



Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee
Information requested on HB 1470

North Dakota Game and Fish Department
Jeb Williams, Director
March 14, 2025

Chairman Patten and members of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide the committee with information on HB 1470. First, I would like to remind all of you that the Department is a special fund agency and we don't receive any general fund dollars. Instead, approximately 46% of our revenue comes from federal excise taxes on hunting and fishing equipment, while the remaining primary source of our revenue is generated by license sales for hunting, fishing and boating. By state law, the Department is required to maintain a \$15 million ending fund balance. This was established first in the late 90's with a \$10 million dollar reserve and then adjusted in 2005 to the current, \$15 million dollar figure. Attached in the information packet we passed out is a graph showing the fund balance (and projected fund balance) along with an informational sheet comparing our neighboring states hunting and fishing fees.

In recent bienniums, the Department had sufficient funding in reserve to carry us through following the last, major fee increase which happened in the 2013 legislative session. Many factors have contributed to the increased cost of day-to-day operations in the department. The most obvious is simply inflationary costs. But a desired goal by the Department and the public to grow our outdoor opportunities continues to be the focus. Over the last two bienniums the Department has made significant habitat and access commitments in our private lands program cutting into our reserve fund. The loss of over two million acres of CRP in North Dakota over the last 15 years has had an impact on overall wildlife populations across the state. Sportsmen and women are very engaged on this topic and on many occasions have challenged the department to come up with programs and new ideas that will try to negate or soften the loss of habitat.

We are currently managing a record number of fishing waters across the state. Monitoring for aquatic nuisance species (ANS) continues to be a very important topic and people are relying on the Department to lead this effort. The demand for development infrastructure in the form of boat ramps, docks, piers, etc. is growing and the cost of providing these is increasing. While we partner with the Department of Water Resources on dam repair projects, these have become extremely expensive and given that one-third of our current fishing waters are those behind dams its important these are addressed.

With the changing landscape in North Dakota's population demographics and increased population, many challenges have been presented to North Dakota's peace officers and our wardens are no exception. They are an integral part of our everyday operation, and their budget consists of mostly license funds.

Our relationship and dialogue with our clientele is extensive and I feel quite confident saying the sporting public is asking for more not less. We also realize there is a fine line to walk on the cost of our licenses. There are avid sportsmen and women in the state who are asking that the fees be increased substantially to support habitat, enforcement, fisheries and access. There are also causal sportsmen and women, many who are older and retired, that are on fixed incomes, that don't want to be priced out of the outdoors experience. During last December's habitat and access summit where over 350 people attended, one of the major topics of discussion is how we can work together to maintain and increase our great opportunities in the state and increasing licensing fees was a common theme. Thank you for the opportunity to provide information on a very important topic.