

Curtis Olafson

North Dakota State Senate (2006-2012)
Olafson Farm and Ranch (Est. 1883)
13041 84th Street Northeast
Edinburg, North Dakota 58227
Email: colafson@polarcomm.com
701-265-2356 Cellular

=====

Chairman Porter and Committee Members,

I am writing in opposition to Senate Bill 2137. For the record, Curtis Olafson, former District 10 State Senator in Pembina and Cavalier counties from 2006 to 2012. My professional background also includes a Bachelor's Degree in Animal Science from NDSU. I am a lifelong (now retired) registered cattle breeder, farmer and earthmoving construction business owner.

In my capacity as the manager of our cattle operation in our family-owned businesses, I have decades of experience in animal disease control and prevention.

I was the prime sponsor of SB 2351 in the 2009 session. That bill would have prohibited the artificial feeding of big game and the hunting of big game over bait. My motivation for introducing that legislation was the outbreak of tuberculosis in Minnesota just across the river from my district in northeast North Dakota. It was catastrophic to wildlife and to the cattle industry. I did not get bogged down in the debate over the ethics of hunting over bait. That is an arbitrary debate. The science behind the risk inherent to congregating animals via artificial feeding over a bait pile is not arbitrary. I stuck to the science.

I also want to share with you that I am not a deer hunter and have not hunted deer for several decades. Also, I started a 3-year dispersal of my cattle herd 10 years ago and do not own any cattle. As we say in the Legislature, "I have no dog in this fight."

With that background, I am writing to warn you about what you, as legislators, could potentially be setting yourselves up for with the passage of this legislation. In Minnesota, things got very ugly during the outbreak. What follows are some excerpts from Minnesota newspaper stories covering the outbreak:

October 1, 2010 From the Rochester Post Bulletin:

"In September 2005, the ranch's yard was filled with cattle trucks, workers and state agency representatives. A lone cowboy chose to gather the cattle one last time. Skime moved through the pastures, heading the cattle to the yard. There others helped load cattle on the trucks as BAH and USDA officials sealed the loads.

They shipped 1,172 animals including 600 cows, said Skime.

The ranch, once filled with people and trucks, was empty when the last truck rolled away. Skime and his wife, Bernice, stood alone and he cried.

In the Modified Accredited Status Zone, 46 out of 67 herds were depopulated using state funding."

Note "state funding." "Depopulated" is a kinder, gentler way to say they sent them all to slaughter.

February 24, 2009 From the Twin Cities Pioneer Press:

DNR helicopter surveys completed in early February show that there are about 660 deer, an estimated 4.1 deer per square mile, in the 164-square-mile bovine TB core area.

During Feb-April 2008, ground and aerial sharpshooters took 937 deer from the core area.

You read that right. They were using sharpshooters in helicopters to kill as many deer as they possibly could in the outbreak area. This was not for sport. It was a necessity to bring the outbreak under control. Just imagine if such a scenario unfolded in your legislative district. Both livestock producers and hunters would be, understandably, seeking answers as to what happened and why. They will be looking to you for answers. The taxpayers of North Dakota will also be asking why you are spending millions of dollars to control an outbreak that might have been prevented.

There are several problems with SB 2137. It strictly prohibits the ND Game and Fish from prohibiting the all-too-common practice of using bait for hunting purposes. There is no “unless” or “except” language in the bill to address the proper response by the department to control a disease outbreak. Game and Fish officials are trained professionals and have quick access to other professionals in wildlife biology. Passing this legislation will hamstring their ability to respond to an outbreak.

The discussion on limiting artificial feeding or hunting over bait often centers around Chronic Wasting Disease, which is indeed a serious concern. However, I would submit that a tuberculosis outbreak is a much bigger concern. The newspaper excerpts I cited above details why that is the case.

There was a great deal of debate over SB 2351 in the 2009 session. I had a stack of scientific research studies on my desk in the Senate that were several inches thick, supporting my position that this practice was a threat to animal health. I challenged many of the opponents to bring me **just one** scientific research study that was nationally published, peer reviewed, and was based on the research of a professionally accredited wildlife biologist that concluded that congregating big game animals over a concentrated bait pile was not a threat to animal health. I am still waiting to receive such a research study from the opponents.

I urge you to give SB 2137 a DO NOT PASS recommendation.

Curtis Olafson, North Dakota State Senate 2006-2012