

March 15, 2023

In 2015, in partnership with the Red River Valley Catfish Club, I started the Scheels Boundary Catfish Tournament on the Red River at Grand Forks, ND/East Grand Forks, MN. This is a unique event because it is based half in North Dakota and half in Minnesota. This means that instead of one tournament permit I must secure two. The tournament is limited to 50 boats (100 anglers) with an entry fee of \$230.

I admit that because only half of the tournament is in North Dakota that I have negotiated that I must pay a conservation fee of 5% instead of the required 10%. Here is the sticky point of the permits. Even paying half, the 5% fee is \$550 (when sold out at 50 boats) while the Minnesota permit cost just \$70. This points out a drastic difference for just one event.

In 2017, I took over the direction of the Rod and Reel Rally at Drayton for the Chamber of Commerce. At the time it was a cheap big fish derby but since has become the Catfish Capital Challenge, a two-day event. This event is 100% in North Dakota and comes with a \$300 entry fee. The conservation fee costs the Drayton Chamber of Commerce \$1,800 (when the tournament is sold out). With the 75% required payback that leaves \$2,700 for expenses and profit after the dust settles.

When I decided to start what is now the Moorhead Catfish Tournament in 2022, I explored both Fargo and Moorhead's access points and while not the sole reason, Moorhead, Minnesota was chosen because the permit is a \$70 permit fee meaning there would be more operating funds to start the event even with an 80% payback.

Sure, the claim is that the "conservation fees" can go back to fisheries projects for the betterment which is great. Over the years I have earmarked thousands to extend the north boat landing in Grand Forks. The money is sitting there waiting for the project to actually happen. The "conservation fee" and the work required to collect the small amount of money and turn it back seems like an inefficiency for the Game and Fish Department.

Drayton being the small town that it is, just realized that they had the tournament money coming to them. Had the chamber been able to keep the "conservation fee" it could have been used for community promotion or things to promote their Catfish Capital of the North or even walk a check down the block and give it directly to the City of Drayton for ramp maintenance. This would save multiple administrative steps and expenses to achieve the same goal.

It is because of the history of these events and understanding that in relation to neighboring states is very expensive I am in support of the passage of bill HB1538 and would like to recommend DO PASS. Because these events are operated by Non-Profits the fees would be cut substantially and be more in line with our neighbor, Minnesota where we also operate events. This would allow us to produce better events and raise more money for our projects while not cutting any paybacks to anglers.

I do think the \$2,500 fee for a for profit event is unfair for small tournaments such as mine should for some reason we not be able to fall under non-profit even with our nonprofit partners. There should be criteria established for smaller events perhaps with 50 or less boats and/or \$300 entry fees. (Hopefully that is dealt with at the administrative level. Should either of my events be classified to require \$2,500 fees we will see a quick death of the tournaments or in our case be moving exclusively to Minnesota leading to the potential tourism and income losses to the communities involved.

Now to change gears a bit. I am also very involved with the Red River Valley Catfish Club and the Wednesday Night Catfish League that we operate in the summer appears to be falling through a crack here.

I would like to request an amendment or at least point out a potential problem that will have to be addressed during the administrative phase should this bill pass.

Currently, when the river permits, we are scheduled to run 12 weeks, six in North Dakota and six in Minnesota. We average around 30 boats each week. The entry fee to participate in a league night is \$15 per boat and we pay back 80%. Our current North Dakota fees are 10% which amounts to \$30-\$45 per time versus Minnesota where our entry fee is considered too low and we DO NOT require a permit at all.

The league really is not about winning the money which is never more that about \$150 for first place and Big Fish of the night. The league is popular with anglers who do not play softball, golf or other to get out and fish one evening per week. The real prize that everyone is after is the "Angler of the Year" title and jacket presented to the angler or team that collects the most points throughout the season. We do not charge for this.

The way HB 1538 is worded "fishing contests," as defined in the legislation, would be limited to events offering a prize or cash for catching fish in public waters. That would include big-money tagged fish contests, fishing tournaments, biggest fish contests, contests awarding prizes for the largest number or weight of fish and fishing leagues or tournaments comprising multiple fishing events with a cumulative fee of \$50 or more per event.

Events would not be considered a tournament or required to pay an entry fee if they charge less than \$50, have fewer than 50 participants and fewer than 15 boats.

Using these definitions, our league does not charge \$50 but rather \$15. Because we have about 60 participants and 30 boats it would make us a tournament. Our fees would then under this definition for non-profit go from \$45 to \$75 for each event we have in North Dakota leaving nothing to cover the cost of the jackets and other supplies for the league. I think instead of 15 boats, something to protect us should be considered. I realize that we have a very unique situation to be as big as we are with as low dollars as we do.

Even though we feel as this is written it would be detrimental to our catfish league, overall, we still support HB 1538 because it could be very beneficial to the tournaments that we partner with. We would like DO PASS.

Sincerely,

Captain Brad Durick

Tournament Director- Scheels Boundary Battle Catfish Tournament, Catfish Capital Challenge- Drayton, Moorhead Catfish Tournament
Board Member- Red River Valley Catfish Club/League