

Johnnie Candle

Professional Walleye Angler

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Testimony Regarding HB 1538

Dear Representatives, the following is my testimony regarding HB1538.

HB 1538 is not about restricting the ND Game and Fish Department in their administrative role of managing fishing tournaments. In fact, I believe they do a great job with this. The department makes sure that boat landing and bodies of water are not over saturated on tournament days. They are very mindful of not placing too much pressure on a body of water. The overall health of a fishery always comes first and for all of this I am grateful.

HB1538 does provide opportunities for all anglers to enjoy competitive angling in a manner that and at a price that makes sense.

There are a few key areas of HB1538 that I would like to address. First is the ramifications, both short and long term, of the existing laws regarding fishing tournaments and their economic impact in ND. Under the current rules, a conservation fee of 10% of all entry fees collected is required to obtain a tournament permit by a promoter. Until the fall of 2020, this amount was capped at \$5000. An administrative rule was put into place that lifted this cap. That meant that for some larger national tournaments, the conservation fee could now be \$25,000; an amount that all national tournament promoters refuse to pay. This has eliminated the short term economic impact of hundreds of anglers visiting a body of water for a week to ten days to compete in a tournament. They rent rooms, buy food, bait and tackle. They get boats and vehicles repaired. They buy fishing licenses. The amount of money potentially spent is well into the hundred of thousands of dollars.

This does not include the long term impacts of having these anglers returning home and sharing the good word about the wonderful fisheries in ND. Friends and relatives as well as their fishing fans hear how much the tournament anglers enjoy their time on our incredible fisheries and they want to come see it for themselves. It also does not take into account the national media exposure that will be no more without these tournaments. This brings even more economic impact long term.

HB 1538 eliminates the conservation fees, allowing the larger tournaments that bring economic impact and national promotion back to the state of ND.

HB 1538 also allows for fishing clubs, fishing leagues, and student angler leagues to thrive. Again the current rules do not make it easy for the above groups to gather and hold competitive fishing events. Student Angling is one of the fastest growing youth

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events across the country. The exorbitant conservation fees are forcing the student angling groups in ND to look elsewhere for places to compete.

Currently, if a fishing tournament with no entry fee is held in ND, there is a conservation fee of \$10,000. This means that if an organization would like to hold a fundraising event, they may have to give all or most of the money raised to the ND Game and Fish Department. HB 1538 prevents this.

The bottom line is this; ND has become one of the most restrictive states in the country when it come to fishing tournaments. Our state currently put all of the burden of providing conservation fees on tournament competitors. No other group of anglers or boaters is required to pay a fee that is used to provide and maintain lake access or help replace fish taken from the resource.

ND has created a reputation across the country as being anti fishing tournament and may be starting a precedent nationwide as to higher tournament fees and stricter permitting regulations.

ND is prohibiting the growth of student angler which is one of the fastest growing youth participation activities in the country. This is slowing the addition of long-term participants enjoying our fisheries and buying fishing license for years to come. It is not just the students, but their parents as well. The more fishing licenses sold, them more participants we have, the more federal and local dollars that are generated from many sources.

It puzzles me that Big Buck contests, Pheasant Long Tail contests, Coyote Hunting contests, and Duck and Goose shoots can be held anywhere in the state with no conservation fees, but a fishing tournament cannot.

I urge you to please take a closer look at the current situation, then take a look at HB1538. I am positive that you will see the old way is broken and HB1538 is a great step in fixing it.

Thank you,

