

March 10th, 2023

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee,

My name is Sally Jacobson, I am a proud to be the President and CEO of the Red River Zoo in Fargo. I am here today on behalf of my zoo and attractions across the state to encourage you to support the Destination Development Fund. It would be a game changing opportunity and ignite growth for attractions across the state.

I would be remiss if I did not take a moment to tell you how unique our zoo is. We specialize in caring for cold adapted species, animals from around the world that live in environments just like ours in North Dakota. This niche has allowed us to have tremendous success in breeding and rearing some of the world most rare and endangered cold adapted species. We are leaders in our industry, accredited by the Association of Zoo's and Aquariums, less than ten percent of institutions that exhibit animals meet these rigorous standards for animal welfare, scientific research, safety, and guest experience (to name a few)

Each year approximately 150,000 guests visit the zoo. But if you were to ask them why they visit, I would venture to guess that most would not mention our credentials. They would talk about experiences, seeing unique animals and amenities, enjoying educational programming, and making memories with their friends and families.... quality of life. It's what draws people to communities and what keeps them there.

The zoo is poised for greatness. In fact, the biggest critique we receive is that people want to see more! We have a dynamic master plan and a vision for innovative events and exhibits that will knock your socks! But we do face challenges to growth. One of the biggest challenges we experience is weather. We have a relatively short season to earn enough revenue to care for our animals and staff, maintain the zoo and set funds aside for capitol improvements. We are proud of what we have created through earned revenue, volunteerism, and philanthropic support but to continue to reach our full potential, we need support.

Our Zoo is not alone! There are unique attractions and amenities across the state that drive economic growth, improve quality of life, and attract workers to our communities. The tourism industry is a strong source of employment and revenue. To remain strong and truly thrive, we need to invest in growth.

By supporting appropriation for the Destination Development Fund, you can ignite innovation, transform our industry, and spur economic growth.

Your support will make a tangible difference in the lives of our citizens and communities and help us achieve our goals of a thriving tourism industry.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Sally Jacobson
President and CEO
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