

Testimony in opposition to HB 1151
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My name is Andrew McKean, and I live in Glasgow, Montana. I'm a lifelong hunter, the Hunting and Conservation Editor for Outdoor Life magazine, and a former Montana Fish and Game Commissioner. I'm also a national board member for the Mule Deer Foundation (MDF), but am writing you today in my capacity as an individual, not as a representative of the MDF.

Although I am not a resident of North Dakota, and as such fully expect you to dismiss my testimony in opposition to HB 1151, I would like to provide my experience with Chronic Wasting Disease, and encourage you to avoid the fate of your neighbors to the west.

Montana had been bracing for the arrival of CWD for years before it was actually detected here, in 2017. We expected it to arrive either from Wyoming, where it's so widespread that it's become endemic, or from Saskatchewan, where the prevalence of CWD among mule deer is the highest of anywhere in North America. Once it was detected, and Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks started intensively sampling hunter-killed deer and elk, we found it in many more places, including high concentrations along our common border with Canada.

I mention this because of the similarities between Saskatchewan and North Dakota. Both allow for baiting deer, which has led to unnaturally high concentrations of animals and accelerated the spread of CWD. Saskatchewan has followed a practice of not managing CWD, which has caused infections to spread far beyond initial "hot zones" to include most of the province. More notably, for me, it has spread to the northern tier of counties in Montana, which share deer with Saskatchewan. The prevalence of CWD in these Montana counties now exceeds the threshold for drastic disease-management action, which can include depopulation of deer in these areas.

Looking back on our experience, I wish we had been more persuasive with our neighbors about addressing CWD early on. I wish they had prohibited baiting, deer farming, and other practices that cause unnatural concentrations of deer. The main item of HB 1151 that I oppose is taking away that tool from North Dakota Game and Fish Department.

Chronic wasting disease is a complex, divisive issue, and I don't pretend that any one action will stop its spread. Instead, I believe it takes many small changes in our management in order to slow the spread of the disease. One of those is to give the authority to professional wildlife managers to apply best management practices, an authority that you are removing with the passage of HB 1151.

It also occurs to me that you are setting your wildlife agency up for failure. I can foresee with some clarity a future in which CWD becomes so widespread and so prevalent in populations that it will be impossible to slow. I hope legislators who vote for HB 1151 have the courage to

stand up at that time and tell the sportsmen and women of North Dakota that, when they had the chance to do something proactive about CWD, they actually hastened its spread.