“They were damn lucky,” the spill didn’t occur over a fast-flowing aquifer, he added.

And there were no major irrigation wells in the area, Merrill said.

The Pine Sands aquifer under Hubbard and Becker counties is “a very sensitive aquifer,” Merrill said. “The pipeline basically goes right through the middle of the irrigation well system. If there’s a leak in the pipeline and a well sucks up the petroleum, it will be applied to the potato field, drain in, and be sucked into other wells, it will move towards the Park Rapids (city water supply) wells.”

Aquifer water in the Straight River area can move 300 to 600 feet per day, and the big irrigation wells, which can pump 1,000 gallons per minute, “can greatly exacerbate the 600-feet per day movement by increasing the gradient,” Merrill said.

Both he and Mattison said the city of Park Rapids would have come out in support of the pipeline route.

“The pipeline actually runs into the Park Rapids wellhead protection area. They’re not supposed to allow activities in wellhead protection zones that can contaminate those water supplies,” Merrill said.

Mattison said it would be better to route the Sandpiper through the less permeable soils of southern Minnesota farmland.

David Barnett, a special representative to the United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipe-Fitting Industry, said the Grand Forks Herald recently that opposition is rooted in anti-oil views, rather than against the pipeline itself. “Stopping the pipeline is not going to stop the oil,” Barnett said. “It’s coming through on the trains.”

He said the Sandpiper will create about 3,000 well-paying jobs, boost local economies and help ease crude-by-rail traffic. He added that pipelines are safer than in the past.

From an environmental standpoint, the pipeline company could not have chosen a much worse route than the one through Hubbard County, Merrill said.

“It has the most porous soil, the fastest infiltration rates and the fastest-moving aquifer,” he said. “The lakes and streams and groundwater in that aquifer are directly linked, what happens on the land is going to happen on the lake or stream. If you contaminate one part of it, you’re going to contaminate the other part too. That’s why we’re so alarmed at putting something in the ground — out of sight, out of mind — that can leak, that will leak, at some time in the future.”

North Dakota Pipeline Company LLC, an Enbridge subsidiary, is proposing to construct the 565- to 608-mile long Sandpiper pipeline and storage facilities.

The Minnesota portion of the Sandpiper Project is about 300 miles long and will include the installation of a proposed 24-inch diameter pipeline from the North Dakota border to Clearbrook, and a 30-inch diameter pipeline from the Clearbrook to Superior, Wis.

The initial capacity of the Project will be 225,000 barrels per day into Clearbrook and 375,000 barrels per day into Superior.

About 940,000 barrels per day are now moved by rail out of the Bakken region.

To the extent practicable, North Dakota Pipeline Company is proposing to have much of the route re-located with its existing pipeline right-of-way or other utility rights-of-way in Minnesota. NDPC is proposing two general pipeline routes.

In Minnesota, both routes parallel existing rights-of-way from the North Dakota border south of Grand Forks to Clearbrook, Minn.

From Clearbrook, the northern route follows the Enbridge Energy Limited Partnership System (Mainline) route, terminating in Superior, Wis.

The southern route deviates from the existing Mainline route at Clearbrook, going south to Hub bard, Minn., and then east to Superior.

Enbridge Energy Inc. on Tuesday said Sandpiper project won’t be completed until 2017, about a year behind the company’s original estimate.

The company had hoped to start construction in 2015 and have oil moving by early 2016. But those de-