



Testimony on HB 1166
Senate Agriculture Committee
March 16, 2023

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and members of the Senate Agriculture Committee. I am Dani Quissell with the North Dakota Weather Modification Association. I am here in opposition to HB 1166 as it was passed by the House.

North Dakota has a long history of conducting weather modification activities, dating back to the 1950s. We are fortunate to have a framework in place that gives the people the choice, on a local level, on whether or not weather modification activities occur in their area.

Studies done in North Dakota show benefit for North Dakotans due to weather modification. These studies have indicated a 5-10% increase in moisture and a 45% reduction in hail in areas where weather modification activities occur. While these benefits are directly felt by the residents of areas where weather modification activities occur, these benefits have a larger, statewide impact through things like increased agricultural productivity and economic development. In fact, as I believe will be discussed in later testimony, producers in Bowman County today have access to affordable crop insurance products that they did not have access to prior to starting their weather modification program. Access to these important insurance products helps individual producers and local agricultural businesses *and* the overall agricultural economy in North Dakota. Weather modification also supports a number of local businesses. I believe several have contacted you and/or submitted testimony regarding this bill.

Today, five counties have voted to conduct weather modification activities in their counties: Bowman, McKenzie, Williams, Mountrail and part of Slope. The people in those counties provide 66% of the funding for these activities. The State Water Commission, using Resources Trust Fund dollars, not general fund dollars, cost shares with these counties to support weather modification activities in their counties. This is no different than the cost share the State Water Commission provides to other projects that help develop or manage North Dakota's water resources.

In its current form, HB 1166 would prohibit the state from providing cost share for weather modification activities. While the cost share from the state is relatively small, about \$250,000/year total, it is an important part of maintaining the viability of the weather modification program. The 34% cost share provided is also a way the state can recognize and support the overall benefit the state sees due to the decrease in devastating hailstorms and increase in overall precipitation. We would ask that HB 1166 be amended to remove sections 8 and 9, which would prohibit this cost share.

HB 1166 also currently contains problematic language regarding where weather modification activities can occur. The current language could, and likely would given prevailing weather patterns, prevent flights occurring in entire townships that have voted to participate in the program and are paying for most of the program. We believe this is inherently unfair and would support an amendment to section 1 of the bill to clarify that flights can occur in 'project areas', or those areas where weather modification activities have been authorized.

The House-passed version of HB 1166 also requires public votes to reauthorize weather modification programs every five years, potentially requiring counties to hold special elections in some years. We would ask that the bill be amended to move that vote requirement to an even number of years, perhaps every 10 years, at the general election. This would be a change from the current statute, which requires reauthorization of programs to happen by a vote of the county commission.

Without these amendments, we would ask for a 'do not pass' recommendation on HB 1166.

I believe there will be further testimony that will provide additional detail on the technical aspects of weather modification and the current program as well as how HB 1166 in its current form would impact producers and landowners in western North Dakota.

Thank you for your attention this morning. I'd be happy to stand for any questions.