



House Energy and Natural Resources Committee
Testimony on SB 2297

North Dakota Game and Fish Department
Greg Link, Conservation and Communications Division Chief
March 10, 2023

Chairman Porter and members of the House Energy and Natural Resources Committee, my name is Greg Link. I serve as the Chief of the Conservation and Communications Division for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department (Department). I am providing testimony in support of SB 2297.

The successful delivery of the Department's education programs relies heavily on the service contribution of its corps of over 800 active volunteer instructors. We greatly appreciate and give high regard to their generosity and dedication. As a means of acknowledging and showing our gratitude and support for their contribution, the Department provides service awards to instructors who have reached a certain benchmark of volunteer years and hours of instruction, as follows:

- 2 years (50 hrs) = Vest
- 5 years (125 hrs) = Jacket
- 10 years (250 hrs) = Plaque
- 15 years (375 hrs) = Knife
- 20 years (500 hrs) = Binoculars
- 25 years (625 hrs) = Gun
- 30 years (750 hrs) = Lifetime Hunting and Fishing License [*as per NDCC Sec.20.1-02-05 (25)*]

As you can see, our 30-year service award is tied directly to the subsection of statute we are discussing today, first established in 2001. Unfortunately, nobody could foresee, at that time, the implications of limiting this service award to only resident instructors.

The dilemma created by this limitation first came to our attention about 5 years ago when a long-serving volunteer instructor for our program and his local communities in North Dakota had achieved the 30-year service benchmark. Because he resided just across our border and claimed residency in a neighboring state, he could not qualify nor receive this award, as a non-resident. Since that time, we've had other nonresident volunteers, serving the Department and our state, achieve the 30-year service benchmark and face this same predicament. Based on our records,

seven volunteers have run into this dilemma; two of which have continued to purchase nonresident licenses in order to hunt and fish in our state. Recognize, this situation will continue to manifest as more volunteer instructors, currently residing out-of-state or eventually moving out-of-state, achieve 30 years of service. Therefore, we fully agree it is time to address this unintended consequence of the original statute language.

In addition to broadening this provision to nonresident volunteers, this bill also extends the lifetime license provision to all Department volunteer instructors meeting the 30 years of service, regardless of the education program they've taught. This would include Hooked On Fishing, Fur Harvester Education, Archery Education, and Boat and Water Safety Education, not just Hunter Education.

Also, state law does not provide a "combination license" for nonresidents; only residents. To provide a non-resident with the equivalent licenses and comparable hunting, fishing, and trapping opportunities to those provided in the combination license for residents, this bill explicitly spells out in subsection 25(b) the appropriate composite of complementary nonresident licenses a qualifying nonresident volunteer would be entitled to receive (i.e. fishing license, general game and habitat license, small game license, statewide waterfowl license, spring white goose license, furbearer and nongame, and reciprocal trapping license).

While this bill would provide non-resident instructors with a complimentary set of the licenses, as specified, it is our understanding we would still be subjecting them to the nonresident season restrictions, such as the 14-consecutive-day or two 7-consecutive-day license periods for hunting small game and waterfowl, etc.

In closing, for the reasons I've outlined above, the Department SUPPORTS and respectfully asks for a DO PASS on the SB 2297.

Thank you, Chairman Porter and Committee Members, for your time and consideration of this testimony.