

Testimony in support of HB 1538:

My name is Jeff Clarke and I live in Williston, ND.

I am an avid recreational and tournament fisherman. I regularly fish tournaments in North Dakota, Montana and in Saskatchewan. I also am the tournament director for two of the largest tournaments in North Dakota. Fishing is one of the reasons I chose to live in North Dakota. I have raised 3 daughters who love hunting and fishing and am now helping raise my girlfriend's son the same way! We fish a lot around my house!

From a tournament director stand point I have been at the fore front of the ND Game & Fish tournament fee debacle. I have done a lot of research on tournament fees in other States. North Dakota fees are so out of line. There is a reason that the National Professional tournaments (Walleye and Bass) no longer visit North Dakota. What a shame for our small lake towns and all the North Dakota towns in between that would benefit from the increased traffic and dollars that come with these tournaments (Millions of dollars lost). From the research I did a few years ago regarding these tournament fees:

South Dakota fee = \$50/50 teams. Additional \$50 for next 50 teams. 100 team tournament = \$100 fee

Montana fee = \$3/tournament angler 100 teams = \$600 fee

Minnesota = \$250 flat fee

Wisconsin = \$25 flat fee

Below is some information about the two tournaments I run and the fees associated with them.

#### **Williston Rural Fire Association Spring Walleye Classic:**

About 5 or 6 years ago we started this tournament on western Lake Sakakawea to raise funds for the fire department here in Williston. The tournament has been a huge success in that regards. We have fishermen come every year from all over ND, SD, MT and even MN. The first few years of the tournament we had a waiting list. After the fee change we have struggled to get a full field of fishermen (100 teams). People don't want to pay the Game and Fish tournament tax. It is ridiculous in my opinion that we are taking thousands of dollars annually away from the local fire department to pay the Game and Fish. 100 teams @ \$400 entry fee = tournament fee \$4000

#### **Lewis & Clark Big 10 Showdown:**

The Lewis and Clark Big 10 showdown is a high dollar tournament (\$1000 entry and almost \$100,000 payout) also located on western Lake Sakakawea. This tournament is held in conjunction with the local CVB here in Williston and was created as a way to bring people to our area. The 2022 tournament brought anglers from six states to the Williston area. Most anglers come for a week or more to pre-fish and fish the tournament. Both professional and amateur anglers come to our area and spend thousands

of dollars on gas, beer, bait, food, hotels and other expenses. The conservation fees for this tournament have doubled from \$5000 max to \$10,000 since the Game and Fish fee change. Since the change, the local Convention and Visitors Bureau here in Williston has helped pay the increased fee amount. Again, this takes those dollars away from other local community events to pay to the Game and Fish. 100 teams @\$1000 entry fee = tournament fee \$10,000

The ridiculous Game and Fish tournament fees also limit youth fishing tournaments. In this day and age promoting outdoor activities should be a priority for all of us. Other states have youth fishing leagues and tournaments but the fee structure in North Dakota is a deterrent for this.

There are no fees for Coyote tournaments, pheasant hunts, baseball or basketball tournaments, etc. Why the huge burden on fishing tournament anglers??

Please vote yes and pass this legislation. Conservation fees can be funded through appropriations and not through a tax on tournament fishermen. Get us back in line with surrounding states on tournament fees, welcome back the National circuits, and let's give some homefield advantage back to our local professional anglers by allowing them to fish at home here in North Dakota.

Sincerely,



Jeffery T Clarke, CPA  
Fisherman  
Tournament Angler  
Tournament Director

701-770-0199