

1/17/2025

Written Testimony in support of SB 2137

Dear Senate Agriculture and Veterans Affairs Committee members,

I am writing today to show my support of SB 2137. This Bill would not allow the ND Game and Fish department to impose a rule or policy that would prohibit the use of supplemental feed on private property for the purposes of big game hunting.

I urge you to look at the full body of the testimony for this bill, as well as a 2023 bill (HB 1151). Most North Dakota voters support these bills. The 2023 Bill passed the house easily and came out of the senate committee with a Do Pass recommendation. Politics came into play at that stage, and it failed on the senate floor. This was very disappointing to see so many politicians going against what their constituents believe. You all are elected to represent the voices of the public. This vote in 2023 was not representative of our voices.

The scientific evidence presented from the opposition is very one sided and does not lead to a clear conclusion. Baiting restrictions and deer culling have been utilized as “management” for decades in other states and has had no measurable impact on CWD prevalence and/or spread. They will not listen to or even consider studies that have results contrary to their narrative. Anytime a group is not open to hearing the opposing viewpoint or looking at data that contradicts their data it is not “science” at that point. Questioning and analyzing should be encouraged when trying to come up with science-based answers. Simply shutting the contrarian viewpoints down makes me question the science even more. If you cannot argue your viewpoints with facts and data while removing emotion, you do not have a scientific argument. You have an opinion or emotional based suggestion.

Hunter recruitment and retention needs to be at the forefront of the outdoor community. While most of the hunting I participate in does not involve baiting, I would like to be able to use it as a tool to keep my kids engaged in hunting. Using bait to help them get a controlled shot situation on their first couple big game kills will go a long way to keep them interested in the outdoors. Having a positive first experience will get them hooked for the rest of their life.

From the lens of private property rights, I also have a tough time agreeing with the Game and Fish practices. I have feeders out for the wildlife all year on my land, but it only becomes a problem if I decide to hunt near it? A vast majority of folks are going to feed wildlife whether they are in a banned unit or not. The ban only applies to hunting, it does not apply to feeding. I think this is why so many landowners have an issue with this hunting restriction. Feeding is perfectly legal anytime, anywhere, and any volume. Hunting near it is not. It does not make any sense scientifically.

Our Game and Fish is against baiting from an “ethical” standpoint. They are simply using CWD as the vessel to push their ethics onto everyone in our state while using “science” as their argument. They have tried in the past to ban feeding of wildlife and failed. They are simply side stepping that failure by banning a method of take.

If CWD had a measurable detrimental impact on deer numbers and baiting was the clear reason behind the spread of CWD, I would be the first person to scream for a ban on all baiting and feeding. If we are trying to discourage the “artificial concentration of deer” to slow the spread, why is the Game and Fish planting food plots all over the state still? That practice encourages concentration as well. Why are they not banning the use of food plots? It is also hard to take them seriously when I’ve witnessed employees of that agency using feed in a CWD unit.

EHD has a clear impact on our deer numbers. In 2021 and 2024 we found hundreds of dead deer in our hunting areas that died from EHD. In the decades they have tested for CWD, they have found only one deer that has died with CWD that was not a hunter caused mortality. For a supposedly “always fatal” disease you would think that number would be much higher.

While in most cases I do not agree with “ballot box biology”, when the Game and Fish oversteps, they need to be kept in check. They have refused to listen to both sides of this argument in the name of their “science”, so this is what it has come down to. They have refused to reach common ground or come up with a compromise on this issue. The public is holding them accountable for a regulation they do not agree with that is based on science that is not definitive.

Thank you for considering a “Yes” vote on SB 2137. I appreciate your time and consideration of this testimony.

Sincerely,

Jacob Wheeling