

I am a lifelong hunter and outdoorsman. I spend a lot of time in the field taking others hunting, working on habitat projects and planting food plots. The last 5 years I have been one of the coordinators for hunts with Prairie Grit Adaptive Sports in Minot. We work to provide hunting opportunities for people with disabilities. I am writing you because the current NDG&F rules on baiting have adversely affected our program. I have always supported the NDG&F as much as possible but their logic and rules on baiting do not seem logical to me and do not seem to be based in science.

The NDG&F position is that the rules on baiting are designed to reduce the spread of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD). The theory is that baiting brings deer into close proximity to one another which will expedite the spread of CWD. I do not believe that this theory is supported by science and logic under the current baiting restrictions.

Does banning baiting for deer hunting by individuals, on private land, increase the amount of close contact in whitetail deer:

- The law specifically bans baiting on private property for the purpose of hunting big game. It is still legal to:
 - o Put out feed for hunting turkeys. Deer and turkeys eat many of the same things so deer are eating this feed.
 - o Put out feed for the purpose of photography or watching wildlife, including big game.
 - o Put out feed just for the purpose of feeding wildlife.

- Deer in North Dakota naturally group up in the winter so our deer herd will come into close proximity regardless of baiting.
 - o I fed deer at my house before it was banned in my unit. I estimate that 20-30 deer used the feeder at my house for 3-4 months during the fall archery season. There is a feedlot 1.2 miles from my house. In the winter months there will be 100-200 deer feeding and bedding in the silage and haystacks. The 20-30 deer that may have come into close proximity at my house are part of a much larger herd that will spend 2-3 months in close proximity at this feedlot. This seems to make the effect of my feeder at promoting the spread of CWD mostly insignificant.
 - o I can't feed deer at my house for the purpose of hunting big game because it will spread disease, but my neighbor, 1/4 mile away, can feed deer and other wildlife for viewing. Once again this seems to make the effect of my feeder at promoting the spread of CWD mostly insignificant.
 - o Deer are naturally social animals, particularly during the fall breeding season. They mark their territory by making scrapes on the ground and using a "licking branch" above the scrape. A licking branch is a low hanging limb that deer rub their faces on to leave their scent. On one evening this fall I sat in a blind overlooking a food plot that had a scrape and licking branch. Over a time span of approximately 2 hours, I watched 8 deer feed through the plot, 3 young bucks, 1 doe with 1 fawn and 1 doe with 2 fawns. Of these 8 deer 6 used the licking branch. The 2 that didn't use the licking branch were fawns that were later groomed by their mothers who had. The potential of disease spread would be approximately 100%. These 8 deer are most likely spending the winter at the feed lot.

- NDG&F permits what is called intercept or preemptive feeding. This is done in cases where livestock feed supplies, silage and hay, are being damaged by wildlife. In these cases, feed is placed away from the farmyard, usually on travel routes that wildlife use to get to the farmyard. This is done to reduce the amount of wildlife damage to livestock feed supplies. At Advisory Meetings the NDG&F was asked if this practice would be stopped to reduce wildlife coming into close proximity of one another, thus increasing the spread of CWD. The response from NDG&F was that the practice would continue because they believe these animals would come into contact with one another anyway. This is the same argument that we have stated to them repeatedly. Small amounts of feed for hunting is not going to create more contact for wildlife because they are most likely going to come into contact anyway.

The rules that NDG&F have implemented to ban baiting in certain units do not affect everyone fairly/equally:

- In those areas where a banned unit borders a non-banned unit situations are created where one hunter can bait and another can not. If your neighbor across the road is permitted to put out feed but you are not, then you are at a major disadvantage.

- There are areas where there is a high percentage of success when hunting without bait. Those properties that have wooded areas, river or creek bottoms and coulees with good cover are some great areas to hunt. Those areas are not plentiful in North Dakota and are highly sought-after hunting locations. Getting permission to hunt those locations is difficult. Those hunters that can't get permission to hunt on prime property are left to trying to hunt on open cropland,

pastures, CRP and sloughs. Without bait the probability of success in these areas is small.

- Planting food plots is permitted and a great way to bring more wildlife into your hunting area. This is not a practice that is available to most hunters. Planting food plots requires owning property or having access to property that the landowner will allow the planting of food plots. It also requires owning or borrowing the equipment needed to prepare, plant and take care of the crop. Successful food plots also require a commitment of time and money that makes it unrealistic for most hunters.

- The restrictions on baiting have caused more hunters to use public hunting areas like refuges, national grasslands and other wildlife management areas. This has caused increased hunting pressure in these areas for wildlife. It has also caused more issues between hunters in the field.

- While banning baiting can affect all hunters it disproportionality affects those that are disabled, older hunters and younger hunters.

o Hunting for disabled hunters presents physical challenges. Hunting blinds usually have to be established in advance to make sure that conditions will allow access. In most cases getting to the areas with heavy cover that are preferred for hunting is not an option. Disabled hunters usually do not get to choose the best location for their hunt. They must choose the best location that can be made accessible. Chances for success at these locations can be very limited without the use of bait. "We can't go to the deer. We have to get them to come to us."

o Hunters that are confined to a wheelchair are less mobile in the blind as well. Moving a wheelchair from one shooting window to another without spooking deer is a challenge. For this reason, most disabled setups are designed with one primary shooting window. If the deer don't come within range of that window then success is unlikely.

o Mobility can also be an issue for older hunters. As we age the ability to hike long distances or over rough terrain decreases. For those hunters an established hunting blind with feed placed nearby may be the only option for a successful hunt.

o Mobility can also be an issue for those that are trying to get kids involved in hunting. Small children would struggle with hiking long distances or over rough terrain.

o For those trying to get kids involved in hunting the key is keeping their interest. Most kids are going to lose interest quickly if they are not seeing wildlife. Placing feed nearby increases the odds of seeing deer and other game. It creates a great learning situation when wildlife can be observed and discussed.

Thank you for taking time to read this. I would welcome the opportunity to visit with you personally if you have questions about any of the issues that I have addressed. Please vote "Yes" on SB 2137.

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