



Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee
Testimony on HB1242

North Dakota Game and Fish Department
Greg Link, Conservation and Communications Division Chief
March 4, 2021

Chairman Kreun and members of the Senate 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, 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 is an effective recruitment tool, giving 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/or deer hunting while accompanying and being mentored by an adult licensed hunter without having to enroll in and complete the Department’s Hunter Education course.

When last March’s COVID-19 pandemic’s social distancing and gathering size restrictions went into effect, the Department cancelled its traditional “in-person” classroom Hunter Education 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 by implementing a COVID contingency on-line home study course to address on-going certification, the follow-up “in-person” test and hands-on practical 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.

With use of the apprentice license provision and our shift to the online home study course last spring, we successfully “weathered the storm” created by the pandemic in 2020. Resetting the apprentice license feature 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, as we continue to play “catch-up” and deal with on-going pandemic challenges in 2021.

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