

North Dakota Beekeeper on SB 2134 Dusty Backer of Center ND (Backer Bees)

Good Morning. I am Dusty Backer, owner and operator of Backer Bees of Center, ND.

Placing hives a certain distance from a road would sound “logical” to the basic ears yet ask a beekeeper that has invested years of experience, relationships, and knowledge to their trade. We do understand the “logic” and it is our hope that you hear our reasoning. Invite a beekeeper to your table and chat about the habits and health of a bee hive, and you will definitely be amazed and begin to understand.

Bees are creatures driven by nature—eat and reproduce. If the vegetation is there, they take the shortest path. Sometimes that path is 4 miles away and to a bee, it is about survival. North Dakota is a top producer of honey because of vegetation, daylight hours, lack of spray, and landowner appreciation of bees.

The economic impact of a 1/4 mile placement regulation would be severe and would have a trickle impact across the nation. This includes honey production, pollination services, employment, business spending, crop yields, fuel, housing, repairs, and building.

North Dakota hives don't just impact North Dakota. 80% of the world's almonds are grown in California and bees are the only insect that can pollinate them. North Dakota is the perfect place to keep bees alive and healthy to prepare for rigorous pollination services. Not just in California, but also Wisconsin, Florida, Oregon, Washington, New York in fact all 50 states have crops that bees pollinate. There are 90 different crops that are reliant on beekeepers and honey bees so this is an invaluable practice that ultimately puts food on dinner tables across the nation.

Approximately 38.6 million pounds of honey is produced in North Dakota a year and that amount does not support the need that US demands which is 450 million pounds. The balance of needed honey must be imported. There are nearly 340 registered beekeepers in North Dakota and they employ, spend and produce. The social impact of a placement regulation would be severe. Careers, jobs and trades would be destroyed.

Landowners mostly direct where they would prefer hives be placed on their land and this must be respected, since we are guests. Normally, they too, would like us to place the hives closer to the entrance end of their land plots to reduce vegetation and terrain disruptions.

We are a somewhat small beekeeping operation with a range of 2,000 hives and have over 65 landowners that we have spent 20 years creating relationships with. This Bill would reduce our bee placement locations by 65%. That would make 1,300 hives that would need to be relocated and in a much smaller area, because of a regulation.

These landowners are so valuable to bee farming and reducing, or restricting the area range in which hives can be placed, infringes on landowner rights. We have committed years of time, conversations and respect for our landowners to secure spots for our hives. Most depend on our bees to boost their yields. For instance, we have a landowner that has reported his canola and sunflower yields are up 10% when the bees are placed on his property. Another stated their hay crop is considerably higher when we have hives by the fields.

Bees are in top production for the months of July, August and September. Are North Dakotans willing to crash the farming trade of beekeeping in North Dakota and the nation, because of 3 months? That may sound dramatic yet when a regulation such as location placement, which is, in reality, an agreement with private landowners, is dictated, careers, livelihood's and trades are lost.

It is the way we make a living at the same time contributing to nature's routines. Most beekeeping homesteads, processing plants, hive storage, hives, and production facilities are within 1/4 mile from roads. This regulation would strip our occupation, way of life and devalue our trade and properties. I would no longer be able to support my family.

Is there a quick "fix" for the frustration and annoyance of bees splatting windshield, bikers or car grills?

Is there a good answer to bees crossing roads?

No--bees fly and will travel 4 miles for food and water.

Restrictions are rarely the answer and sometimes, there is no answer.