

Testimony in support of North Dakota House Bill 1538

Date: 3 February 2023

Submitted by: Jim Carroll – Professional Angler

To: Representative Porter and Members of the North Dakota House Energy and Natural Resources Committee

I am writing to lend my support to North Dakota House Bill 1538. For the past 30 years I have been involved in walleye fishing tournaments- as an angler, a volunteer, and organizer- at all levels of the sport from the grass-roots to professional level events across the United States. I have fished at the highest levels of competitive walleye fishing for the past 20 years; in that time competing in several events held here in my home state of North Dakota. I'm always proud to call North Dakota my home.

Travelling and fishing tournaments across the country has given me a great appreciation and perspective on how good the fishing can be here in North Dakota and I give our ND Game and Fish Department great credit for nurturing and improving our fisheries. However, in 2020 I believe a mistake was made when Game & Fish issued an executive ruling removing the \$5000 cap on the 10% Conservation Fee on entry fees paid by tournament anglers. This cap system had been in place for 20 years and while not perfect, it had allowed larger local events to thrive and national tournaments to be held in our state. The net effect of this change, whether intended or not, has undoubtedly been a chilling effect on tournaments and fishing here in North Dakota.

There have been no large national events in ND since this rule was changed in 2020. I fish the National Walleye Tour (NWT) and a regular season NWT event typically has around 120 boats with the pro's and co-anglers paying nearly \$300,000 in entry fees. With the removal of the \$5000 cap on the 10% Conservation Fee there would be a mandated fee to ND Game & Fish of nearly \$30,000 to hold an event in North Dakota. By contrast the NWT would pay \$250 for a tournament permit from the State of Minnesota. In South Dakota there is no fee. The State of Montana would charge \$360 and in Wisconsin the permit would cost \$25. It's easy to see why large professional tournament events will not be coming to North Dakota under the current rule. The potential economic impact on tournament towns like Devils Lake and Garrison could be enormous.

Local tournaments are affected as well. I've worked with the ND Governor's Cup Walleye Derby for the past 10 years and this rule change has meant the conservation fee paid to the State has nearly doubled. That money is no longer available to put into the purse to pay anglers.

Non-profit organizations that would like to raise funds with a fishing tournament are hampered as well. As are grass-roots efforts like High School Fishing Leagues and Fishing Clubs which we all want to see thrive here in North Dakota.

What needs to happen going forward is a decoupling of entry fees paid by anglers from the permit fee paid by tournament organizations to hold the event. The amount of entry fee paid by an angler does not correlate to impact on a fishery.

For these reasons I support HB 1538 going forward and hope we can move forward together to showcase the wonderful fishing opportunities here in North Dakota!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim Carroll". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jim Carroll

Professional Angler

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