

Introductory speech for SB 2137

Chairman Porter and members of the House Energy and Natural Resources committee.

I am here today to introduce Senate Bill 2137, a bill to preserve the rights of North Dakotans to engage in supplemental feeding of deer on private property.

Feeding wildlife is a cherished activity in our state, one that allows sportsmen, landowners, and families to interact with nature freely. Currently, this practice is unrestricted in terms of location, time, and quantity—except during hunting season. SB 2137 seeks to address this inconsistency and protect property owners' rights to responsibly manage their land.

In 2010, the NDGFD implemented a regulation prohibiting hunting over bait, citing concerns about Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD). While I understand the intent to safeguard our wildlife, it's important to examine the facts:

- Over the past 22 years, 49,596 deer have been tested for CWD in North Dakota, with only 105 detections. Importantly, a detection is not synonymous with disease. A confirmed case requires necropsy to identify brain degeneration.
- To date, only one confirmed deer in North Dakota has died from CWD.

If these figures were related to my livestock, I would find them negligible. Mammalian diseases with such minimal impact would not raise serious concerns. The science simply does not support the level of regulation we currently have.

Moreover, the regulation's focus on bait piles during hunting season seems disconnected from reality. Consider the natural winter gatherings of hundreds of deer in farm and ranch feeding areas—situations far more conducive to disease transmission than a small bait pile. Restricting baiting only during hunting season provides little return on investment in terms of disease prevention.

This legislation is necessary to restore balance and respect for property rights. Property owners should not be told how to manage their land within reasonable limits. If they wish to place feed for wildlife on their property, they have every right to do so.

It's also worth noting that North Dakota's deer population has suffered significant losses in recent years due to drought, epizootic hemorrhagic disease (EHD), and harsh winters—not CWD. Tag allocations are at historic lows, but CWD is not the cause. The data backs this up.

The Department's own cited research acknowledges that feeding restrictions, whether by quantity, location, or type, do not significantly mitigate disease transmission. According to a 2019 report by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, CWD management strategies are based on hypotheses rather than proven science. In North Dakota alone, nearly \$1.8 million has been spent on these efforts—money spent on managing a theoretical risk rather than an evidenced one.

The landowners and sportsmen of North Dakota are asking for the freedom year-round to supplemental feed deer—they are asking for consistency, science-based regulations, and respect for their property rights across every acre of their property without buffers or area restrictions. SB 2137 addresses these concerns by allowing supplemental feeding and hunting over feed on private property.

I urge you to support this commonsense measure that respects the rights of landowners, promotes responsible wildlife management, and aligns with the realities of CWD science.

Thank you. I stand for questions.