

Please support North Dakota Senate Bil 2155 – Relating to Gratis Antelope Licenses

My name is Jeff Benda, a proud North Dakota resident, outdoor writer, wild game chef, and avid outdoorsman. I am writing to voice my full support for Senate Bill 2155, which seeks to restore fairness and opportunity in pronghorn antelope tag allocations in our state.

North Dakota's pronghorn antelope is a treasure of our Great Plains, a species that has inspired generations of hunters like me to connect with the land. Yet, under the current allocation system, the odds of drawing a tag are heavily skewed. The practice of reserving the first 50 tags in each unit for landowners, coupled with a disproportionate distribution of remaining tags, leaves the majority of public hunters—our children, grandchildren, nephews, nieces, co-workers, and friends—at a significant disadvantage. **In some units, over 90% of the tags go to landowners.** This imbalance limits access for the broader hunting community and threatens the traditions that define North Dakota's outdoor heritage.

By eliminating the preferential allocation of the first 50 tags to landowners and establishing a straight 50/50 split, this bill would return some fairness back to the lottery process.

Consider this - **In 2024, over 1,000 North Dakota residents with 8 or more bonus points were not able to get drawn for a pronghorn antelope tag.** That means a North Dakotan has a better chance to get drawn for an antelope tag in dozens of hunting units in Wyoming vs. their home state!

Why should landowners who live out in western North Dakota where the antelope roam have the only opportunity to hunt antelope? **Why are we excluding the diesel mechanic, public school teacher, nurse, or even the hard-working young farmer who lives east of Bismarck?**

SB 2155 makes it both equitable and essential to maintain the integrity of our hunting culture. Being able to hunt out wildlife is the birthright of every North Dakotan – every American! Hunting is more than a pastime; it is a way to teach responsibility, patience, and respect for the natural world. But if the opportunities to hunt pronghorn antelope continue to diminish for the average resident, we risk losing a vital part of our state's identity.

I have been fortunate to draw a pronghorn tag and experience the thrill of pursuing this incredible animal on North Dakota's open landscapes. Now, I dream of the day when my 9-year-old daughter can have the same chance. But under the current system, the odds are stacked against her. Senate Bill 2155 is a step toward a future where every young hunter can share in the opportunities that shaped the lives of those who came before them.

Hunter and conservationist Randy Newberg once said, "Hunting is not just something we do; it's who we are." This bill reflects that truth. It's not just about increasing the odds of drawing a tag; it's about preserving the values of fairness, access, and shared responsibility for our wildlife.

I urge you to pass Senate Bill 2155 and ensure that the pronghorn antelope remains a symbol of opportunity and connection for all North Dakotans. Together, we can uphold the principles of conservation and equity that make our state's hunting heritage truly great.

Sincerely,

Jeff Benda
Fargo, North Dakota