

Testimony in support of: North Dakota House Bill 1538-A Bill for an Act to amend and reenact subsection 20 of section 20.1-02-05 of the North Dakota Century Code

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Submitted by: Zach Axtman
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To: Representative Porter and Members of the North Dakota House Energy and Natural Resources Committee

As an avid angler and outdoorsman, I am writing to voice my support for your House Bill 1538.

Let me tell you a little story about a young boy that grew up on a dairy farm in north central ND. We did not do much fishing growing up. We would basically have one big fishing trip a year where my we would get together with my father's family and fish for an extended week. All though that may have been great fun, It never really got me passionate about fishing. Now fast forward to 1996 my dad surprised my brother and I with a trip to the big city of Bismarck ND. We had no idea what he had planned for us all we knew was he was taking the day off from milking cows to go to Bismarck. Anyone that knows dairy farms you do not just take a day off. Well to our surprise he was taking use to the Professional Walleye Trail weigh in. Now boy was that exciting getting to watch the pros pull their boats around the civic center and weigh their fish in! It was so much fun my brother and I convinced him to take us back for the final weigh in so we could see who would win. Seeing these weigh ins and all the excitement surrounding them really made me want to learn to fish.

I went home and wanted to learn everything I could about fishing. Now mind you we did not have a boat, so I would beg my mom to drive me down to the two small lakes that had fishing in them. I would save all my money to buy fishing tackle even enough to buy an old busted up paddle boat to fish out of at my grandmas cabin. I spent as much time as I possibly could in that old paddle boat.

Fast forward to today. I have enjoyed a mildly successful fishing career, but an absolute successful career in helping get people passionate and involved in the sport of fishing. Now many of the individuals I have helped/taught may never participate in a fishing tournament. But they all were helped along the way by a young boy that fell in love with the sport of fishing thanks to a tournament trail that got the opportunity to come to Bismarck ND.

In a time where kids are locked into screens daily I among other anglers have the opportunity to share our passion for the sport of fishing and help get kids out from behind the screens and in to the outdoors. I'm afraid with the current legislature not allowing these tournaments to come to North Dakota these kids will get interested but than have nothing to back up that interest that allows them to set a goal to achieve in the sport of fishing like the PWT once did for me.

With the current 10% conservation fee we have seen all the national tournament trails pull their regular season events out of the state of ND. This not only takes away from giving individuals the opportunity to catch the fishing bug like I did but I hinders the communities that

rely on these events to bring tourism dollars to their businesses. In a survey done in Devils Lake while the National Walleye Tour was in town. Anglers said they spent on average \$1,375 while in town. Now this is direct impact on businesses in the communities and does not include recirculation of that money in the town. By having these tournaments in our state, we are not only helping towns prosper but as many of these tournaments are nationally televised, we are getting great promotional exposure for tourism in our state. I do not know how many anglers I have talked to that have come to North Dakota for a fishing tournament only to return to either fish or hunt for fun in our great state.

Now not only have I been fortunate enough to help educate people about fishing. I have been able to use fishing to help give back. My family and I have been participating in the Kolar Toyota ALS Charity Fishing tournament in Duluth MN. This tournament raises money for ALS in ND SD and MN. It absolutely blows me away every year we attend how much money they raise. They consistently raise over \$200,000 dollars for ALS. This Tournament raise money through their entry fees. Each angler needs to raise a minimum of \$250 but can raise as much as possible. Some anglers raise up words of \$20,000. Now let put this into perspective in ND current century code numbers. Due to the entry fee being endless for the participants because they can raise as much money as they want to fish it. They would be required to pay \$10,000 in conservation fees or 10% of the entry fees depending on what Game and Fish deems correct. Then 85% (\$153,000) of what is left would have to be repaid back to the anglers. Now that would only leave \$27,000 to \$28,5000 to actually be donated back to the ALS organization, we are trying to raise money for. Now I think we can all agree this is no way beneficial to nonprofits and fundraisers in North Dakota under the current century code guidelines.

In the eyes of a once young dairy farmer boy in rural ND who knew nothing about fishing. I hope that this bill passes because you never know who or how many people will catch the passion bug for fishing by just watching a group of anglers weigh fish in a tournament or how one dollar raised may be the one to cure a disease. That is why I **support** Bill 1538.

Thank you for your time and consideration!

Sincerely,

Zach Axtman

Zach Axtman

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