



## BACKCOUNTRY HUNTERS & ANGLERS NORTH DAKOTA

### Members of the Committee

The North Dakota Chapter of Backcountry Hunters and Anglers supports House Bill 1175 that has been introduced to the 68<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly by Representative Vicky Steiner (Dickinson). This bill would guarantee the hunting and fishing access to 706,600 acres of land, which are managed by the Surface Division of the North Dakota Department of Trust Lands.

From data derived through the Department of Trust Lands, over the course of the last 22 years, we have seen an average of 9,362 acres closed to the public, which equates to around 1% of total surface acres. However, over the last 4 years the total acres of trust lands closed to the public has shown an increase. In 2019, there were 9,474 acres closed to the public. In 2022, that number climb to 19,930 acres, the highest observed in the last 22 years of available data. Since 2000, the number of individual tracts posted as closed has more than tripled, and 96% of these had an effective start date of that closure between the months of August and December

While we recognize that the main purpose of trust lands is to generate funds for the 13 permanent education trusts, we also feel that there can be multiple beneficiaries of these public lands without monetarily detracting from that original intent or their current and future lessees.

We agree that prohibited activities listed in North Dakota Century Code 15-08-19.4 are a detriment to the mission of generating funds. However, we fail to find a lawful reasoning in not allowing continued public use for the approved activities. Hunting and fishing can both be viewed as minimal-impact activities that don't interfere with the department's mandate of generating funds. If 99% of the lands managed by the Department are open to the public, what is the significant fiscal impact in not allowing public access to the remaining 1%?

Access is a primary barrier for new hunters and anglers, and we believe those 19,000 acres are valuable access opportunities that cannot be ignored. With the introduction of H.B. 1175, we welcome the discussion it will generate on the utilization of public lands for hunting and fishing.

We urge the committee, Do Pass.

North Dakota Chapter of Backcountry Hunters and Anglers  
[northdakota@backcountryhunters.org](mailto:northdakota@backcountryhunters.org)

