

Senate Bill 2066

House Energy and Natural Resources Committee

March 4th, 2021

Comments of Clint Boyd, Senior Paleontologist

The Fossil Excavation and Restoration Fund (North Dakota Century Code 54-17.4-9.1) was established during the 1997 legislative session. The fund contains monies both appropriated and donated to the Department of Mineral Resources -- Geological Survey to pay for excavation and restoration of fossils for display in the North Dakota Heritage Center and other museums and public venues across the state. Fossil restoration is very time intensive and fossil exhibits also take a considerable amount of time to plan and prepare and are also very costly. This continuing appropriation fund enables the monies to be carried across bienniums for these multi-biennium projects.

Since 1997, \$250,000 in appropriated funds and roughly \$900,000 in donations has been deposited into the fund. Conversely, roughly \$1,110,000 has been withdrawn from the fund to pay for a multitude of projects. The current balance of the fund as of February 15, 2021 is \$37,239.64.

2000	Mosasaur exhibit at the Heritage Center (\$74,000)
2004	Mesohippus (early horse) Exhibit at the Cowboy Hall of Fame (\$7,000)
2006	Dinosaur exhibit at the Heritage Center (\$84,000)
2007	Paleocene (crocodile) exhibit at the Heritage Center (\$51,000)
2008	Final phase of exhibit updates at the Heritage Center (\$170,000)
2008 - 2013:	Preparation work on Dakota (\$167,000)
2008 & 2011:	Bismarck airport exhibit and update (Pterosaurs added) (\$5,000)
2012 - 2014:	New exhibit hall (Corridor of Time) at the Heritage Center (\$265,000)
2016:	Cretascope update at the Heritage Center (\$105,000)
2018 to present:	Dakota (mummified hadrosaur) exhibit update (\$95,000 so far)

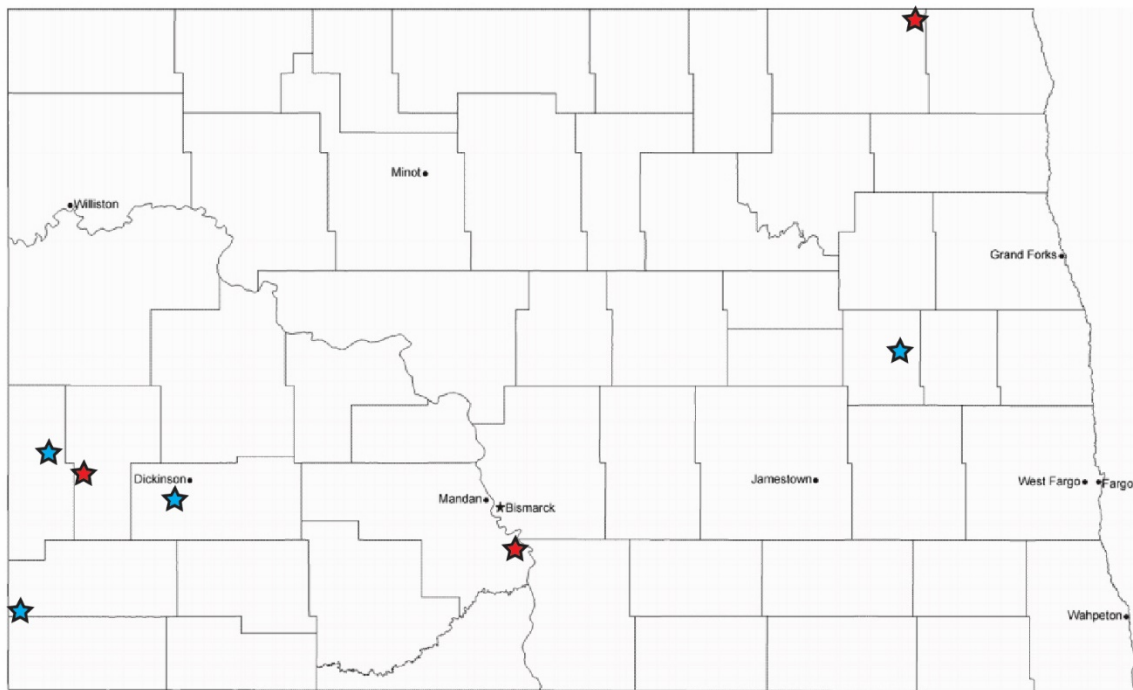
The Geological Survey's Public Fossil Dig Program has grown from a few dozen dig slots in 2000 to well over 600 slots in 2018. For a number of years, only three of the five fossil digs we participated in charged a registration fee (Medora, Walhalla, and Marmarth) and that money went to our partners who handled all of the costs for that particular dig (Theodore Roosevelt Medora Foundation, Walhalla Convention and Visitors Bureau, ND Parks and Recreation, and the Marmarth Research Foundation). It has only been in recent years that the Geological Survey has taken over the accounting side of the digs from our partners and began charging a registration fee for those digs as well as the digs that we have always run alone (Bismarck and Dickinson digs).

We have kept the dig registration fee low (\$30 per person) so as to not price out North Dakotans. Roughly half of our dig participants are from North Dakota. Over the years, the fossil dig program has become the primary source for state fossils that will eventually go on display at the Heritage Center or other museums and venues across the state.

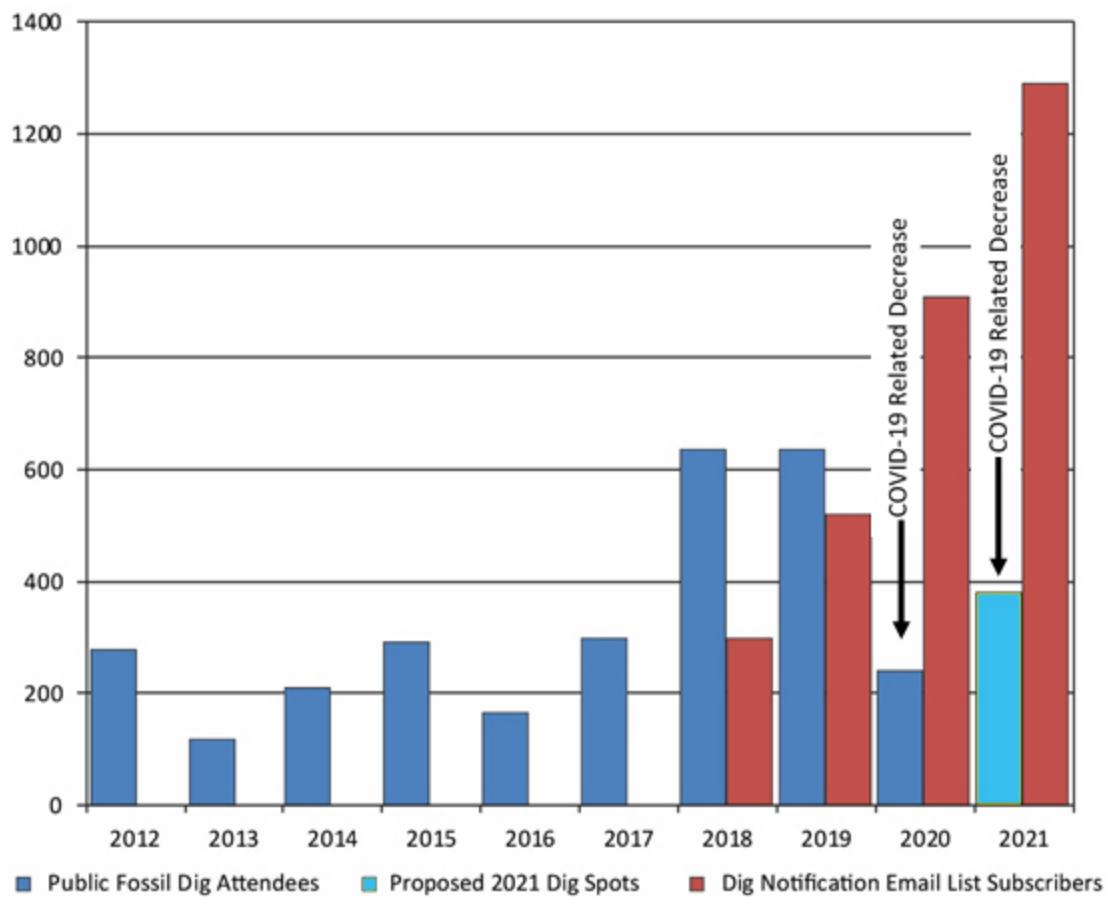
In 2019, the fossil digs generated \$21,200 in registration fees and \$20,540 in expenses. In 2020, registration fees were \$10,100 and expenses were \$13,500. In both years, the registration fees were run through the Office of Management and Budget's Conference Fund. We typically manage three or four fossil digs per year (Medora, Dickinson, Bismarck, and Walhalla) and each dig has to be accounted for separately within the OMB Conference Fund. This means if we run a deficit in one dig, we can't use the surplus from one of the other digs to balance it. Placing the fossil dig registration fees in the Fossil Excavation and Restoration Fund would enable us to spread the fossil dig program budget over the entire summer giving us much more flexibility and making the program more self-sufficient.



Upper Left: The 2000 Mosasaur exhibit at the Heritage Center. Upper Right: Pterosaur casts and a triceratops skull at the Bismarck Airport in 2011. Middle Right: The 2004 Mesohippus Exhibit at the Cowboy Hall of Fame. Lower Left: Children interacting with the updated Cretascope exhibit in the Heritage Center in 2016.



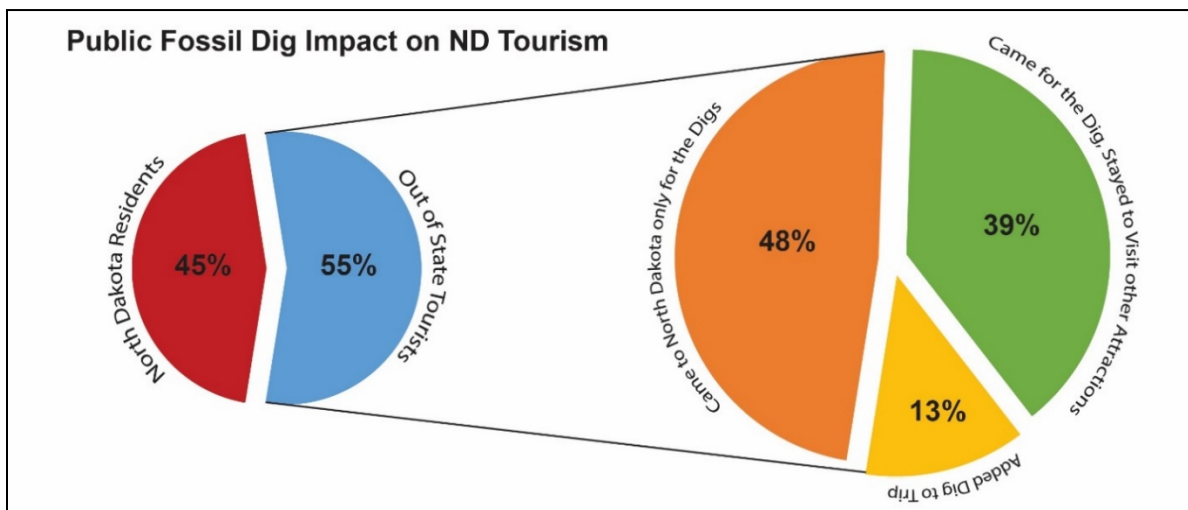
Map of North Dakota showing the locations of current Public Fossil Digs in Bismarck, Medora, and Walhalla (red stars) and other sites where digs are occasionally held (blue stars).



Interest in the Public Fossil Dig Program greatly increased beginning in 2018 and the number of people subscribed to receive the annual dig announcement email far surpasses our current capacity.



Members of the public participate in the Public Fossil Digs at the Pembina Gorge State Recreation Area near Walhalla (top left), the Little Badlands area south of Dickinson (top right), a cooperative dig with the Theodore Roosevelt Medora Foundation east of Medora (bottom left), and on private land south of the Bismarck-Mandan area (bottom right).



Slightly more than half of participants are from out of state, and 87% of them came to North Dakota because of the Public Fossil Dig Program.