

**Testimony of Cole Higlin
North Dakota Recreation & Park Association
To House Appropriations Committee
In Support of HB 1019**

Chairman Delzer and Members of the Committee, my name is Cole Higlin, and I am the public policy committee chair of the North Dakota Recreation and Park Association (NDRPA). NDRPA represents more than 900 members across the state and works to advance parks, recreation and conservation for an enhanced quality of life in North Dakota. I am here on behalf of NDRPA to support House Bill 1019.

Public parks and recreation facilities are valuable community infrastructure, and usage in our state is significant. Six out of every 10 North Dakota households (60 percent) report outdoor recreation is very important, while 93 percent report it is important, according to the *2018-2022 North Dakota State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)*. Five percent more North Dakota households feel outdoor recreation is very important today compared to five years ago.

NDRPA supports the governor's recommendation for operating expenses and maintenance for the Parks and Recreation Department, as well as parks' infrastructure funding through bonding and park district infrastructure grants through bonding. As noted in the *2018-2022 SCORP*, 49 percent of outdoor recreation providers report demand for facilities and activities exceeds supply for their users. Over the next five years, additional funding needed to fulfill reported existing unmet capital needs is \$319 million. The Parks and Recreation Department is a strong partner with organizations across the state, and planning documents such as the *SCORP* are important to North Dakota parks and recreation agencies. The priorities outlined in the governor's recommendation would strengthen these partnership efforts.

With the state's growing population, the Parks and Recreation Department and local agencies need sufficient resources to provide and build upon our public parks. Parks, open space, trails, greenways, water, recreation facilities, programs, and services provide documented benefits, among them economic, health, environmental, and social/community. Providing safe, affordable and accessible recreation opportunities for our citizens and visitors is essential to maintaining North Dakota's commitment to a high quality of life.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee and express support for this bill and for your continued commitment to North Dakota's quality of life needs.