



NORTH DAKOTA WILDLIFE FEDERATION

Testimony of John Bradley
North Dakota Wildlife Federation
House Bill 1151
Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee
March 16, 2023

Chairman Patten and members of the Senate Energy and Natural Resource Committee:

For the record, I am John Bradley, Executive Director of the North Dakota Wildlife Federation (NDWF). I'm here today representing our thousands of members in 15 affiliated wildlife and sportsmen's clubs across North Dakota that make up the North Dakota Wildlife Federation.

NDWF opposes HB 1151. As an organization that is built on our grassroots, our members and affiliates bring ideas forward through a delegate and resolution process, and just like you are elected to represent your districts, they represent their clubs and their members throughout the state. Earlier this year they supported via our resolution process that, and I quote:

“Therefore, be it resolved that the North Dakota Wildlife Federation supports the North Dakota Game and Fish Chronic Wasting Disease and Surveillance Plan 2023 – 2027 and the proposed actions and strategies to manage and restrict the spread of Chronic Wasting Disease.”

HB 1151 would severely undermine the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's (NDG&F) authority and ability to manage deer and deer hunting with the best-available science. Specifically, the bill removes the authority from NDG&F to issue rules or adopt a policy or practice prohibiting the baiting of big game for lawful hunting. The original one-line bill, and now the amended bill, look to remove management authority from NDG&F. This is a direct attempt to undermine chronic wasting disease (CWD) management efforts in the state and would have a detrimental impact on managing other diseases as well.

Our deer managers are working hard to implement methods and tactics to mitigate the spread of diseases, including CWD. The science tells us that artificial baiting increases unnatural, man-made density around a single food source and therefore increases the potential for direct and indirect contact among individuals. We understand that natural congregation occurs in our deer herds, but we shouldn't remove what we as humans can control from our management toolbox. Proponents of the bill have pointed that hunters are being unfairly targeted by NDG&F, while others are allowed to feed year-round. Unfortunately, the Department doesn't have the authority to regulate wildlife feeding. We should be looking to give the Department that authority to regulate wildlife feeding that is high-risk for spreading disease. This legislative body should be adding tools in their management toolbox to minimize the spread of disease, not stripping them of their authority. When it comes to CWD, we are buying our future selves time to figure this disease out and discover new ways to reduce and hopefully eliminate CWD from the landscape.

Outside of CWD, there are 11 other deer diseases that are thought to be spread by direct contact, including bovine tuberculosis (TB), some of these diseases, left unchecked, can severely impact our livestock producers as well.

The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) sites that unnatural concentration of cervids facilitates CWD transmission and establishment if CWD prions are present. AFWA, (which is made up from every state game and fish agency, as well as the National Rifle Association, National Shooting Sports Foundation, Boone and Crockett Club, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Mule Deer Foundation, National Wildlife Federation, Wild Sheep Foundation, etc.) lists the prohibition of baiting or feeding wild deer as a best management practice for the prevention of CWD introduction and establishment. Imagine removing a ratchet from a mechanic's toolbox, and still expecting them to be able to fix your vehicle. HB 1151 intentionally removes this management practice (tool) from the authority of NDG&F.

Furthermore, this bill would also have a negative impact on hunting opportunities for sportsmen and women. Healthy wildlife populations are essential to the sustainability of hunting opportunities, and the spread of diseases such as CWD and TB can have a significant impact on these opportunities. Sportsmen and women hunt on the harvestable surplus of our deer population. But they are not the only ones, coyotes and mountain lions also work into that harvestable surplus, as do diseases, natural death, long winters, Fords and Chevys, semi-trucks, and anything else that kill deer. Every deer that dies from CWD is equal to one less tag in the long run since it comes off that surplus. Because of this, if or when the CWD infection rate balloons like it is in some states, that means fewer tags issued to hunters. By limiting the ability of the department to protect wildlife populations from disease, HB 1151 would also limit the opportunities for deer hunting in the long run.

Wildlife management decisions, and especially disease management decisions, should remain in the hands of professional wildlife managers – not lawmakers. HB 1151 would result in a massive setback for disease and deer management in North Dakota. We urge a Do Not Pass on HB 1151