STATE OF IOWA
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
BEFORE THE IOWA UTILITIES BOARD

IN RE: )
) Docket No. HLP-2014-0001
) DAKOTA ACCESS LLC

DIRECT TESTIMONY OF

TAYLOR BRORBY

ON BEHALF OF

SIERRA CLUB IOWA CHAPTER

OCTOBER 12, 2015

EXHIBIT SIERRA CLUB–TB–1
Q. Please tell us your name and where you live?

A. My name is Taylor Brorby. I live in Ames, Iowa.

Q. Tell us a little bit about yourself.

A. I grew up in western North Dakota, in the area now known as the Bakken area. I left North Dakota in 2006 to go to college in Minnesota. I am now a graduate student at Iowa State University, emphasizing environmental writing.

Q. Have you remained connected to what is happening in the Bakken area in recent years?

A. Yes. I return to North Dakota at least once a year for two or more weeks. I have become very concerned about the impacts from the oil boom in the Bakken area. From my observations I have noticed towns double, or sometimes quadruple, in size, putting extreme demands on local communities. The influx of people working in the oil industry have increased the need for housing, medical services, infrastructure, and government services. Massive road expansion development has occurred to accommodate the increased amount of traffic in this rural part of the
country. Due to a lack of financial resources these demands are not being met.

I have also seen the environmental impacts of the oil boom. For instance, last summer when a pipeline leaked near Mandaree, ND, spilling over one million gallons of saltwater, the cropland was rendered sterile. Little Missouri State Park, a public park, is currently installing a pipeline as well as an oil pad for more oil exploration and transportation. In total, there have been over 10,000 reported saltwater, chemical, and oil spills in the Bakken area. All of these spills empty into the Missouri River watershed, which not only impacts North Dakota, but every state downstream.

I have written articles and essays about my experiences in observing the impacts of the oil boom in the Bakken area. Many have appeared in The Huffington Post, High Country News, various ethics journals, and Minnesota Public Radio. Additionally, I’ve been interviewed about my work on North Dakota Public Radio, KHOI in Ames, and National Public Radio for All Things Considered.

Q. The oil from the Bakken area is obtained by hydraulic fracturing, or fracking. Have you seen the impacts of fracking in the Bakken area?

A. Yes. Over the nine years of this boom, oil wells have
grown to nearly 10,000 in the region, impacting not only the visual aesthetic of western North Dakota, but also the overall environmental health of the region. We know the oil in western North Dakota contains known carcinogens, such as benzene, but the flaring of natural gas carpets the region and exposes people to chemical toxins. Western North Dakota is no longer dark at night—there are constantly flares roaring across the prairie. Some areas, such as Fort Berthold, are the most heavily impacted with flaring of natural gas in some instances as high as 60 percent and oil rigs located every 3-5 miles. Exhibits Sierra Club-TB-2, 3, 4, and 5 show what I am talking about.

The oil boom also impacts land development and conservation. There is a greater demand on roadways and adequate road construction; there are new housing developments that must be built; there is a greater demand for drinking water in an arid region of the country. All of these issues are directly related to the Bakken oil boom.

Q. Have you observed how long the oil wells in the Bakken area are productive?

A. The productivity of the wells in western North Dakota are both unstable and short-lived. In comparison to the Middle East, the Bakken oil rigs lose efficiency by roughly 15 percent in the first year, roughly 40 percent in the
second year, and go to about 20-30 percent of total productivity by year three. This means more wells are developed to continue building an increasingly demanding oil infrastructure.

Q. Have you observed the impacts of oil spills, leaks and explosions from oil pipelines in the Bakken area?
A. Yes. I have visited the largest inland oil spill on Steve Jensen’s farm near Tioga, North Dakota. Two years after this oil spill, Tesoro is still struggling to clean up the 865,200 gallons. I have also visited the one million gallon saltwater oil spill near Mandaree, ND, which compromised the town’s drinking water, the spill eventually reaching Lake Sakakawea on the Missouri River channel. Additionally, I have visited a fracking waste site near Glendive, MT, a repository for radioactive filter socks, fracking fluid, and other oil boom material that is currently 30 acres and will be completed to 130 acres, holding 2 million tons of radioactive waste. This site sits above an aquifer which eventually leads to the Yellowstone River.

Q. Have you edited a book on the oil boom in North Dakota?
A. Yes.

Q. Please describe the book.
A. The anthology, as a whole, surveys the impacts of
fracking across the country. Fracking not only impacts areas such as North Dakota, Oklahoma, Texas, and Pennsylvania — areas where we know fracking is happening — but also California, Ohio, Michigan, Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, Washington State. This book examines this phenomenon from the perspective of over 50 writers, all who write about their place and the impacts of fracking both in their regions and how those impacts relate to a larger national concern about fracking.

Q. Have you talked with residents in the Bakken area about the impacts on their lives?

A. Yes. People such as the Stenslies, who lived near Lake Sakakawea eventually sold their home due to a fracking site being within a half mile of their home, moving south and east to Napoleon, over 200 miles away; Jim said he feels like a refugee in his own home state. Brenda and Richard Jorgenson have two pumpjacks within 500 feet of their home—these wells have blown out, too, filling the Jorgenson home with dangerous methane. Debbie Wonser now lives near Chattanooga, TN, moving due to the emotional toll fracking has taken on her family. While washing apples to make a pie, Debbie’s water turned black due to a nearby pumpjack. Until their move, the Wonsers drank from a separate water tank, filled with city water each week. Other residents of
the state have moved east due to the rising cost of housing in the region. An apartment in Williston, ND, may cost as much as $2,500 a month. Two residents, Jim and Ida, who I had lunch with, moved from Kansas to rebuild their retirement account after the economic downturn. They live in a 28-foot trailer in a mancamp with their 8 year-old daughter and pay $1,200 a month. Jim often spends the night at a friend’s apartment so his family can have enough room in their trailer.

Q. Based on your observations and experience in the Bakken area, why do you oppose the construction of the Dakota Access pipeline?

A. The Dakota Access pipeline, if built, supports an intensive extractive economy based off of corporate profit. It supports our dependence on an energy source that we know we need to move away from—and move away from quickly. The Dakota Access pipeline construction would continue to support a volatile economic model in North Dakota and to the larger corporate interests, an economic model that externalizes the true cost of this extractive energy upon future generations, upon the environment, upon our own ability to live a sustainable life.

Q. Does this conclude your prepared testimony?

A. It does.