



MORTON COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT

Kyle L. Kirchmeier, Sheriff



For Immediate Release

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Third night of protest activity on Backwater Bridge, 21 arrested

MANDAN, ND – Dakota Access Pipeline protesters entered their third consecutive night of trespassing and trying to confront, flank and intimidate Morton County law enforcement personnel holding a line on the north side of the Highway 1806 Backwater Bridge.

“It is unfortunate that these protesters are now engaging in nightly riots that impede law enforcement’s ability to facilitate the important clean-up efforts requested by the Standing Rock tribe and Morton County citizens,” said Morton County Sheriff Kyle Kirchmeier, “As has been repeatedly said, with the flood season fast approaching, it is imperative that we are able to help the appropriate agencies remove debris and waste from these protest camps to prevent a probable ecological disaster.”

Protesters began assembling on the Backwater Bridge around 6:45pm on Wednesday, January 18. By 8:30pm, the crowd of protesters had grown to approximately 150. During the following four hours, protesters started two fires on the bridge and erected two tipis further blocking the bridge. Protestors flanked law enforcement line several times, attempting to get behind them. After protesters failed to comply to multiple orders from law enforcement to return to the south side of the bridge and go back to camp. Law enforcement deployed less-than-lethal munitions.

Over the course of the evening, law enforcement continued to negotiate and issue multiple warnings to the protesters, however, the orders were not heeded and the crowd continued to grow.

As the protester crowds grew in size and became more aggressive by throwing projectiles at officers and engaging in flanking maneuvers, the field commanders authorized use of less-than-lethal munitions of direct impact sponge rounds, drag stabilizer bean bag rounds, hand deployed pepper spray canisters and smoke riot control CS canisters.

“Last night our officers faced the same type of hostility and aggression that we have been subjected to for the past six months,” said Mandan Police Chief Jason Ziegler, “Rioters once again violated their December agreement to stay off the Backwater Bridge as they set fires and assaulted officers using a variety of materials including ice chunks, rocks, and other home-made projectiles.”

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Law enforcement cleared the bridge of protesters three times resulting in 21 arrests ranging from criminal trespass, engaging in a riot, disorderly conduct, prevent arrest on misdemeanor or infraction charge and remain after request to leave. Many of those arrested were transported to the Mercer County Jail in Stanton, ND.

There were five injuries to law enforcement officers and ND National Guard soldiers. They ranged from ankle, shoulder, wrist and hand injuries. A report was taken of a protester who was injured in the face. He was transported by ambulance to Sanford Medical Center in Bismarck, ND.

The ND Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI) is conducting an investigation into last night's incident and there is a possibility of further arrests.

Law enforcement has made a total of 624 arrests during protest activity since August 10, 2016.

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