

HB 1260

Good Morning Chairman Porter and Members of the House Energy and Natural Resources Committee.

For the record, I am Representative LaurieBeth Hager from District 21 in Fargo. District 21 is in the middle of Fargo, just south of Downtown between Highway 10/ Main Avenue and 13<sup>th</sup> Ave, from the Red River on the east to a small western corner of West Fargo.

I am here today with HB 1260 at the request of ND Game and Fish. Some of you may be wondering why a Rep. from the middle of Fargo is the prime sponsor of a mule deer count bill and some of you already realize why. My dad, Ray Hager, was a lifelong deer and upland game hunter and also a longtime lobbyist for Cass County Wildlife. So today I am honored to carry this hunting bill to the Energy and Natural Resouce Committee.

HB 1260 deals with how the number of available mule deer licenses are determined. Currently in Century Code the number of licenses is based on the count of the deer population the PREVIOUS year rather than using the current year's count. This can create a problem for hunters seeking licenses--When the mule deer count is taken following a harsh winter that resulted in lowering the mule deer population but the number of deer licenses are based on the previous year. On the other hand, if the conditions were ideal the deer population would be higher but the licenses would be too few to adequately manage the mule deer population.

The past 2 winters have demonstrated this. In the winter of 2022-23 the extreme winter conditions increased the winterkill and decreased the fawn production. However last winter 2023 -2024 was one of the mildest winters on record. According to Casey Anderson of ND Fish and Game, "following a harsh winter, modest license allocations are intended to maintain hunting opportunities and encourage herd population growth in the state."

A simple fix exists: calculate the number of licenses based on the CURRENT year's count of mule deer. Interestingly Mule deer licenses are the only type of big game that uses the previous year data for calculating the number of licenses.

I have received questions from hunters concerned that this bill was brought by outside interest groups or out of state hunters so they could get more licenses. It is not. The purpose of this legislation is to update our Century Code to assure that the number of available licenses is matched to the number of available mule deer.

I am asking members of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee for a green vote and I stand for questions.

