

I am in support of HB1538, which looks to sensibly modernize the current rules regarding fishing tournaments on North Dakota waters.

I am a small business owner, and as such have sought to use the platform of my business to create meaningful experiences in the Northern Plains. We have grown a state championship triathlon, bringing people from all over the United States to compete in North Dakota. Though it is a business, the aim of the experience has been to create an avenue to give back to the community in service and profits.

I attempted something similar with a multi-species, online fishing challenge during COVID shut downs. My hope was to get people from all over the state to go outside, explore the beauty of their own backyard, and promote the sport of fishing.

The rules for the challenge would be simple: The longest fish of each species would get a point. The most points at the end of the challenge, win. The fish would be measured and photographed and released. Therefore, a bullhead from Antelope Creek in Hazen would be worth as much as a trophy walleye from the Tailrace. My hope was not to make money from North Dakota's resources, but to create a genuine experience in the out-of-doors, when everyone was otherwise locked inside. As an added bonus, this challenge would be sustainable and not negatively impact any fishery with weigh-ins and boat ramp usage. It also challenged experienced anglers to try something new – when is the last time you have targeted a sucker with a wormtail? Or a buffalo carp with grub? People might need to travel to find a brown trout point, or visit Owl pond for perch. The point was to get people to explore North Dakota waters.

Seeking to do this correctly, I learned quickly this would be considered a tournament under North Dakota rule. No problem – until I filled out the application, which necessitated one North Dakota body of water, a weigh-in, and a payout. My application was denied. How could it be that taking photos of your catch, releasing it, and posting them for a common challenge would be illegal, while catching multiple fish, weighing in, and winning huge sums of money would be the correct way? It seemed to me the rules simply hadn't yet caught up to the technology.

I am in favor of HB1538, opening new avenues for enjoyment of North Dakota's fisheries for all ages and professions.