trucking and the use of that (entrance) road. It would really destroy the ambiance," she said.

The 218-acre site where Roosevelt raised cattle in the mid-1880s before he returned to his native New York and eventually moved into the White House is in the north end of the park and on the west side of Little Missouri River. It was added to the National Register of Historic Places last year.

XTO Energy, a subsidiary of ExxonMobil Corp., has staked out an area for up to four oil wells near the cabin site. One corner stake is about 100 feet from the lot where people park before hiking up to the spot where Roosevelt built a log cabin more than a century ago.

State Mineral Resources officials who will make a recommendation to the state Industrial Commission have scheduled a permit hearing March 28, according to the Tribune and The Dickinson Press. Any oil wells also would require a federal permit because they would be on the Little Missouri National Grasslands.

An XTO spokeswoman, Emily Snooks, said in a statement to The Dickinson Press that the company is working with the U.S. Forest Service to "identify an appropriate site and have reviewed more than one option with them. Our priority is, and will remain, to ensure the safety of the community, our employees and contract personnel, and to protect the environment."

State Mineral Resources Director Lynn Helms is a hearing examiner and cannot comment on the drilling permit application. Department spokeswoman Alison Ritter told the Tribune that Helms has been in talks with the company and the National Park Service because of the sensitive location.

Other drilling options likely will be discussed at the hearing, Ritter said. One possible option is that any wells be moved nearly two miles west, to the other end of the staked-out area.

Roosevelt traveled to the North Dakota Badlands in 1883 to hunt, and during the trip he decided to raise cattle and bought a ranch. He returned the next year,

several months after his mother and first wife, Alice, died on the same day, and established the Elkhorn Ranch, which is about 25 miles east of the Montana border.

Roosevelt remarried two years later and moved into a home he had built on Long Island, in New York, yet he credited his time at the ranch with deepening the love and respect he had for nature that helped make him an early champion of conservationism. In his writings, he even said he wouldn't have become president if not for the time he spent in the North Dakota Badlands.

"The Elkhorn Ranch is one of the most important places not only in North Dakota, but in America," Clay Jenkinson, a Dickinson native and Theodore Roosevelt historian and author, told The Dickinson Press. "I see this as a real test of our character as a state and as a people. This is a shrine to one of the Rushmore four and someone who is widely considered one of the top five presidents in U.S. history. This is where Theodore Roosevelt became Theodore Roosevelt and if ever there was a sacred place in North Dakota, this would be it."

Source URL (retrieved on *07/26/2014 - 12:32pm*):
http://www.chem.info/news/2013/03/oil-company-eyes-site-near-roosevelt-ranch