



House Energy and Natural Resources Committee
Testimony on HB1242

North Dakota Game and Fish Department
Greg Link, Conservation and Communication Division Chief
January 21, 2021

Chairman Porter and members of the House Energy and Natural Resources Committee, my name is Greg Link; I serve as the Chief of the Conservation and Communications Division for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department (Department). I am testifying today in support of HB1242.

North Dakota state law requires that anyone born after 1961 and 12 years of age or older must complete and pass a Hunter Education course to obtain a hunting license in this state. However, state law, in NDCC 20.1-03-01.5, also provides the apprentice license, or as we call, the “Try It, You May Like It” provision. This apprentice license provision gives a prospective hunter a **one year, one time** opportunity to bypass the Hunter Education requirement so they may “try-out” and experience small game and deer hunting along with an adult licensed hunter, without having to complete the Game and Fish Department’s Hunter Education course.

When last March’s COVID-19 pandemic gathering size and social distancing restrictions went into effect, the Department had to cancel its traditional 14-hour “in-person” Hunter Education classroom courses for safety reasons. This came at the peak season of our course delivery, just prior to the deer license application deadline in June. Although, we quickly responded with the implementation of a COVID contingency on-line home study course to address on-going certification, the follow-up “in-person” written and hands-on practical testing requirement still put a strain on our resources. To reduce this testing bottleneck, we encouraged first time hunters to utilize the apprentice license provision for the 2020 fall hunting season, if they qualified.

With our shift to the online home study course last spring, along with the promotion of the apprentice license provision, we successfully “weathered the storm” created by the pandemic in 2020. As we move forward in 2021, we will continue to be challenged by gathering and social distancing restrictions; therefore, we will be relying heavily on an improved and upgraded online home study course for Hunter Education certification. However, resetting the apprentice license provision by nullifying its one-time use by hunters in 2020, as provided in HB1242, would greatly benefit the Hunter Education program and the Department’s hunter recruitment and retention efforts.

For these reasons, the North Dakota Game and Fish Department SUPPORTS the passage of HB 1242.