

69TH LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

House Bill 1554 - “A BILL for an Act to amend and reenact section 54-17.8-06 of the North Dakota Century Code, relating to the North Dakota outdoor heritage advisory board.”

House Energy and Natural Resources Committee

January 31, 2025

Testimony Submitted by:

Tom Claeys, State Forester

Outdoor Heritage Fund - Technical Committee Member

Chairman Porter, members of the House Energy and Natural Resources Committee, for the record, my name is Tom Claeys, North Dakota Forest Service - State Forester and Outdoor Heritage Fund - non-voting Technical Committee Member.

As a member of the technical committee for the past six years and having served occasionally for the former State Forester since inception of the OHF committee, our agency is supportive of the changes proposed in HB 1554.

Allowing expanded representation from the Department of Water Resources would be a welcome improvement for the Technical Committee. Currently the technical committee consists of the ND Game & Fish Department, ND Parks and Recreation Department, North Dakota Association of Soil Conservation Districts and the North Dakota Forest Service. In the first 25 grant rounds, many of the proposed projects have had water-related components, and historically, a number of them included additional funding committed by the Department of Water Resources. The Department’s expertise and knowledge of these projects would help the technical committee provide timely, professional guidance to the voting members of the OHF Committee.

Given the committees terms of office, periodic turnover and need for continuity, any enabling language that helps clarify, streamline or simplify the selection process would be welcome. Our collective goal should be to ensure eligible applicants, with qualifying projects, that are technically sound, and meet one or more Directives, have an opportunity to be favorably considered for OHF funding. The proposed changes to Century Code, relating to approval of grants, will help facilitate the process.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak in favor of House Bill 1554 and would stand for questions, while acknowledging that there are others here today prepared to testify and share their perspectives.

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