

## Land designation raises ire of N.D. property owners

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**BISMARCK (AP)** - Some property owners in a five-county area bordering the Missouri River in North Dakota are objecting to its designation as a national heritage area.

The residents complain proper hearings weren't held before the designation was made, and they fear losing their property rights. But federal and other officials say hearings were held, no property rights will be lost and the designation makes federal money available to the area.

President Barack Obama on March 30 declared McLean, Mercer, Oliver, Morton and Burleigh counties the Northern Plains Heritage Area. That makes the area part of the National Heritage Program, which is affiliated with the National Park Service.

Forty-nine national heritage areas have been declared since the program started in 1984. Eight others in states including Arkansas, Maryland and Alabama were authorized in the same bill that created North Dakota's.

The designation reflects the area's importance in Native American culture and agricultural history as well as the scenic beauty of the Missouri River, said Tracy Potter of the Northern Plains Heritage Foundation. It also allows the area to get federal matching grants for tourism and to develop cultural resources.

But residents have greeted the designation with suspicion. A Farm Bureau flier inviting people to a public meeting about the heritage area a month after the bill's passage, called it "the largest regulatory taking of private property in the history of North Dakota."

Wes Klein, a Farm Bureau director from Mercer County, said a lack of public hearings or involvement during the study process left people feeling like, "The bill is here and you can like it, or don't like it. It creates bone-on-bone friction because of what's been done."

The privately funded North Dakota Policy Council has accused Potter of falsely testifying to Congress that public hearings were held. Potter told a congressional committee the heritage area was explained at regular city and county meetings that were open to the public.

Sen. Byron Dorgan, D-N.D., who sponsored the designation, said it's not designed to affect property rights.

"If they tried to, I would shut down funding," he said.

Some landowners are unduly paranoid, Potter said.

"We can't own land; we can't regulate people's property. The list of things we can't do is longer than the things we can do," he said. "The only thing is a positive action."

Up to \$10 million in federal money will be available to the area over 15 years, Potter and Dorgan said. The money can go to preserve and promote places like Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site at Stanton or Double Ditch Indian Villages north of Bismarck. It can be used for better signs, better interpretation, better promotion and better preservation of the area's cultural heritage.

But landowners who wish can opt out of the heritage area, although that means they can't receive any future grant money, Potter said.