To: North Dakota Senate
State and Local Government Committee
Date: 2/9/2023
Re: SCR 4007

Senator Roers and committee members,

My name is Nick Ybarra. I have dedicated my life to preserving, promoting and enjoying the world-famous Maah Daah Hey Trail, in the North Dakota Badlands. Over the past two decades I have logged more miles and hours on the Maah Daah Hey Trail than anyone else on the planet. I first visited the trail in 2002, as an eighteen-year-old on a Walmart mountain bike and fell head over handlebars in love with the trail. In 2008 I became the first person to "legally" mountain bike the 107 miles of single track trail from CCC Campground to Sully Creek Campground. In 2015 I became the first human to mountain bike the 154 miles from CCC to Burning Coal Vein Campground. Finally in 2022 I doubled the MDH150 and set the record for the first ever MDH300 out-and-back, riding my mountain bike from CCC to BCV and back to CCC, in 107 hours. I also hike, run, snowshoe, hunt and enjoy other activities on the MDH Trail all year round.

Around 2011 the USFS lost funding and staffing to adequately maintain the MDH, and the trail started to disappear. Out of a deep love and passion for the trail my wife and I founded SAVE THE MAAH DAAH HEY, a 501c3 nonprofit organization. We partner with the USFS to perform the annual, hands-on, volunteer trail work that saves the MDH and connecting trails from overgrowth, erosion and ultimately extinction.

In 2012 my wife and I created the Badlands Race Series to promote and share the magic of the Maah Daah Hey Trail with as many people as possible. Our Badlands Races have helped thousands of runners and mountain bikers safely experience some of the most beautiful parts of North Dakota, and arguably the world. Thousands of other trail users have become aware of the Maah Daah Hey through our events and heroic volunteer trail work efforts and have traveled out to the remote campgrounds and trailheads to enjoy the solitude and challenge of this well maintained, raw and rugged, epic 180-mile trail system.

I submit this written testimony IN FAVOR of SCR 4007. As an avid recreational trail user, volunteer trail worker and Badlands Race Director, I see a very real and dire need for SAR in North Dakota. There are some sections of the MDH Trail that span up to fifteen trail miles without even crossing a gravel road. The utter remoteness of the trail combined with the extreme high and low temperatures of our area and the unrelenting elevation changes of the badlands make for very difficult rescue scenarios on the trail. During the Badlands Race events local law enforcement officers and first responders have expressed feelings of frustration due to the aforementioned challenges and lack of staff and resources available to their smaller communities that surround the MDH Trail System.

I believe that a well-functioning SAR program, led with passion and skill, operating in collaboration with current local authorities could be greatly beneficial to all Maah Daah Hey Trail users. My wife and I have seen first-hand some of the challenges of operating as a volunteer nonprofit organization attempting to partner with existing governing agencies for a good cause. Understandably there can be apprehension and hesitancy until trust is earned. However, once a strong working relationship is established a lot of good can come out of those kinds of partnerships. But they must be given a fair chance. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration to establish SAR in North Dakota.

Sincerely,
Nick Ybarra