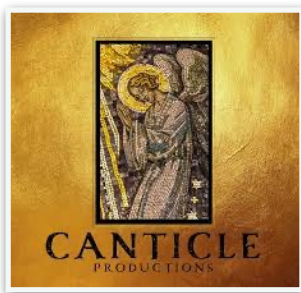


My name is **Matt Fern** and I am a **filmmaker from Bismarck, North Dakota**. I produce commercials, podcasts and feature-length films throughout our state.

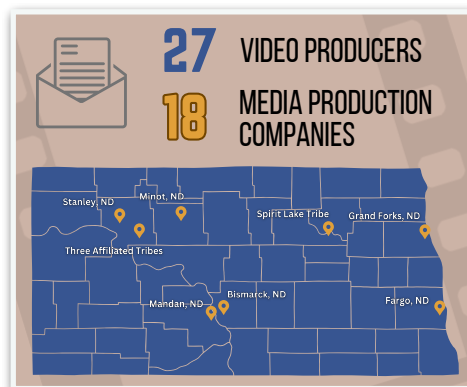


For over two years, I've conducted independent research into the **Motion Picture Production & Recruitment Grants** administered by the **North Dakota Department of Commerce**.

Since 2017, **Canticle Productions** has been awarded (3) **Motion Picture Production & Recruitment Grants** totaling **\$740,000** through the **Tourism & Marketing** division of the **North Dakota Department of Commerce** (ND Commerce).

Months before the most recent \$600,000 grant was issued in 2023, **myself and more than two dozen North Dakota filmmakers began submitting written requests calling for an investigation** into how these grants were being administered by ND Commerce. **Those concerns went unanswered** and the issues we identified remain unresolved.

For a comprehensive look at my research, I've produced a **2-hour podcast available at FilmNorthDakota.com**.



1) Lawmakers Introduce Motion Picture & Recruitment Grants

The first mention of **Motion Picture Production & Recruitment Grants** appears in 2021. In committee hearings and floor debates that year, **Rep. Mike Nathe** spoke of “*a North Dakota production company*” that had received **\$40,000** by ND Tourism’s AOR (Ad Agency of Record) in **2017** and whose footage had been used by ND Tourism “*at no cost*”.

Four years later in **2021**, **lawmakers approved a \$100,000 film grant line item**, modeled after the 2017 grant Rep. Nathe referenced.

Motion Picture Production and Recruitment Grant	100,000
---	---------

Rep. Mike Nathe: House Appropriations (04.13.21) “\$100,000 was added from the general fund to provide for a Film and Theater Production Grant directly to an organization dedicated to the preservation and honor of North Dakota... we did this a number - a year or two ago - a while back to a North Dakota production company here in town. I saw the video it’s extremely high quality. So much so that the footage was used by Tourism at no cost... we just took that \$100,000 out of the Tourism line and dedicated it towards the film. And Tourism is on board.”



Rep. Mike Nathe: North Dakota House Floor (04.21.21)

“\$100,000 we added out of general fund for a film. We’ve done this before. The film has to do with a incident hanging out in Watford City years ago. The production is very high value. When they’re done with that Tourism then can take that footage and use that footage to also make up different ads and marketing programs, marketing ads that we could for the state... these ads can cost thousands, hundreds of thousands of dollars. So this is kind of a win win for not only... helping a North Dakota production company, but also helping provide advertising footage for Tourism.”

Two years later, in 2023 lawmakers expanded film grant funding to \$600,000.

Motion picture production and recruitment grant - The 2023 Legislative Assembly appropriated \$600,000 of one-time funding from the general fund to the Department of Commerce to provide a motion picture production and recruitment grant during the 2023-25 biennium, an increase of \$500,000 from the 2021-23 biennium general fund appropriation of \$100,000.



Sen. Brad Bekkedahl: North Dakota Senate Floor (04.29.23)

“There’s an added funding for a Motion Picture Production & Recruitment Grant to a production company for another motion picture - that’s being made in North Dakota. Many of the predictions or productions from this company have been North Dakota centrist productions and this is another one they’re bringing online.”

2) Statement of Purpose Added to Film Grants

Although **Canticle Productions** was never identified by name during public testimony or floor debate, the company was listed in two

“Statement of Purpose” footnotes within the 2021 and 2023 appropriations bills.

According to reporting by journalist **Rob Port**, the lawmaker responsible for adding “Statement of Purpose” footnotes was **Rep. Bob Martinson**. These footnotes, buried within Senate Bill 2018 (2021) and House Bill 1018 (2023), **quietly directed Motion Picture & Recruitment funds to Canticle Productions.**



2021 Footnote: Statement of Purpose Amendment: Senate Bill No. 2018 (Pg. 8)

§ One-time funding of \$100,000 is added from the general fund to provide a film and theater production grant directly to Canticle Productions, which is an organization dedicated to the preservation and honor of North Dakota land, history, and citizens, the same as provided by the House.

2023 Footnote: Statement of Purpose Amendment: House Bill No. 1018 (Pg. 12)

Adds funding for a motion picture production and recruitment grant to be provided directly to Canticle Productions. The Senate did not provide funding for this purpose.

600,000	0	600,000
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3) ND Commerce Awards \$740,000 to Canticle Productions

Since 2017, ND Department of Commerce has awarded **(3) Motion Picture Production & Recruitment grants totaling \$740,000.**

Despite the size and scope of these awards, ND Commerce did **not** publicly announce the **\$40,000 grant in 2017 or the \$100,000 grant in 2021.**

They also did **not** require applicants to provide **essential details that are customary for film grant applications** such as a company address, project budget, timeline, locations, cast, crew and script in **2017, 2021 and 2023.**

North Dakota Motion Picture Production & Recruitment Grants Awarded by ND Commerce to Canticle Productions

	2017	2021	2023
Funds Available	\$40,000	\$100,000	\$600,000
Recipients Awarded	1	1	1
Public Announcements	0	0	2
Application Window	0	0	6 Business Days*
Applicant Address	Not Required	Not Required	Not Required
Applicant Script	Not Required	Not Required	Not Required
Applicant Budget	Not Required	Not Required	Not Required
Applicant Timeline	Not Required	Not Required	Not Required
Applicant Cast/Crew	Not Required	Not Required	Not Required
Progress Reports	Not Required	Not Required	2**
Final Report	Not Required	Not Required	1**

** ND State Auditor: “We reviewed awarding procedures for 12 other grants issued by (ND Commerce) in 2022 and 2023 to determine the number of days allowed for applicants to apply and found that in the same competitive process, (ND Commerce) gave 28 to 84 days from the date grants were announced.”*

*** Lacking/Late Reports: Reports lacked key information and (2 of 3) were submitted late.*

4) Filmmakers Request Motion Picture & Recruitment Grant Investigation

Beginning August 30, 2023, more than two dozen North Dakota filmmakers requested investigations into the **Motion Picture & Recruitment** grants, raising concerns to offices of ND Commerce, ND Governor, ND Attorney General, ND Auditor and ND Procurement.

Despite multiple requests and unanswered questions, ND Commerce proceeded to sign the **\$600,000 grant agreement with Canticle Productions on December 6, 2023.**

Date	2023 Motion Picture Production & Recruitment Grant Timeline
07.21.23	ND Commerce Announces \$600,000 Grant Application
07.21.23	ND Commerce Opens \$600,000 Grant Application
07.31.23	ND Commerce Closes \$600,000 Grant Application
08.04.23	ND Commerce Announces \$600,000 Grant to Canticle Productions
08.30.23	ND Filmmakers Request Investigation to ND Governor
11.28.23	ND Filmmakers Request Investigation to ND Attorney General
12.06.23	ND Commerce Signs Grant Agreement with Canticle Productions

5) Results from 2023 Motion Picture & Recruitment Grant

Canticle Productions **progress and final reports** reveal the company did **not** complete either film project and did **not** meet **any** of the grant requirements by the biennium deadline.

2023 Motion Picture Production & Recruitment Grant Requirements	Date Due	Date Delivered	Requirement Met
Provide the STATE with a written bi-annual activity and progress report, setting out how grant funds have been expended...	07.01.24	08.21.25	No
Provide the STATE...a final activity and progress report...	06.30.25	07.01.25	No
Receive and consider feedback from the STATE as to locations...	06.30.25	N/A	No
Provide the STATE...(1) a list of locations where the motion picture(s) were shown;	06.30.25	N/A	No
Provide the STATE... (2) a list of any film festival showings;	06.30.25	N/A	No
Provide the STATE... (3) a list of awards the motion picture(s) were nominated for or received.	06.30.25	N/A	No
To the extent such film and photo assets are available, GRANTEE agrees to provide the STATE with an appropriately limited license to use certain agreed film and photo assets not central to the motion picture(s)'s storyline, for state marketing efforts.	06.30.25	07.01.25 ***	No

*** **No Usable Assets:** Film and photo assets supplied for state use were either low-quality or watermarked, rendering them unusable for advertising. (1) 52-second 720p Video Clip & (171) Screenshots & BTS Photos



6) Response from ND Tourism Director (Sara Otte Coleman) to ND Filmmakers

Sara Otte Coleman (ND Tourism Director) was 1 of the 3 ND Commerce employees who **selected Canticle Productions as the 2023 grant recipient**. She also was the ND Commerce employee who **signed the \$600,000 grant agreement** on December 6, 2023.

On August 14, 2025, **Sara Otte Coleman** (ND Tourism Director) answered questions via email for my podcast about the **Motion Picture Production & Recruitment Grants**. She also cc'd the **Chris Schilken** (ND Commerce Commissioner) in her reply.

Q: After reviewing the final 2023 grant report, do you consider the 2023 film grant program a success? ND Tourism Director: Yes

Q: How does your department plan to use the photo and video assets Canticle Productions submitted in the final report? ND Tourism Director: We have used the scenic and historic shots/clips for media and promotional efforts. Additionally, our asset library is available to the public and some of the items may be accessible.

Q: Were there any concerns or red flags raised in the two reports Canticle Productions submitted in 2024 that indicated neither film ("Hazel" nor "Medora, Empress of the Badlands") would be completed by June 30th, 2025? ND Tourism Director: No, there were no concerns

Q: Do you have any intention to request an audit of Canticle Productions by the North Dakota State Auditor? ND Tourism Director: No

Q: What documentation or activity and progress reports did Canticle Productions submit to ND Commerce related to the \$100,000 grant awarded in 2021? ND Tourism Director: Specific progress and activity reports were not required under the 2021 grant agreement.

Q: When evaluating Canticle Productions' 2023 application for the \$600,000 grant, did the fact that the applicant had already received \$100,000 for a similar purpose in 2021 play any role in the decision-making process? ND Tourism Director: No, it did not.

Q: In August 2024, over one year after the application process had been completed in July 2023, why did ND Commerce change [this website](#) listing the employee title "Film Program Manager" to "Tourism Outdoor Recreation Manager of the Department of Commerce's Tourism & Marketing"? ND Tourism Director: The informal title was changed to the official title because there was a misconception that the state operated a film program, which it does not and has not since the film commission ceased to exist over 20 years ago.

Q: Can you walk us through the timeline of your communication, if any, with Rep. Bob Martinson regarding the 2021 and 2023 grant payments from ND Commerce to Canticle Productions? ND Tourism Director: No formal communications

Q: Canticle Productions was paid \$40,000 by (AOR) in 2017 for content creation, screenings, and B-roll footage. Can you walk us through how that agreement was structured and approved?

ND Tourism Director: As good stewards of taxpayer dollars, we look for synergistic ways to collaborate with partners. We work with our agencies of record to structure cooperative agreements that provide the state with affordable content from remote areas.

Q: Do you believe the processes by which Canticle Productions was awarded \$100,000 in 2021 and \$600,000 in 2023 by ND Commerce were fair and transparent? **ND Tourism Director:** Yes

7) Unanswered Questions for ND Commerce

1. What did ND Commerce do to address filmmakers' **multiple investigation requests** in the **three months before signing the \$600,000 grant agreement** on December 6, 2023?

2. In written testimony (page 2) to the Senate Appropriations Committee on **January 15, 2025**, **Chris Schilken (ND Commerce Commissioner)** continued to **refute the ND Commerce audit report** saying ND Commerce did not follow their normal process for a grant application timeframe:

“Commerce disagreed with this finding due to the audit finding and recommendation does not account for the inherent differences between grant programs. Grant programs vary significantly in their time constraints. A one-time, highly sensitive grant with strict seasonal requirements cannot be compared to ongoing programs with application windows spread throughout the biennium.”



Now that **neither** 2023 Motion Picture Production & Recruit films were completed **by the biennium**, how does ND Commerce justify its **defense of the shortened application window**?

3. The “movie production balance sheet” included in Canticle Production’s 2023 final grant report listed **expenses unrelated to feature-film production** (such as a music video, legal fees, and poster art) while providing **no receipts** and **omitting a full record of expenses**.

What steps **did ND Commerce take to verify the accuracy of these expenses** before accepting the 2023 final grant report?

4. According to a *Dickinson Press* article on Sept. 29, 2025, **one of the 2023 grant-funded films primarily features religious messaging**.

The article states *“central to the film is the family’s strong Christian faith. Dialogue and visuals throughout the film serve to evoke the image of Christ, and Hazel frequently recites First Corinthians Chapter 13, verses 4-7, to motivate herself while stuck in the blizzard.”*

Was ND Commerce aware that at least one of the two 2023 Motion Picture Production & Recruit Grant films would feature **explicit religious themes, imagery, and scripture**?

5. ND Commerce employee **Dave Lehman** (Advanced Manufacturing Business Development Manager) purchased **Burnt Creek Farm** in 2021, which has been used as a **filming location** for at least **(2) feature-length films** produced by **Canticle Productions**.



What steps did **ND Commerce** take to ensure this arrangement **did not create a conflict of interest** when requiring the grant recipient to “*Receive and consider feedback from the STATE as to locations...*”?

7. Besides Mr. Lehman, **have any other ND Commerce employees worked with or personally benefited from Canticle Productions?**

8. **Sara Otte Coleman** (ND Tourism Director) wrote she had “*no formal communications*” with **Rep. Bob Martinson** regarding the **2021 and 2023 grant payments from ND Commerce to Canticle Productions**.



Can ND Commerce clarify what, if any, *informal* communication occurred?

9. **How does ND Commerce characterize the 2023 film grant as a “success”** when:

- neither funded film was completed by the contractual deadline,
- reports lacked essential timeline and budget information,
- no usable marketing assets were provided?

10. **Will there be any accountability for ND Commerce’s actions regarding these film grants?** Specifically:

- awarding three grants totaling \$740,000 to one company without a competitive process,
- failing to require basic application materials,
- signing a \$600,000 contract despite months of unresolved concerns,
- accepting incomplete reports,
- accepting unusable media assets,
- allowing a grant program to operate outside ND Commerce’s own established standards?

8) Index of Exhibits

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Exhibit 2 — 2023 Canticle Productions Website — Page 9

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Exhibit 6 — \$600,000 2023 Grant Progress Report #1 — Page 15

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Exhibit 9 — \$600,000 2023 Movie Production Balance Sheet — Page 19

Exhibit 10 — \$600,000 2023 Grant Film & Photo Assets (Film #1: Hazel) — Page 20

Exhibit 11 — \$600,000 2023 Grant Advertising Assets (Film #1: Medora) — Page 21

Exhibit 12 — List of North Dakota Filmmakers Requesting Investigation — Page 22

Exhibit 13 — Surrounding State Film Programs — Page 22

Exhibit 1 — 2023 Motion Picture Production & Recruitment Grant Website

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying the website for the 2023 Motion Picture Production and Recruitment Grant. The page header includes the North Dakota Department of Commerce logo and navigation links for Careers, Newsroom, and Make ND Home. The main navigation menu lists Community Services, Economic Development & Finance, Global Engagement Office, Tourism & Marketing (highlighted), and Workforce. The breadcrumb trail reads: Home / Tourism & Marketing / Marketing and Media Programs / 2023 Motion Picture Production and Recruitment Grant. The main heading is "2023 Motion Picture Production and Recruitment Grant".

Introduction

The North Dakota Department of Commerce is accepting proposals for Motion Picture Production and Recruitment Grant. The department has been appropriated funds available in the amount of \$600,000 to eligible organizations.

Timeframe

Grants shall be available during the current biennium: July 1, 2023, through June 30, 2025.

Eligible Applicants

Must be a North Dakota based organization which can do all filming and production in North Dakota and has a history of distributing impactful motion pictures about North Dakota's land, history, and citizens.

Application Process

Eligible organizations shall submit a concise application letter to the Department of Commerce. Applications shall identify the applicant, point of contact and associated contact information, amount requested, intended uses for the funds requested, examples of previous similar films, and desired outcomes.

Applications shall be **submitted electronically by July 31, 2023**, to the Film Program Manager of the Department of Commerce's Tourism & Marketing division:

Mike Jensen
✉ mjjensen@nd.gov

Review Process

The Department of Commerce will evaluate applications submitted to the Motion Picture Production and Recruitment Grant. It may seek input from the Governor's Office and/or legislative council on legislative intent. Upon completion of the review process, the Department of Commerce shall notify applicants of funding decisions and issue award funds to a successful applicant.

Intended Use of Award Funds

The Motion Picture Production and Recruitment Grant was established to provide a film and theater production grant directly to an organization dedicated to the preservation and honor of North Dakota land, history, and citizens. Film products should showcase the state by telling stories that will instill curiosity and potentially inspire viewers to learn more about the history, culture, and landscapes of North Dakota and to motivate travel.

Accountability

Successful applicants must track all expenditures of award funds and retain documentation that is readily accessible for auditing purposes. Successful applicants must fulfill reporting requirements by providing a written report to the Department of Commerce, every 6 months, to fulfill legislative reporting requirements (format provided by the Department of Commerce).

Commerce should be provided with film and photo assets not central to the film's storyline, captured during production that may be used for state marketing efforts.

Successful applicants must submit a written report using the provided format to the Department of Commerce by June 30, 2025, that summarizes how award funds were spent and describing progress toward the desired outcomes identified in their respective applications. The written reports shall also identify any unspent award funds and any photo and video assets provided to the state from the project. The report shall be submitted to the Film Program of the Department of Commerce's Tourism & Marketing Division.

Exhibit 2 — 2023 Canticle Productions Website

The screenshot shows the "About" page of Canticle Productions. The page has a dark blue background with the word "About" in the top left corner. The main heading is "CANTICLE PRODUCTIONS" in a large, gold, serif font. Below the heading, the text reads: "Canticle Productions is a North Dakota-based film and theater production company. We tell powerful stories of sacrifice, faith, and perseverance that honor the land, history, and people of North Dakota."

Exhibit 3 — Canticle Productions' \$600,000 2023 Grant Application



CANTICLE
PRODUCTIONS

Dear Mr. Jensen,

My name is Daniel Bielinski. I am the Founder of Canticle Productions, a production company based in North Dakota and dedicated to honoring the land, history, and citizens of North Dakota through the production of high-quality motion pictures.

Please consider this letter to be our application for the 2023 Motion Picture Production and Recruitment Grant.

PAST WORK

Canticle Productions has a history of creating films that honor the land, history, and citizens of North Dakota. Our first feature film, *A Heart like Water*, is based on the true stories of early Dakota homesteaders, including the early Dakota historian Linda Slaughter.

(www.aheartlikewater.com) Our second feature film, *Sanctified*, tells the story of a nun and outlaw who journey through the North Dakota badlands in 1890 to a church in Williston.

(www.sanctifiedfilm.com) Our third feature film, *End of the Rope*, tells the true story of the 1931 Charles Bannon case and the last lynching in North Dakota. (www.endoftheropefilm.com)

Canticle Productions successfully distributed each of these past three films in theaters, museums, libraries, and historical societies in North Dakota, as well as in the surrounding states Minnesota, Montana, and South Dakota. These past films have played, and are continuing to play, in film festivals around the country. They have also secured wider distribution deals for broader release domestically and worldwide. *A Heart like Water* is currently available for streaming through its website. *Sanctified* was licensed by the distributor FilmRise, and it will be on streaming platforms (such as Amazon, AppleTV, DirecTV, and more) on August 11, 2023. *End of the Rope* is currently entertaining multiple distribution offers and will be on DVD/Blu-ray and streaming platforms by the end of 2023.

GRANT REQUEST

We are seeking \$600,000 for the production of our upcoming North Dakota films *Medora* and *Hazel*, both of which are scheduled for production in 2024 and completion by June of 2025, at the latest.

Medora tells the true story of the Marquis de Mores, his wife Medora, and their incredible adventures in the North Dakota Badlands. This is an important story in the history of North Dakota, as the legacy of the Marquis continues to impact modern-day Medora.

INFO@CANTICLE-PRODUCTIONS.COM • WWW.CANTICLE-PRODUCTIONS.COM

Exhibit 3 — Canticle Productions' \$600,000 2023 Grant Application



CANTICLE
PRODUCTIONS

Hazel tells the true story of Hazel Miner, the young farmgirl from Center, North Dakota, who saved her little brother and sister during the blizzard of 1920. March 16, 2020 was declared by Governor Burgum to be "Hazel Miner Day" to honor this North Dakota heroine.

Both films will be shot in North Dakota and will showcase the beautiful North Dakota landscape. Grant funds will be used to pay cast and crew fees, location fees, food and lodging costs, equipment costs, and other similar production costs.

Both films will follow a distribution path similar to that of our previous films: theatrical release in North Dakota and the surrounding region; DVD/Blu-Ray release around the country; and release on streaming platforms around the country and around the world.

If awarded the grant, we would request that payment be made to Canticle Productions through our non-profit arm, Grain of Wheat Productions. Any grant funding that we receive would be restricted solely to use by Canticle Productions for Canticle's upcoming North Dakota film productions, as detailed above.

Thank you for your consideration! Please see more of our North Dakota work at www.canticle-productions.com.

Daniel Bielinski
Founder, Canticle Productions
daniel@canticle-productions.com
414.520.5437

INFO@CANTICLE-PRODUCTIONS.COM • WWW.CANTICLE-PRODUCTIONS.COM

Exhibit 4 – Sara Otte Coleman (ND Tourism Director)’s Score Sheet



Name of Project Canticle Productions		
Brief Project Description Production of 2 films: Medora and Hazel Minor		
Submitted By Canticle = Daniel Bielinski	Grant Year 2023	Amount Requesting \$66k

I. Description (100 total points for this section)	Points
A) Description (40 points) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the applicant provide a clear, concise description of the proposed project? 	38
B) Meet Goal of Legislation (60 points) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the project align with the goal to showcase preservation and to honor the North Dakota landscapes, history, and culture? Would the project showcase the state by telling stories that will instill curiosity and potentially inspire viewers to learn more about the history, culture, and landscapes of North Dakota? Will the project instill pride in the citizens of North Dakota? Will the project tell an interesting story that would be enjoyed by a broad audience? 	55
TOTAL POINTS - Section I <i>(must be 100 or less)</i>	93

II. Production (100 total points for this section)	Points
A) Experience (30 points) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the applicant have a history of distributing impactful motion pictures about North Dakota’s land, history, and citizens. 	30
B) Organization (30 Points) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the applicant a North Dakota based organization which can do all filming and production in North Dakota? 	30
C) Timeline (20 points) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the applicant describe production timelines or expected release timeframes. 	18
D) Budget (10 points) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the applicant explain intended uses for the funds requested. Will the granted amount be enough to complete the project? Can the grant recipient finish the project if the grant does not cover all expenses?. 	10

Exhibit 4 — Sara Otte Coleman (ND Tourism Director)’s Score Sheet

SFN 1805022 (11/2019)
Page 2

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is a specific amount requested? Yes \$66K 	
E) Support (5 points) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are there letters of support or existing partnerships with community organizations.- yes past but not specified in application 	2
F) Format (5 Points) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the project a motion picture. Motion Picture must be a form of entertainment that enacts a story by sound and a sequence of moving images appearing as continuous movement. 	5
TOTAL POINTS - Section II <i>(must be 100 or less)</i>	
95	

III. Outcomes <i>(60 total points for this section)</i>	Points
A) Distribution (20 points) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there a plan for broad distribution? 	15
B) Motivation (20 points) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will the audience of the project be motivated to travel to North Dakota to learn more and visit locations firsthand? 	15
C) Education (10 points) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will the project educate the audience about the history, culture and story of people and places of North Dakota? 	10
D) Assets (10 Points) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will the project create photo and video assets that can be used for state marketing efforts. 	10
TOTAL POINTS - Section III <i>(must be 60 or less)</i>	
50	

TOTAL POINTS FOR PROJECT	238
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Signature Socoleman	Date 8/3/2023
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Exhibit 5 — \$600,000 2023 Grant Announcement Email

From: Coleman, Sara O. <socoleman@nd.gov>
Sent: Thursday, August 3, 2023 4:17 PM
To: Akason, Shayden <sakason@nd.gov>; Jensen, Michael J. <mjiensen@nd.gov>
Cc: Schmidt, Kim S. <ksschmidt@nd.gov> 1
Subject: film grant

Hey Shayden,

We have completed the competitive grant process for the film grants and have the news release ready to go out. It is copied below:

Local filmmaker awarded movie production grant funding

VIEW THIS RELEASE ONLINE: www.commerce.nd.gov/news/

BISMARCK, N.D. – Canticle Productions is the recipient of state’s Motion Picture Production and Recruitment Grant according to the North Dakota Department of Commerce, who received dedicated funding from the legislature. The funding is intended to support the production of impactful motion pictures about North Dakota’s land, history, and citizens.

“Canticle Productions proposed to produce two new films around legendary North Dakota stories,” North Dakota Department of Commerce Tourism and Marketing Director Sara Otte-Coleman said. “We are excited to support their projects through this dedicated funding.”

Canticle Productions is a film production company dedicated to the telling of powerful, true stories of North Dakota. Founded in 2018 by Daniel Bielinski, the company produced and distributed three feature films in 2020-2021: *A Heart like Water*, *Sanctified*, and *End of the Rope*. Grant funding of \$600,000 will contribute to two new Canticle Productions film projects.

The Motion Picture Production and Recruitment Grant was established to provide a film and theater production grant directly to a producer dedicated to the preservation and honor of North Dakota land, history, and citizens. Film products should showcase the state by telling stories that will instill curiosity and **potentially** inspire viewers to learn more about the history, culture, and landscapes of North Dakota.

Do we need to use the attached grant agreement template- or do we have a simplified or updated version we can use? Mike has notified the winner and those not selected via email – so he expects the request for the money to come in immediately.

Thanks for your guidance,

Sara Otte Coleman
Director, Tourism and Marketing Division

701.328.2527 • socoleman@nd.gov • www.commerce.nd.gov • www.ndtourism.com



Exhibit 6 — \$600,000 2023 Grant Progress Report #1



CANTICLE
PRODUCTIONS

Bi-Annual Report

The Motion Picture Production and Recruitment Grant has been put to use in the production of two feature films: *Hazel* and *Medora*.

The production phase of *Hazel* was successfully completed in May of 2024. This film is now in post-production (editing, music, color, sound mix, etc). *Hazel* was shot in Bismarck with over one hundred North Dakotans involved in the shooting of it.

Please find Behind-the-Scenes photos from the production of *Hazel* here:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1nxj_8CasGsuUKML3FemD3hzGsPS2zQ72?usp=sharing

Medora, Empress of the Badlands is currently in production. It began filming for three weeks in Bismarck, and we will complete an additional three weeks of filming in the Badlands by the end of August, 2024. Over three hundred North Dakotans will have been involved in the shooting of the movie.

Please find *Medora* production stills here:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/12NaDi7hfysR9tlPYmwaw_5sYxDZJtKLV?usp=sharing

Currently, \$510,000 of the grant has been expended for production of both films. The remaining amount will be used for upcoming post-production costs. Both films have been beautifully captured, and both will reflect respectfully on powerful stories from North Dakota history.

Thank you again for your support!

Daniel Bielinski
Canticle Productions

INFO@CANTICLE-PRODUCTIONS.COM • WWW.CANTICLE-PRODUCTIONS.COM

Exhibit 7 — \$600,000 2023 Grant Progress Report #2



CANTICLE
PRODUCTIONS

Semi-Annual Report

The Motion Picture Production and Recruitment Grant has been put to use in the production of two feature films: *Hazel* and *Medora*.

The production phase of *Hazel* was successfully completed in May of 2024. This film is now in post-production (editing, music, color, sound mix, etc). *Hazel* was shot in Bismarck with over one hundred North Dakotans involved in the shooting of it. This movie is now in post-production.

Please find Behind-the-Scenes photos from the production of *Hazel* here:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1nxj_8CasGsuUKML3FemD3hzGsPS2zQ72?usp=sharing

The production phase of *Medora, Empress of the Badlands* was completed in August of 2024. It filmed for six weeks in Bismarck and in Medora, North Dakota. Over four hundred North Dakotans will have been involved in the shooting of the movie. This movie is now in post-production.

Please find *Medora* production stills here:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/12NaDi7hfysR9tlPYmwaw_5sYxDZJtKLV?usp=sharing

The grant money will be fully expended by June of 2025. Grants have been used for pre-production costs, production costs, and post-production costs. Both films have been beautifully captured, and both will reflect respectfully on powerful stories from North Dakota history.

Thank you again for your support!

Daniel Bielinski
Canticle Productions

INFO@CANTICLE-PRODUCTIONS.COM · WWW.CANTICLE-PRODUCTIONS.COM

Exhibit 8 — \$600,000 2023 Grant Final Report



CANTICLE
PRODUCTIONS

Final Report

The Motion Picture Production and Recruitment Grant has been put to use in the production of two feature films: *Hazel* and *Medora, Empress of the Badlands*. Both films were shot in summer of 2024.

Hazel is now in post-production. The musical score, the color, and the sound mix have been completed. A poster has also been completed. The visual effects are currently in progress, nearing completion. *Hazel* was shot in Bismarck with over one hundred North Dakotans involved in the shooting of it. This movie is very close to the end of post-production.

Please find Behind-the-Scenes photos from the production of *Hazel* here:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1nxj_8CasGsuUKML3FemD3hzGsPS2zQ72?usp=sharing

Please find *Medora, Empress of the Badlands* production stills and video here:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/12NaDi7hfysR9tlPYmwaw_5sYxDZJtKLV?usp=sharing

At this point, neither film has been released or shown in any public settings. Neither have they been screened at any film festivals. They have not been nominated for or received any awards. Theatrical screenings and festival screenings of *Hazel* will begin in Fall of 2025, and nominations and awards will potentially follow. Theatrical screenings and festival screenings of *Medora, Empress of the Badlands* will begin in spring of 2026, with nominations and awards potentially following.

BTS photos and footage from the productions are available for use by the State. The links are above. As we complete the film, there will be additional footage that can be made available to the State, if desired.

Medora, Empress of the Badlands is also nearing the end of post-production. A poster is being created, the musical score is in progress, the final sound mix is in progress, and the visual effects are in progress. The color grade has been completed. Over four hundred North Dakotans will have been involved in the production of this movie.

The grant money has been fully expended. I have included a breakdown of expenses. Please note that the Motion Picture Recruitment Production and Recruitment grant comprised only a portion of our total budget, so there are other expenses that were incurred by the production that were paid for by our other sources of funding.

Hazel is scheduled for release in theaters around North Dakota starting in September of 2025. Public announcements will be in the second half of July 2025, regarding its release. *Medora*,

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Exhibit 8 — \$600,000 2023 Grant Final Report



CANTICLE
PRODUCTIONS

Empress of the Badlands will be released in spring of 2026. Grants have been used for pre-production costs, production costs, and post-production costs. Both films have been beautifully captured, and both will reflect respectfully on powerful stories from North Dakota history. Our goal with both films is to motivate travel as well as instill curiosity and potentially inspire viewers to learn more about the history, culture, and landscapes of North Dakota.

Thank you again for your support!

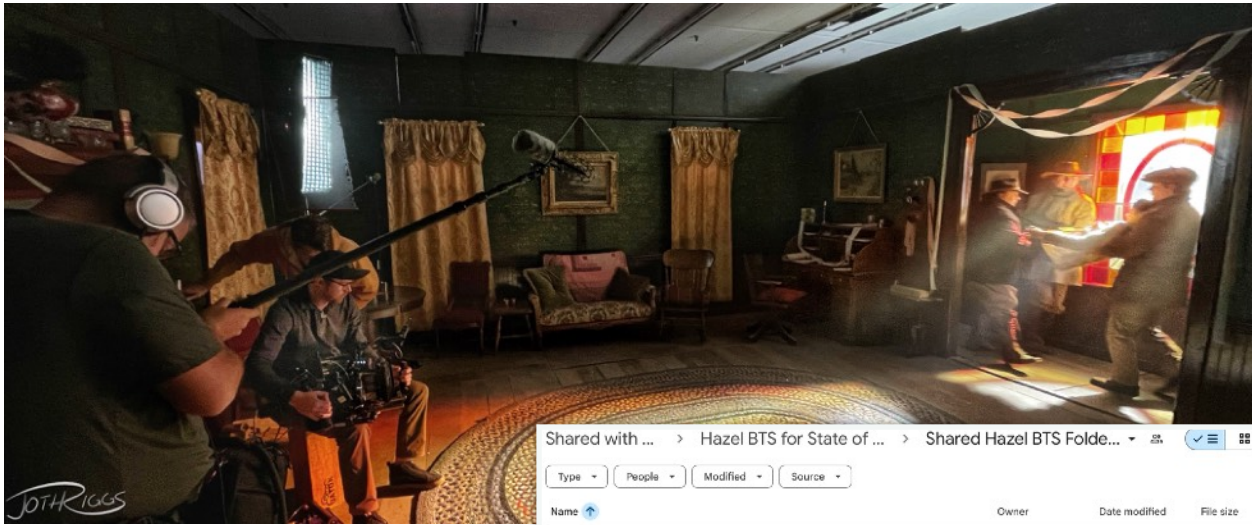
Daniel Bielinski
Canticle Productions

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Exhibit 9 — \$600,000 2023 Movie Production Balance Sheet

Expenses	
1st Asst Camera	6,100.00
1st Asst Director	16,133.33
2nd Asst Camera	4,900.00
Accounting	1,125.00
Art Department	8,272.19
Art Director	4,800.00
Art Production Assistant	1,510.00
Asst Art Director	7,200.00
Asst Wardrobe	400.00
Bank Service Charges	92.00
BTS Photography	500.00
Camera Department	11,438.83
Cast Member Per Diems	2,580.00
Casting Director	7,000.00
Catering - Food Costs	3,729.61
Colorist	20,000.00
Construction Labor	5,366.25
Costume Designer	5,100.00
Craft Services	38.98
Crew Meal Stipends	12,422.38
Director of Photography - production	19,910.00
Dog & Horse Wranglers	12,000.00
Editor	5,000.00
Equipment Rent	58,054.91
Film Development	38,200.00
Gaffer	6,700.00
Gas & Fuel	1,763.52
Grip & Electric	18,525.84
Hair & Makeup	6,934.21
Hair & Makeup Asst	5,100.00
Key Grip	15,988.00
Key Production Assistant	400.00
Lead Cast Stipends	60,882.14
Legal Fees	8,120.50
License & Permits	300.00
Location Scouting	440.00
Marketing	273.50
Meals	1,424.30
Medical Expense	600.00
Music Score	15,000.00
Music Video	484.07
Office Supplies	751.34
On-Set Carpenter	2,400.00
Photographer	2,000.00
Postage	262.90
Poster Art	1,000.00
Printing	1,705.98
Producer	2,027.24
Production Assistant	3,700.00
Production Coordinator	5,650.00
Production Department	414.14
Production Dept Office	1,587.72
Rent for production studio	9,003.00
Repairs & Maintenance	388.75
Security	674.71
Set Dresser	4,900.00
Set Materials	2,334.24
SFX Fees	800.00
Snow Coordinator	8,000.00
Snow FX	31,090.95
Sound Mixer on Set	5,900.00
Sound Mix - Post Production	20,000.00
Sound Track	300.00
Stunt Coordinator	3,990.00
Supplies	4,019.44
Swing Grip & Electric	5,725.00
Travel	
Airfare	163.99
Gas/Fuel	147.82
Ground Transportation	141.01
Lodging	28,575.15
Parking	11.00
Travel - Other	390.28
Total Travel	29,429.25
Trailer	4,000.00
Venue Rentals	1,882.98
VFX Expenses	299.00
VFX Supervisor	5,000.00
Additional VFX Fee	5,000.00
Wardrobe	1,364.78
Wardrobe Assistant	5,500.00
Website	300.15
Workers Comp Insurance	1,718.60
Additional Wrangling	1,000.00
Poster additional cost	1,000.00
Additional BTS photographer payment	2,500.00
Additional DP payment - color session	1,570.27
Additional Color Payment	20,843.70
Final Sound Mix payment	11,500.00
Total	606,343.70
Total	606,343.70
Grant Amount:	\$600,000

Exhibit 10 — \$600,000 2023 Grant Film & Photo Assets (Film #1: Hazel)



Shared with ... > Hazel BTS for State of ... > Shared Hazel BTS Folders

Type | People | Modified | Source

Name	Owner	Date modified	File size
Copy of final 27.JPG	danielbielinski	Jul 1	2 MB
Copy of final 28.JPG	danielbielinski	Jul 1	2.3 MB
Copy of final 29.JPG	danielbielinski	Jul 1	2.2 MB
Copy of final 30-1.JPG	danielbielinski	Jul 1	1.9 MB
Copy of final 30.JPG	danielbielinski	Jul 1	1.9 MB
Copy of final 31.JPG	danielbielinski	Jul 1	1.7 MB
Copy of final 38.JPG	danielbielinski	Jul 1	2 MB
Copy of final 39.JPG	danielbielinski	Jul 1	1.8 MB

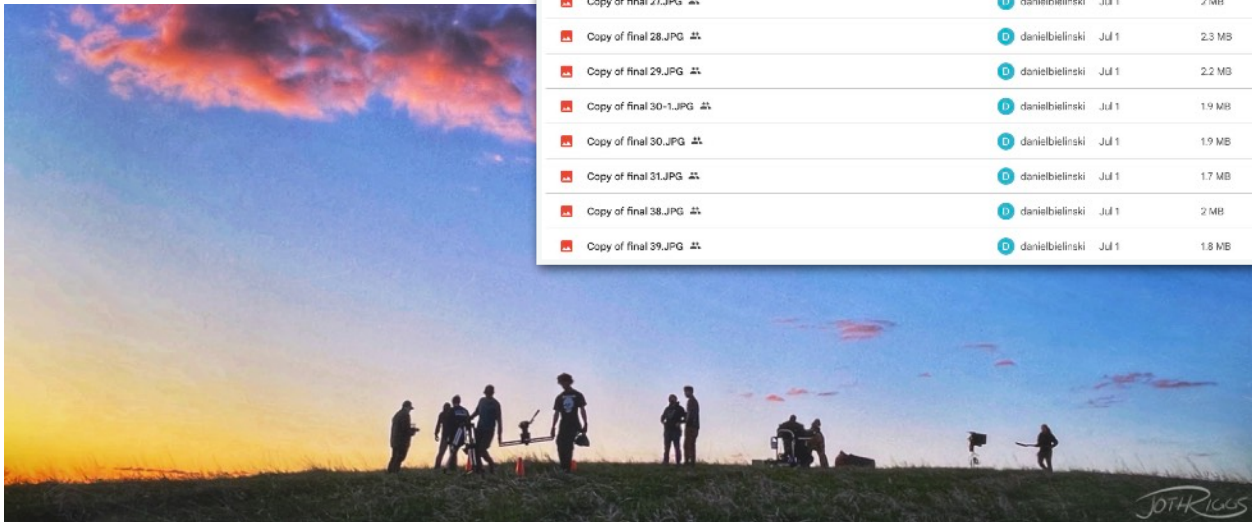
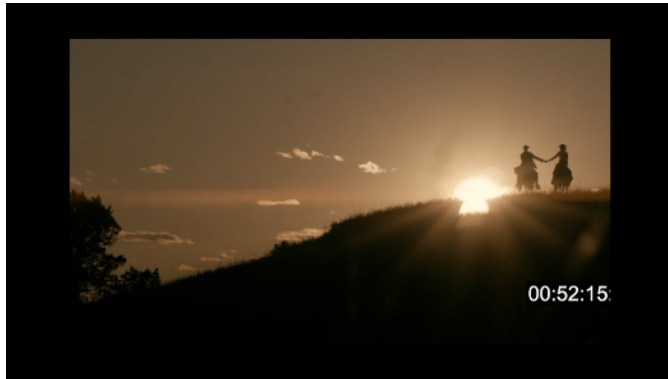
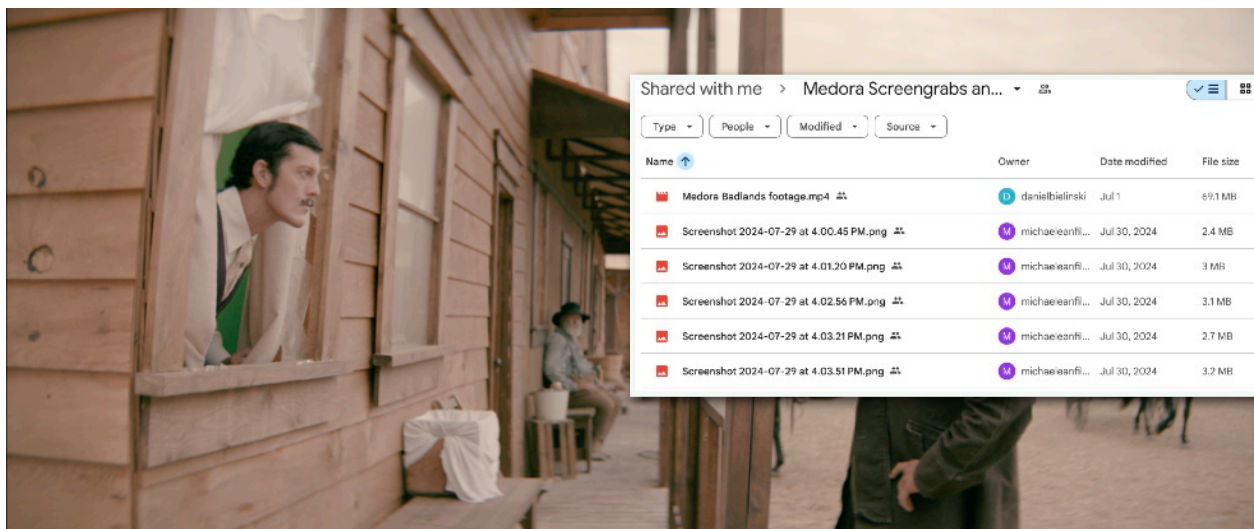


Exhibit 11 — \$600,000 2023 Grant Film & Photo Assets (Film #2: Medora)



Video Title: Medora Badlands footage
Length: 00:53 seconds
Resolution: 720p (1280x720)
[Watch Here](#)

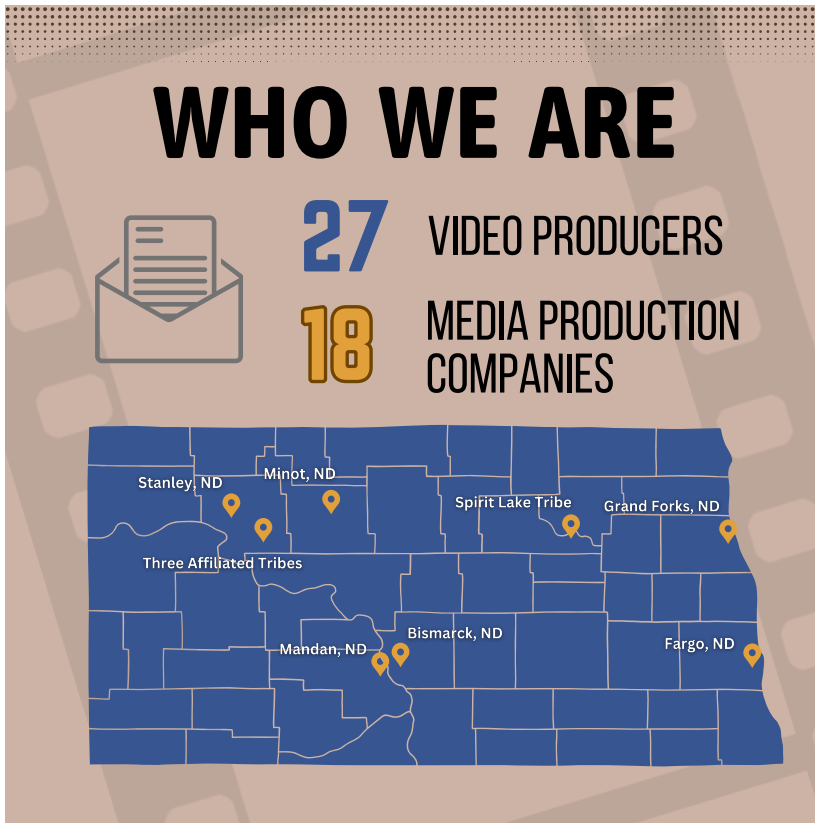
Note:
Standard Marketing Resolution:
4K (3840x2160)



Shared with me > Medora Screenshot 2024-07-29 at 4.03.51 PM.png

Name	Owner	Date modified	File size
Medora Badlands footage.mp4	denielbialinski	Jul 1	69.1 MB
Screenshot 2024-07-29 at 4.00.45 PM.png	michaeearfi...	Jul 30, 2024	2.4 MB
Screenshot 2024-07-29 at 4.01.20 PM.png	michaeearfi...	Jul 30, 2024	3 MB
Screenshot 2024-07-29 at 4.02.56 PM.png	michaeearfi...	Jul 30, 2024	3.1 MB
Screenshot 2024-07-29 at 4.03.21 PM.png	michaeearfi...	Jul 30, 2024	2.7 MB
Screenshot 2024-07-29 at 4.03.51 PM.png	michaeearfi...	Jul 30, 2024	3.2 MB

Exhibit 12 — List of North Dakota Filmmakers Requesting Investigation



Kevin Ackley, *Chamber Six Media*
 Jason Allen, *Independent Producer*
 Easton Bennett, *Bennett Creative Media*
 Sean Coffman, *Independent Producer*
 Oscar De Leon, *Chamber Six Media*
 Justin Deegan, *Thunder Revolution Studio*
 Steven Dettling, *Quantum Digital*
 Marek Dojs, *Independent Producer*
 Adam Dyess, *Dyess Media, LLC*
 Matt Fern, *Prairieland Motion Pictures*
 Wayne Footh, *Lostwood Media LLC*
 Gina Footh, *Lostwood Media LLC*
 Cole Gendreau, *Stand Firm Productions*
 Connor Hellman, *Hellman Media*
 Caleb Hauff, *Threefold*
 Keenan Hauff, *Threefold*
 Paul Hoplin, *Twin Tandem Studios*
 Nolan Johnson, *Quantum Digital*
 Adam J. Kempenich, *Threefold, Kempix*
 Jonah J Lantto, *The Good Talk Network*
 Ethan Lohnes, *Tiwahe Media*
 Danielle Molinaro, *Threefold*
 Christine Morse, *Make a Difference Pictures*
 Derek Olson, *Independent Producer*
 Benjamin Weisbeck, *BWeis Media*

Exhibit 13 — Surrounding State Film Programs

