

1/19/23

ND House Energy and Natural Resource Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony in support of HB 1151.

I am a lifelong ND resident hunter and I began going deer hunting on a regular basis 30 years ago with my dad when I was only 4 years old. He taught me woodsman ship, hunting skills, respect for the land, and respect for the animals that we love to pursue. I would argue that almost no one has as much respect and admiration for deer and deer hunting than I do. It is what I think about and prepare for all year.

This discussion on this bill will likely get heated as people on both sides of this issue feel that their hunting heritage and the way of life the grew up with is being threatened. Good arguments are going to be laid out on both sides of the issue.

The opposition is going to fight everything in the name of science. However, there have been plenty of studies on the other side of CWD that are simply ignored. Why is only one side of the CWD debate recognized by our Game and Fish? There has been no conclusive study saying that baiting bans actually slow the spread of this disease. However, what the NDGF is doing is not actually a baiting ban. It is a hunting over that bait ban. If these regulations are based on science, why is baiting still allowed? Why does feeding deer only become a problem when someone is trying to shoot a deer over it? Why does the NDGF still feed deer themselves to bait them away from hay yards? Why do they still plant small food plots to help concentrate deer in specific areas if they want to slow the spread? The answer is clear that this isn't about science. It is about a social or ethical preference our NDGF has against baiting. They are using science and CWD as vessel to ban what they feel is a morally wrong method of hunting.

Many on the opposition say this is an overreach by the Legislature. However, I see it as just the opposite. The overreach came from the NDGF first. This bill is to try and stand up against this overreach. Letting the Game and fish manage by social preference is a dangerous slope. Look what has happened in some states with hunting season losses because of social not biological management. In some areas, you are no longer allowed to hunt black bears, Grizzly Bears, or mountain lions because it is no longer accepted socially, not because there is a shortage of them. This could happen in our state too. Maybe not in the form of a species but in the form of equipment bans. The use of trail cameras could be next or maybe your favorite hunting rifle. They could also say it is no longer acceptable to use a rangefinder, scope or a high-powered long-range rifle. Maybe it is bowhunting they attack next? They could come after any method of take they want if the precedence is continued to be tolerated by sportsman. While I agree that wildlife management should be left up to the professionals, when the unelected professionals abuse their power, they need to be kept in check.

My support of this bill is also based on a loss of opportunity. I do not need bait to kill a deer and my success rate will not change no matter what direction this falls. This isn't about me. It is about certain groups of people that are less mobile or fortunate to have access to great land, a baiting ban will hit them the hardest. My elderly father, who can no longer hike the badlands chasing deer with his bow will suffer. Hunters with disabilities will suffer. Everyone wants to support Diversity, equity and inclusion. A baiting ban does the exact opposite. It makes the resource more available to able bodied people that have access to good land.

Of all the groups a baiting ban will hurt, Youth hunters are my biggest concern. We need to keep recruiting new hunters into the outdoors. Without them, we have no hunting future at all. Bait can enhance the hunter experience in the eyes of young kids. Seeing their eyes light up when they can watch a deer up close is one of my favorite things to watch. Keeping kids interested in the outdoors is crucial for the future of hunting. Bait can also aid in making their first hunting experience a positive one. It helps with a more controlled setting when trying to get a child their first deer. It can keep a deer calmer and still while they wait for a good shot angle. The kid will have less of a chance wounding a deer and having all the negative emotions that come with that as their first hunting memories.

Again, Thank you for your time and consideration. I hope all of you hear both sides of the argument and decide on a best path forward. I urge you to support HB1151.

Jacob Wheeling