

I wish to submit testimony concerning HB1538. I believe organized fishing tournaments serve as a valuable component to the fishing industry as a whole and also to tourism in the state of North Dakota. When North Dakota changed the ruling removing the cap for the conservation fee paid by tournaments operating in the state, I don't believe that anglers were fairly represented and also don't believe that communities that benefit from tournaments were represented. I believe that a conservation fee is good for creating goodwill and for putting something monetary back towards the resource or department that can be used to create more opportunities for the outdoor resource of the state. When the cap was removed however, the fees that were required to be paid to the state to have a tournament became excessive considering that other states don't require anything similar. As a result, many large National scale tournament circuits immediately quit coming to North Dakota.

There is a misconception that the tournament organizations themselves are getting rich from the resource. The truth is that most of these circuits barely survive from year to year. I can remember many large tournament organizations that no longer exist: Professional Walleye Trail, North American Walleye Association, Team Walleye, Western Walleye Pro Circuit... the list goes on. The people who stand to benefit the most financially from tournaments happening in the state of North Dakota are North Dakotans. From gas station owners and hotel owners to resorts, guides and retail locations. Communities like Devils Lake, Newtown, Garrison and others benefit greatly from fishing tournaments.

There is also the misconception that tournament anglers simply replace recreational anglers in that if the tournament isn't happening, there would still be ample weekend anglers spending the same amount of money. That can be true at times but so often... this isn't the case. If the weather is cold, rainy and windy on Memorial Day weekend for example, it can cost a community like Devils Lake millions of dollars in lost revenue. The tournament anglers still fish and spend money regardless of poor fishing reports or weather.

What also goes unsaid is that many North Dakota resident anglers also enjoy participating in these tournaments. From a grass roots level to promote angling and getting future generations involved in fishing, the high school and college level organized fishing tournaments have greatly increased participation for young and new anglers across the country where North Dakota has lagged greatly behind with organized high school fishing. These high school programs in particular have been so beneficial because angling requires equipment and mentorship. Highschool age kids are able to compete in fishing tournaments when their parents did not own a boat. These kids are able to receive mentorship and information to make themselves competent anglers because of these entry level tournaments and many of these kids go on to become licensed and passionate anglers. The overall beauty of all these youth tournament opportunities is that any kid can learn and get good at fishing and find satisfaction and enjoyment. I believe this bill would also increase youth fishing tournament opportunities in the state.

To provide balance between those that benefit from tournaments and those that believe they do not, the permit process is needed and some type of conservation fee getting paid to the state is good but there needs to be some flexibility.

Respectfully,

Jason Mitchell

Jason Mitchell Outdoors Television