



Billings County Rural Fire Protection District
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March 20, 2025

To: House Energy and Natural resources Committee

Subject: SB 2340

Chairman Porter & Committee Members, my name is Kyle Shockley, I currently serve as the Fire Chief and Emergency Manager of Billings County. I have been a firefighter for 25 years, in North Dakota, serving in multiple different positions as both a Volunteer and Career firefighter. Out of those 25 years I have been a Fire Chief for 17 of those years. I served as the Assistant Emergency Manager of Billings county for 2 ½ years and now as the Emergency Manager for the past 3 ½ years.

Through my years of service, I have primarily worked in the SW and SE regions of the state but I also have some time spent in the NW region. My multiple roles in emergency services over the years have taken me to many different places and has given me a good look at the emergency responses that happen across North Dakota. When I read SB 2340 I gave it a lot of thought, kicked around some ideas. Taking some of my past experiences with working floods in the Red River Valley, responding to Hazmat's, taking command of the Medora Fire in 2021; seeing what other fire chiefs and emergency managers have encountered even in just recent years, I easily came to the conclusion that this study is just what North Dakota needs. This state has never put together a study like this in the past, and bringing in all of the stakeholders from the local level up to the state level will only make us all better prepared for the future.

I have read the majority of the testimonies that you have heard today or are about to hear and I agree 100% with every word on those testimonies. With that being said I'm going to give some bullet points on what this study can help North Dakota emergency responders with to better prepare for the future.

1. Almost every emergency agency has a plan for an initial response to an incident and a plan for those initial calls for mutual aid. These plans are excellent and will always play a vital role in emergency responses, but what happens in the cases like what happened in western North Dakota in 2021 and fall of 2024 when you have every fire department out on fires for several consecutive counties, along with a large amount of state and federal resources?
This study will help us build a larger tiered response system that goes beyond our neighbors in surrounding counties.
2. North Dakota is made up of about 94% of volunteer firefighters. What happens when the volunteers in a drought area of the state are running multiple calls all week long and then the National Weather Service calls for a Red Flag Warning all weekend? I do believe that this study will help us build a protocol to easily allow fire districts to backfill their fire stations during those High Danger days which would allow us to take a more proactive stance for responding to incidents. This study could also build a plan for reimbursing these districts that come to help backfill our stations.
3. In the North Dakota fire service, we not only deal with private property, we also respond to fires on federal lands in many areas throughout the state. My fire district deals a lot with the US Forest Service (USFS). In 2017, we had 1 large fire, and 3 large fires in 2021. At these fires I was approached to sign a US Forest Service Delegation of authority while still actively working with my fire department and neighboring departments to get fires contained. With the wording in these delegations if their rules are not followed or

they want to assess charges for the fire, the named individuals who sign their delegation could become partially financially responsible for the costs of resources used. This concerns me because I have had conversations with fire chiefs who also deal with the USFS and have been approached to sign these delegations and they had no idea what they were signing, they were just told that they needed to. Not sure if this committee is aware that the Elk Horn fire in McKenzie County back in October had costs racked up to 1 million dollars. For the USFS to think it's ok to possibly put a fraction of that cost onto a North Dakota Fire District is not ok, and even a small fraction of that amount could bankrupt a fire district. With this study we can come up with a plan to not only assure that all fire chiefs in the state know the rules, but to also give them the tools they need to not get their fire department into a financial bind. This study could also help us build a protocol on who and when do these delegations from federal agencies get signed.

With this study I know the North Dakota Fire Service, Department of Emergency Services, along with other responders in the state can come up with a final product that can be a great benefit to everyone. This would help give fire departments and emergency managers more tools to take more of a proactive stance vs. being reactive.

The Billings County Rural Fire Protection District is in favor of Senate Bill 2340, and asks for your support in helping all of the North Dakota Fire Service better prepare for the future.

Sincerely,
Kyle Shockley, Fire Chief
Billings County Rural Fire Prot. Dist.