

Testimony by Rep. David Monson

HB1523

This bill is a request for up to \$500,000 from the Strategic Investment and Improvements Fund (SIIF) for emergency repairs to the infrastructure needs of the Pembina Gorge Foundation. This would require a 50% match requirement on their part, so it would mean they would have substantial "skin in the game". Mother nature has been particularly cruel to the Frostfire Ski Resort and Frostfire Theater complex the last few years. When Covid hit in 2020, the border crossing at Walhalla was closed. They depend on a lot of tourism from Canada which is just a few miles north of Frostfire. The extreme snow load on the roof of the outdoor theater in the winter of 2022-2023 caused the roof of the theater to collapse. This requires a totally new theater to be built as soon as possible. They have been able to have their summer theater for the past 2 summers at the Grafton School, but at a much-reduced attendance and revenue. This past summer a sudden 7-inch rain caused the soil around the foundation of the ski lodge to shift requiring work to stabilize a portion of the foundation. They have many other needs to bring the lodge and equipment up to better condition, workforce needs, furnace replacement, kitchen ventilation, etc. They are struggling to keep everything going. They have made huge strides in the past few years with a new chairlift and a new snow making system, so it is truly a premium ski resort.

So why is this so important to the area and all of ND? The summary sheet and testimony I handed out from Pat Chaput of the Pembina Gorge Foundation is very complete and tells the history and story of Frostfire much better than I can. In short, this complex provides recreation, education, culture, employment, and tax revenue to the area and all of ND.

I will share with you what it means to me and my family as well as some of my friends and neighbors. My wife and I learned to ski at Frostfire over 40 years ago. We've enjoyed many high-quality theater shows during the summers for many years. It doesn't stop with just that. My 3 sons all learned to ski and snowboard there. One of my sons was employed there as a ski patrol member while in high school and college, and he learned lights and sound while employed for the summer theater, a job he turned into a lifelong career. My grandchildren have learned to ski and snowboard there as well as having attended summer theater and art camps there. My neighbors have been employed there for many years going now into the 3rd generation. My roommates from college, Canadians, come down to the area for camping and recreation going on for many years. The canoeing, kayaking, biking, hiking, trail riding, snowmobiling, and golfing in the area and now the new state park a few miles from Frostfire are all huge attractions providing recreation and employment. The onsite restaurant and bar at Frostfire provide another source of employment for my neighbors and their families. Governor Burgum, in his farewell speech to the legislature, mentioned the area and the Pembina Gorge. This is truly a ND tourism gem and revenue generator for the state. Unfortunately it is a rather well kept secret that really needs to be promoted and given a bit of an infusion to keep it viable and functioning at the highest level possible. I am asking for your favorable response to this bill. An amendment to give it an emergency clause would probably be important to them as well.