



Senate Bill 2066

House Energy and Natural Resources Committee

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Testimony of Ed Murphy, State Geologist, NDIC - DMR – Geological Survey
Presented by Clint Boyd, Senior Paleontologist

The Fossil Excavation and Restoration Fund (North Dakota Century Code 54-17.4-9.1) was established during the 1997 legislative session. The fund contains both appropriated monies and donations to the Department of Mineral Resources -- Geological Survey to pay for excavation and restoration of fossils for display in the North Dakota Heritage Center and other museums and public venues across the state. Fossil restoration is very time intensive and fossil exhibits also require considerable time and expense to plan, prepare, and maintain. This continuing appropriation fund enables the monies to be carried across bienniums for these multi-biennial projects.

Since 1997, \$250,000 in appropriated funds and \$900,000 in donations (78% of the total) has been deposited into the fund. Conversely, \$1,150,000 has been withdrawn from the fund to pay for a multitude of projects:

2000	Mosasaur exhibit at the Heritage Center (~\$74,000)
2004	Mesohippus (early horse) Exhibit at the Cowboy Hall of Fame (\$7,000)
2006	Dinosaur exhibit at the Heritage Center (\$84,000)
2007	Paleocene (crocodile) exhibit at the Heritage Center (\$51,000)
2008	Final phase of exhibit updates at the Heritage Center (\$170,000)
2008 - 2013:	Preparation work on Dakota (\$167,000)
2008 & 2011:	Bismarck airport exhibit and update (Pterosaurs added) (\$5,000)
2012 - 2014:	New exhibit hall (Corridor of Time) at the Heritage Center (\$265,000)
2016:	Cretascope update at the Heritage Center (\$105,000)
2018 to present:	Dakota (mummified hadrosaur) exhibit update (\$95,000 so far)

The current balance in the Fossil Excavation and Restoration Fund is \$43,780.

The Geological Survey's Public Fossil Dig Program has grown from a few dozen dig slots in 2000 to well over 600 slots in 2018. For a number of years, three of the five fossil digs we participated in charged a registration fee (Medora, Walhalla, and Marmarth) with that money going to our partners who handled all of the costs for their particular dig (Medora Foundation, Walhalla Convention and Visitors Bureau, ND Parks and Recreation, and the Marmarth Foundation). In recent years the Geological Survey has taken over the accounting side of all the digs from our partners and began charging a registration fee for those digs as well as for the digs that we have always run alone (Bismarck and Dickinson digs).

We have kept the dig registration fee low (\$25 per person) in order to not price out North Dakotans. Roughly half of our dig participants are from North Dakota. Over the years, the fossil dig program has become the primary source for state fossils that will eventually go on display at the Heritage Center or other museums and venues across the state.

In 2019, the fossil digs generated \$21,200 in registration fees and \$20,540 in expenses. In 2020, registration fees were \$10,100 and expenses were \$13,500 due to the COVID19 pandemic. In both years, the registration fees were run through the Office of Management and Budget’s Conference Fund. We typically manage three to four fossil digs per year (Medora, Dickinson, Bismarck, and Walhalla), but each dig has to be accounted for separately within the OMB Conference Fund. This means if we run a deficit in one dig, we can’t use the surplus from other digs to balance it. Placing the fossil dig registration fees in the Fossil Excavation and Restoration Fund will enable us to spread the fossil dig program budget over the entire summer giving us much more flexibility and making the program more self-sufficient.



Upper Left: The 2000 Mosasaur exhibit at the Heritage Center. Upper Right: Pterosaur casts and a triceratops skull at the Bismarck Airport in 2011. Middle Right: The 2004 Meshippus Exhibit at the Cowboy Hall of Fame. Lower Left: Children interacting with the updated Cretascope exhibit in the Heritage Center in 2016.