



NORTH DAKOTA WILDLIFE FEDERATION

**TESTIMONY OF JOHN BRADLEY
NORTH DAKOTA WILDLIFE FEDERATION
HOUSE BILL 1408
HOUSE FINANCE AND TAXATION COMMITTEE
JANUARY 24, 2023**

Chairman Headman and members of the House Finance and Taxation Committee:

For the record, I am John Bradley, Executive Director of the North Dakota Wildlife Federation. I'm here today representing our thousands of members in 15 affiliated wildlife and sportsmen's clubs across North Dakota that make up the North Dakota Wildlife Federation.

NDWF supports HB 1408. The Wildlife Federation has a strong track record on working on access issues facing sportsmen and women, finding common ground with agriculture partners, and securing our outdoor traditions for future generations. The bill would incentivize landowners to enroll more acreage into an incredibly popular access program sportsmen and women.

The state of North Dakota has a long history of being a state with strong wildlife diversity, hunting and outdoor recreation opportunities. Over the last few decades, a combination of agricultural expansion, oil and gas development, and urban development have negatively impacted North Dakota's wildlife populations and outdoor heritage.

In 1997, the North Dakota Legislature passed of HB1395 created the Private Land Habitat and Access Improvement Fund to help address access issues. This fund is financed by hunters with the sales of hunting licenses in North Dakota, and interest accrued by the ND Game & Fish Department General fund. This bill created what is commonly known as the PLOTS Program. PLOTS is a working lands program that gives enrolled landowners financial compensation for providing walk-in access for hunting during legal hunting seasons. Landowners can farm, graze, and hay this land and get compensation for providing hunting access. The early goal of this program was to enroll 1 million acres. Currently, we are short of that goal, with approximately 800,000 acres enrolled. That equates to only 0.01% of the entire North Dakota landscape.

Between economic development, agricultural expansion, oil and gas development, less than 5% public land, and only 0.01% PLOTS acres, the need for public access for hunting



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has never been greater. We understand that this bill still needs to address the loss of revenue at the county level. We'd be happy to work with the bill sponsor, Association of Counties, and members of this committee to address that issue.

Survey after survey shows a lack of access to quality lands as the primary reason sportsmen and women give up hunting and stop purchasing a license. We strongly believe that any opportunity to increase access should be seriously considered and we welcome the open dialogue that this bill will bring.

We urge a Do Pass on HB 1408.