

Testimony in support of SB 2216

By Paul H. Myerchin

**Senator Patten, Chair of the Energy & Natural Resources Committee and Members of this Committee:**

I urge this Committee vote in favor of SB 2216 (a waterfowl habitat restoration stamp & youth hunting programs bill) with a “DO PASS” recommendation from this Committee **with amendments to improve SB 2216**. One proposed amendment would be to increase the stamp fee to at least \$15 in order to provide a more meaningful impact on waterfowl habitat restoration projects and youth hunting programs. Additionally, other proposed amendments to the bill would be to require those North Dakota residents buying a “Combination” license (a fishing, hunting, small game & furbearer license) also pay the stamp fee, and to also require all non-residents purchasing a hunting license to pay the stamp fee. My testimony in favor of SB 2216 and the recommended amendments is supported below.

I am a lifelong North Dakota resident having grown up in Grand Forks and now having lived in Bismarck for nearly the past 30 years. My written testimony here is my own personal views, and I am not speaking for anyone else.

First and foremost, I applaud the sponsors of SB 2216, Senator Cleary and Representatives Bosch and Porter. SB 2216 is the first step in the right direction to address the crises we presently have in North Dakota’s great outdoors: the loss of critical habitat and the recruitment of our youth into North Dakota’s strong tradition of hunting.

Second, in order to have a meaningful impact, I recommend this Committee **amend SB 2216 increase the minimum stamp fee to \$15, if not even \$20**. I have been a proud duck hunter for the last 37 hunting seasons, and, God willing, am able to enjoy many more. Duck hunters have a long tradition of “taxing ourselves” to support the waterfowl that are so near and dear to our hearts. Our predecessor duck hunters “taxed” themselves during the height of the Great Depression when they asked Congress to pass the federal duck stamp back in 1934. Also, Ducks Unlimited, Inc., was formed by a small group of duck hunters 88 years ago this week back in 1937, again during the Great Depression. I believe today’s duck hunters will again follow that tradition and gladly pay a few extra dollars to make a meaningful impact for habitat projects that benefit waterfowl.

Additionally, I’m concerned that the \$10 price for the stamp is just “too little too late” for the much larger problem of habitat loss. Back in the late 1990s and

early 2000s, the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) was a habitat blessing to North Dakota's wildlife and our waterfowl flourished because of that habitat. However, we have been steadily losing habitat over the last 15 years and, in fact, North Dakota now has less CRP acres than Iowa. We need to turn the tide of habitat loss. The time has come to realize that Washington DC politics is not going to bail us out of this habitat problem, and we need to take it upon ourselves to find ways to turn habitat loss around. Also, \$10 just doesn't buy what it used to. One only needs to page through the Cabela's hunting catalog to realize that there is not much you can buy in the sport of duck hunting for \$10. Heck, a quality box of shotgun shells is anywhere from \$20 to \$30/box. A \$15 stamp fee is not going to prevent anyone from duck hunting.

Another positive of this stamp fee is that it will go back to North Dakota's rural landowners that want to voluntarily participate in habitat projects that benefit waterfowl. **This is a win-win-win piece of legislation.** Landowners win by being compensated for habitat projects on their land. Duck hunters win by having more ducks to chase. And the ducks and geese win by having more quality habitat available.

Third, under Section 2 of the bill, line 16, as current written, SB 2216 only imposes this fee when buying a "resident small game license . . ." It appears, as written, that the fee would not apply to a resident Combination license. If this in fact the case, SB 2216 needs to be amended. For at least the last 25 years, I have purchased a combination license (fishing, hunting, small game, & furbearer license) because I enjoy fishing, deer, and pheasant hunting too. For those that purchase this combination license out of convenience, we should not be able to forgo this fee or not be counted as a resident duck hunter just because we purchase a Combination license. **SB 2216 needs to be amended to read: "a resident small game or combination license . . ."** Additionally, I also believe that non-resident duck and goose hunters should be required to support habitat projects here in North Dakota as well if they are coming into our state to enjoy North Dakota's resources. I recommend that **SB 2216 also be amended to require non-resident duck and goose hunters purchase this stamp as well and the non-resident stamp fee be set at least \$10 higher than the resident fee.**

Finally, thank you for your consideration of my testimony, and, again, I urge a DO PASS on SB 2216 with the proposed amendments to improve this win-win-win piece of legislation.

Sincerely,  
Paul H. Myerchin  
8725 Spruce Creek Road  
Bismarck, ND 58503

