

TESTIMONY OF JOHN BRADLEY
NORTH DAKOTA WILDLIFE FEDERATION
SENATE BILL 2137
SENATE AGRICULTURE AND VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
JANUARY 17, 2024

Chairman Luick and members of the Senate Agriculture and Veteran Affairs Committee:

For the record, I am John Bradley, Executive Director of the North Dakota Wildlife Federation (NDWF). I'm here today representing our 1,500 members in 15 affiliated wildlife and sportsmen's clubs across North Dakota that make up the North Dakota Wildlife Federation. NDWF opposes SB 2137. This is not simply my opinion - this is an organization that is built on our grassroots. Our members and affiliates bring ideas forward through a delegate and resolution process, and just like you are elected to represent your districts, they represent their clubs and their members throughout the state. Our affiliates supported via our resolution process that, and I quote:

"Therefore, be it resolved that the North Dakota Wildlife Federation supports the North Dakota Game and Fish Chronic Wasting Disease and Surveillance Plan 2023 – 2027 and the proposed actions and strategies to manage and restrict the spread of Chronic Wasting Disease."

SB 2137 would severely undermine the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's (NDG&F) authority and ability to manage deer and deer hunting with the best-available science. Specifically, the bill removes the authority from NDG&F to issue rules or adopt a policy or practice prohibiting the supplemental feed on private property for the hunting of big game animals. The bill, and the removal of management authority from NDG&F, is a direct attempt to undermine chronic wasting disease (CWD) management efforts in the state and would have a detrimental impact on managing other diseases (bovine tuberculosis) as well.

The practice of baiting and its role in deer management has grown in terms of controversy and complexity in the last decade. Our deer managers are working hard to implement methods and tactics to mitigate the spread of diseases, specifically CWD. The science tells us that supplemental feeding (baiting) increases unnatural, man-made density around a single food source and therefore increases the potential for direct and indirect contact among individuals. We understand that natural congregation occurs in our deer herds, but we shouldn't remove what we as humans can control from our management toolbox. When it comes to CWD, we are buying our future selves time to figure this disease out and discover new ways to reduce and someday hopefully eliminate CWD from the landscape. Outside of CWD, there are 11 other deer diseases that are thought to be spread by direct contact, including bovine tuberculosis (TB), some of these diseases, left unchecked, can severely impact our livestock producers as well.

The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) cites that unnatural concentration of cervids facilitates CWD transmission and establishment if CWD prions are present. AFWA,

(which is made up from every state game and fish agency, as well as the National Rifle Association, National Shooting Sports Foundation, Boone and Crockett Club, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Mule Deer Foundation, National Wildlife Federation, Wild Sheep Foundation, etc.) lists the prohibition of baiting or feeding wild deer as a best management tool for the prevention of CWD introduction and establishment. SB 2137 intentionally removes this management tool from the authority of NDG&F.

Furthermore, this bill would also have a negative impact on hunting opportunities for sportsmen and women. Healthy wildlife populations are essential to the sustainability of hunting opportunities, and the spread of diseases such as CWD and TB can have a significant impact on these opportunities. By limiting the ability of the department to protect wildlife populations from disease, SB 2137 would also limit the opportunities for deer hunting in the long run. Wildlife management decisions, and especially disease management decisions, should remain in the hands of professional wildlife managers. SB 2137 would result in a massive setback for disease and deer management in North Dakota. We urge a Do Not Pass on SB 2137.

Additional information on Bovine Tuberculosis:

Bovine Tuberculosis and Baiting

Bovine tuberculosis (Bovine TB) is a disease found in mammals caused by the bacteria *Mycobacterium bovis* (*M. bovis*). In North America, Bovine TB is most commonly found in domestic cattle and captive and wild cervids (white-tailed deer, elk, etc.) Bovine TB has been greatly reduced in the cattle industry since the National Cooperative State-Federal Bovine Tuberculosis eradication program began in 1917. Currently, most states are accredited as "Bovine Tuberculosis-free" by the United States Department of Agriculture, however, outbreaks do still occur throughout the United States. Cattle, captive cervids, and wild white-tailed deer are considered reservoir hosts for Bovine TB. A reservoir host is a species in which Bovine TB can persist and be transmitted among individuals within a species or be transmitted to another species. Wild white-tailed deer may pose the greatest threat to the establishment of Bovine TB on the landscape because they move freely across the landscape and may contact multiple domestic cattle herds.

Both Michigan and Minnesota have had outbreaks of Bovine TB in wild white-tailed deer. In September 2005, the first case of bovine tuberculosis (BTB) in 34 years was discovered in Minnesota and led to a loss of Minnesota's Bovine TB free status. In October 2007 and January and February 2008, four additional cattle herds and deer infected with BTB were discovered in Roseau and Beltrami counties and Minnesota's BTB status was changed from "modified accredited advanced" to "modified accredited" in April 2008. Each of these designations increased regulatory requirements (and costs) for animal testing, record keeping, eradication practices, slaughtering and shipments of cattle within state and across state lines. The 2005-2009 BTB outbreak in Minnesota, which involved 12 infected herds, was estimated to cost approximately \$60 million. (Buhr et al., 2009). This estimate did not include the cost of ongoing

heightened surveillance efforts in the region, nor the economic impact of the outbreak on the broader Minnesota cattle industry.

How can Bovine TB spread?

Cattle, captive cervids, and wild white-tailed deer can contract BTB through direct contact with an infected animal, either another deer or cattle or through shared feeding with an infected animal at artificial bait piles, and areas where cattle are fed or cattle feed is stored.

Why is Bovine TB an important issue in wild deer?

Human health is the main concern; given that Bovine TB is transmissible to humans. Additionally, Bovine TB is not a naturally occurring disease in white-tailed deer. Deer can also be a reservoir for Bovine TB potentially transmitting Bovine TB to uninfected deer and also to uninfected cattle through direct contact or through shared feeding. Because deer are free-ranging they have the potential to contact multiple cattle herds and transmit Bovine TB across the landscape.

Baiting Bans as a Tool

Bovine tuberculosis (BTB) is spread through similar mechanisms as CWD, making it a useful model for understanding CWD. Baiting and feeding has demonstrably been shown to facilitate increased transmission of BTB in deer. Baiting and feeding enabled the BTB outbreak in Michigan to persist and spread. Infection rates decreased after restrictions were applied. These continue to be a pivotal component of reducing the spread of this disease within deer and limiting the economic impact to the cattle industry.

Why is SB 2137 harmful?

Wildlife management decisions, and especially disease management decisions, should remain in the hands of professional wildlife managers. SB 2137 would result in a massive setback for wildlife and livestock disease in North Dakota. If a Bovine TB outbreak were to occur, the ND Game & Fish Department would be limited in their tools to help the landowner and the livestock industry fight the spread of Bovine TB.

Sources:

Cosgrove MK, O'Brien DJ, Ramsey DSL. 2018. Baiting and feeding revisited: modeling factors influencing transmission of tuberculosis among deer and to cattle. *Front. Vet. Sci.* 5:306

Buhr Brian, McKeever Kyle, Adachi Kenji. 2009. Economic impact of bovine tuberculosis on Minnesota's cattle and beef sector