

Testimony – SB 2108
House Government and Veterans Affairs Committee
March 2, 2023
By Cody Schulz
Director, ND Parks and Recreation

Good morning Chairman Schauer and members of the House Government and Veterans Affairs Committee, my name is Cody Schulz. I am the Director of the North Dakota Parks & Recreation Department. I offer this testimony in support of SB 2108.

There are three primary purposes of the bill in front of you today. First, in sections one and three of the bill, language that is outdated or inconsistent is being eliminated. Specifically, language requiring vehicle permit fees to pay for capital costs and bond payments has been struck to allow us to (potentially) pay any future bond issues with other funds such as federal grants or other fee generated revenue. Additionally, section one strikes language regarding special powers of the Director for setting fees for certain groups or uses. If this bill passes, those powers will be granted without the need for the current language in statute.

Secondly, in section two we aim to create flexibility within the pricing process and model of vehicle entrance fees into North Dakota State Parks. Currently, the fees are written into statute and therefore can only be changed every two years, and only by legislative action. The current price structure is:

- Annual Vehicle Pass \$35
- Annual Vehicle Pass (2nd/Family) \$20
- Daily Vehicle Pass \$ 7

I am respectfully requesting that the authority to set fees be given directly to the Director of North Dakota Parks and Recreation. The ability of the agency to create packages, discounts, bundles and partnerships may be very beneficial from a marketing, sales and visitor perspective. A few examples of potential models we are researching and considering are; if an individual reserves a campsite for twelve or more days they receive a free annual vehicle pass, or partnering with another entity such as the International Peace Garden where customers could buy an annual pass to both entities for \$65 (rather than the \$75 it would cost to purchase the passes separately), and other partnership opportunities potentially exist with State Historical Society properties, Theodore Roosevelt National Park, and city and county park agencies. Additionally, with the growth of corporate wellness programs we may be able to create partnerships or packages where business could purchase and provide passes to access our vast trail system for hiking, biking or walking.

Lastly, section four of this bill aims to eliminate inconsistencies that currently exist in NDCC 55-08. The language we propose striking in 55-08-07 currently reads, “No lease rentals and no motor vehicle permit fees may be credited to operating accounts.” However, 55-08-06-4 currently reads, “The fees collected must be deposited in the state park operating fund in the state treasury...” Striking the language as requested would eliminate the inconsistency and align with current practice.

On behalf of North Dakota Parks and Recreation, I recommend SB 2108 receive a Do Pass.

Thank you for your time; I will do my best to answer any questions you may have.