

Dear Members of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB 2155 regarding pronghorn, or antelope, gratis tag allocations. The current allocation method is not an equitable distribution of a public resource, particularly due to the limited tags available. Both landowners and the public need to be considered when considering gratis tag distributions. Private landowners have to deal with wildlife year round at an expense to them. In addition, in most cases they are providing the access needed to allow the public to hunt. At the same time, wildlife are a public resource. The proper distribution of tags can be extremely subjective, but I do think the current antelope distribution needs adjustment.

The current allocation allows landowners to receive the first 50 tags and then 50 percent of the remaining. SB 2155 would result in the gratis allocation being capped at a straight 50 percent, which is in line with the deer gratis allocation. Due to antelope in North Dakota being on the edge of their range, we will never have huge populations and they will always be subject to population swings from harsh winters. Antelope fall well short of the tag availability of deer. Instead they lie somewhere between deer and the once in a lifetime tags of elk and moose. The latter only allow for 15 percent of the tags to be allocated to gratis. I do not see a reason why antelope would have the highest tag percentage of gratis tag allocation for any of the big game animals in the state.

Unit tag availability for antelope is often under 100 in most units of the state. Gratis tags frequently end up taking a large majority of the tags available. For example, in unit 8A and 9A last year, there were 55 tags available in each. Due to the current allocation, 52 of the 55 tags went to gratis. The remaining three tags had 259 and 446 North Dakota residents applying for them. High percentages of tags going to gratis occurred in multiple other units last year and happens every year. I believe most of the general public are unaware of how few tags they are really vying for.

Now is the time to adjust the antelope gratis tag allocation to bring it in line with the deer drawing and give the general public a better opportunity to hunt.

Sincerely,

Greg Morel