

# THE CHALLENGE OF A HARD WINTER

## ...CHASING 1 MILLION BARRELS

By Jason Spiess for the Tribune



**O**n February 9, 2011, it was 35-below zero, 35 mph winds and Patrick McGarry had never experienced anything like it. Wind and snow were not foreign elements to the Aspen, Colo., native, just not at the speed and scale of the Bakken.

“My first day in the Bakken was quite memorable, I’d never seen anything like it in my life,” McGarry said. “I’ve seen my share of cold and wind, but nothing like this and this past winter. It was the worst I’ve ever experienced.”

McGarry’s climatological observation isn’t far off from science. It was a cold winter in the Bakken. Top 20 cold. The National Weather Service ranks the region’s past winter as the 17th coldest on record at 4.3 degrees. The last time the Bakken saw this type of frigid air was 1981-82.

“There are 6,000 plus campers in Williams County, and they were freezing up left and right,” McGarry said. “At one of our jobs, an electrician I know hadn’t had running water since December. His pipes were frozen solid.”

Frozen water pipes in RV’s are just the tip of the iceberg in the Bakken Freeze. Kathy Neset, geologist, couldn’t recall a winter with such an intense cold and personally knows several ranchers and farmers who experienced frozen pipes at their homesteads for the first time.

“The winter was longer and colder than normal,” Neset said. “We started out in December with sub-zero temperature and never really got out of it.”

Like McGarry, Neset’s anecdotal observation was pretty close to what

science is saying. According to the National Weather Service, from December 1 to February 28 the daily low temperature was below zero for 65 days.

“Things just don’t work as well in freezing temperatures,” Neset said. “Whether it is people or iron, it just doesn’t move as well in 30-below conditions.”

Is cold weather to blame for the delay on the 1 million barrel per day milestone? Yes and no. Much like the detailed complexity of the oil and gas

LAUREN DONOVAN/Tribune

Oasis Petroleum is seen completing a well site just east of Ross, N.D., in January 2014.