



**House Energy and Natural Resources Committee
Hearing for HB 1470
February 6, 2025**

Testimony of Mary Massad, President, North Dakota Water Users Association

Chairman Porter and members of the House Energy and Natural Resources Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 1470. My name is Mary Massad, and I am the president of the North Dakota Water Users Association. The Water Users Association is the state-wide member organization dedicated to protecting, developing, and managing North Dakota's water resources. We have more than 150 members including local, statewide and regional organizations in North Dakota who have an active interest in water.

We are supportive of the collaborative work of the legislature, the Game and Fish Department and industry stakeholders to review fees assessed by the Department to support the important work they do. One important mission of the Game and Fish Department is preventing the spread of aquatic nuisance species (ANS).

As the threat of ANS, particularly zebra mussels, grows, additional work will need to be done to curb the spread through inspection and education. Zebra mussels are especially damaging to any type of infrastructure within an infected body of water, including water supply and irrigation intakes. Today, zebra mussels are present in the Missouri River in South Dakota. We must all work diligently to prevent their spread into the Missouri River here. Introduction of zebra mussels in the Missouri River would impact major infrastructure up and down the river including:

- intakes for major water supply systems like the Southwest Pipeline Project and Northwest Area Water Supply project
- numerous water supply systems for communities like Williston and Bismarck
- irrigation intakes
- power production at the Garrison Dam
- recreational opportunities, particularly on beaches and sandbars in the river

Once introduced, zebra mussels can NOT be eradicated. These thumbnail-sized mollusks spread rapidly; a single female mussel can produce about a half a billion offspring in her three-to five-year life span. It only takes one infected boat to introduce zebra mussels and infect an entire body of water, creating a devastating ripple effect to the entire waterway. This is why a robust inspection strategy is vital to prevention.

Game and Fish funds ANS activities through both dedicated fees and federal funding. While the goal of HB 1470 is to ensure the department maintains its needed reserves, we would ask that fees that fund ANS activities also be considered. The costs to meet the growing needs associated with ANS are rising. It seems appropriate to also raise ANS fees as part of this comprehensive review of Game and Fish's license fees.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.