NORTH Dakota | Commerce
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**Legislative Audit and Fiscal Review Committee**
March 24, 2026

Chairman Magrum and members of Legislative Audit and Fiscal Review Committee, I am Chris Schilken, Commissioner of North Dakota Department of Commerce.

**Wonder Fund**
While neither the State of North Dakota, the NDDF nor the Department of Commerce was a named party to the lawsuit involving Wonder Fund, the litigation has since been dismissed with prejudice.

Here is the list of Wonder Funds' investments:

**2023 Total Invested: $8,750,009.55**
The Wonder Fund made investments in the following companies during calendar year 2023:

- Airtonomy, Inc.
- RxE2, Inc.
- HerdDogg, Inc.

**2024 Total Invested: $10,430,178.21**
The Wonder Fund made investments in the following companies during calendar year 2024:

- Tovolo Inc.
- Drut Technologies Inc.
- Quantron AG
- Scranton Holding Company
- Modern Hygiene, Inc.
- HerdDogg, Inc.
- Crop Diagnostix
- Go to Green Security Inc.

**2025 Total Invested: $9,399,419.11**
The Wonder Fund made investments in the following companies during calendar year 2025:

- HerdDogg, Inc.
- Laptis, Inc.
- FarmQA, Inc.
- Scranton Holding Company
- FlyGuys, Inc.
- RxE2, Inc.
- Taq Ortho, Inc.
- Coco Coders, Inc

**The Tourism Destination Development Grant Program**

The Destination Development Grant program was allocated $25 million by the 67th legislative assembly. The program was introduced and supported by more than 20 tourism industry associations and partners to provide an incentive for the development of tourism, a top industry that is key to economic diversification and quality of life.

2023-2025 Grant Program Status below:

- **Program Status:** Projects funded through the 2023–2025 Destination Development Grant are either actively underway or have already been completed.
- Completed projects include:
  - Brews, Chews, and Views in Minot, North Dakota
  - Good Bear Bay Lodge at Indian Hills Resort in Garrison, North Dakota
  - Thrill Hills in Fort Ransom, North Dakota
  - Theodore Presidential Library in Medora, North Dakota
  - Woodland Resort Shores Event Center in Devils Lake, North Dakota

The remaining projects are underway and have made progress toward their goals since being awarded.

As of March 15, 2026, $10,380,340.37 has been disbursed to the 2023–2025 Destination Development Grant (DDG) grantees.

- **2023–2025 DDG Grantees and Awarded Amounts:**
  - Bison World – Jamestown, North Dakota – $3,000,000
  - Bottineau Winter Park – Bottineau, North Dakota – $1,450,000
  - Brews, Chews, and Views (Visit Minot) – Minot, North Dakota – $1,000,000 *(completed)*
  - Dickinson Museum Center Expansion Project – Dickinson, North Dakota – $1,000,000
  - Frost Fire Park – Walhalla, North Dakota – $1,750,000
  - Good Bear Bay Lodge at Indian Hills Resort and Campground – Garrison, North Dakota – $200,000 *(completed)*
  - Huff Hills Ski Area – Mandan, North Dakota – $650,000
  - Riverfront Festival Grounds – Bismarck, North Dakota – $4,000,000
  - Prairie Wings Hunting & Fishing Lodge – Medina, North Dakota – $500,000
  - The Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library – public boardwalk – Medora, North Dakota – $4,000,000 *(completed)*
  - Thrill Hills Lodge – Fort Ransom, North Dakota – $200,000 *(completed)*
  - Turtle Mountain Comprehensive Tourism Plan (Pembina Powwow Arbor, Pembina Cultural Roundhouse, and the Veteran's Park) – Belcourt, North Dakota – $1,500,000
  - Western Heritage – Medora, North Dakota – $4,000,000
  - Woodland Resort Shores Event Center – Devils Lake, North Dakota – $1,750,000 *(completed)*

- While only five projects have been completed, we are also reporting early metrics and outcomes for two additional projects that are still underway. Below is a summary of new activity and revenue these projects have generated. We will continue to capture data that will help determine the return-on-investment. Good Bear Bay Lodge at Indian Hills Resort and Campground – As of December 2025, the facility had hosted 89 nights of guests between May 15 and November 15, averaging six adults per night, and has already secured 60 nights for the 2026 season. Recent visits included Hunt On X and editors from Outdoor Life, Gun Dog, and MeatEater. Pheasants Forever and the North Dakota Game & Fish provided education on local habitat challenges and promoted the Meadowlark Initiative. These opportunities were made possible through the Good Bear Bay Lodge.
- Woodland Resort Shores Event Center Since opening in June 2025, the Shores Event Center at Woodland Resort has welcomed an estimated 3,111 visitors, including about 1,000 out-of-state guests and 1,500 first time visitors, with an average stay of three nights. These visitors generated approximately $66,700 in additional revenue, and the venue already has 25 events scheduled for 2026. The Destination Development Grant made it possible to build a modern event space that attracts new audiences to Devils Lake and brings in out-of-state visitors beyond the region's traditional fishing and hunting market.
    - Huff Hills Ski Area -Huff Hills' project is still underway, but the completed night-skiing components have already shown strong early results. Night operations drew over 600 participants this season and generated more than $15,000 in lift ticket and rental revenue in just one month, not including added food and beverage sales. The expanded evening hours also provided additional practice time for the youth race team. Grant support made it possible for Huff Hills to complete the night-skiing, snowmaking, and tubing-area upgrades together.
    - Bottineau Winter Park – Bottineau Winter Park's project is still underway, but early improvements have already generated measurable impact. The upgrades completed so far allowed the park to open two weeks earlier, resulting in 500 additional visitors at the start of the season. Completion, including a new snowmaking pumphouse, is scheduled for this summer and is expected to extend both the early and late season operating windows.

The Destination Development Grant program was funded $15 million during the 2025 session.

The North Dakota Department of Commerce awarded grants to 23 projects across the state. These investments will enhance tourism infrastructure, elevate visitor experiences and support long-term economic growth in communities large and small.
The 2025 grant cycle received 106 applications from 50 communities requesting $153.2 million in proposals aimed at making North Dakota a must-visit destination. The projects varied widely in scope and appeal, targeting distinct visitor segments and offering new or expanded experiences designed to attract new travelers, while enhancing residents' quality of life.

- **Program Status:** All grant agreements have been distributed to the award recipients, and projects are currently in their initial phases. Some grantees have begun submitting disbursement requests. For those awarded no-match grants, the initial 25% of their funding has been disbursed. The first round of quarterly grantee reporting was due on December 31, 2025. All grantees

provided a report on the status of their projects. The second round of quarterly reports are due on March 31, 2026.

As of March 15, 2026, $1,287,270.66 has been disbursed to the 2025-2027 destination development grantees.

- **2025-2027 DDG Grantees and Awarded Amounts:**
  - Badlands Gateway Trails – Medora, North Dakota: $462,457
  - Barn to Yarn Experience – Nome Schoolhouse, North Dakota: $181,200
  - Bear Creek Events & Cultural Center – Fargo area, North Dakota: $1,000,000
  - Boathouse Bunkhouse – Devils Lake, North Dakota: $235,900
  - Carrington Rainbow Gardens & Interpretive Center – Carrington, North Dakota: $200,000
  - Hearthside Vineyard and Winery – Oakes, North Dakota: $500,000
  - Heartland Trading Post – Rugby area, North Dakota: $152,000
  - Icewind Brewing – Casselton, North Dakota: $350,000
  - Jurassic Junction – Hettinger, North Dakota: $1,200,000
  - Medora Conference & Heritage Commons – Medora, North Dakota: $250,000
  - Miniature Golf at Frontier Village – Jamestown, North Dakota: $212,500
  - *ND Country Fest Accommodations & Permanent Stage – New Salem, North Dakota: $4,000,000 (Declined award. Grand portal reopened)*
  - Raising the Bar for the Arts – Jamestown, North Dakota: $500,000
  - Red Panda Legacy Project – Fargo, North Dakota: $250,000
  - Red River Valley Grandstand – West Fargo, North Dakota: $616,697
  - Scandinavian Heritage Park – Minot, North Dakota: $110,943
  - 6 Mile Lodge Expansion – Devils Lake, North Dakota: $250,000
  - Stockman's Square – Watford City, North Dakota: $400,000
  - Tourism Makerspace Hub – Mandan, North Dakota: $500,000
  - Trestle Commons – Bismarck, North Dakota: $500,000
  - Up North Cabins – Langdon, North Dakota: $97,000
  - Urbain Cote Round Barn RV "FARM" – Dunseith, North Dakota: $3,000,000
  - Valley City Heritage Voices – Valley City, North Dakota: $31,303

After ND Country Fest declined their $4 million dollar grant in early 2026, the application window was re-opened on February 10 and closed again on March 10. Based on learnings from the first round, the application portal was improved to make it easier for applicants to provide the required information and for the committee to review the most important metrics. For example, the application will ask for projected numbers of visitors, defined as having traveled at least 50 miles or stayed overnight versus general attendees. We received 103 applications totaling $86 million in funding support. The review process is underway with the goal of announcing the successful applicant(s) on April 30th

This concludes my testimony and I open the flow for any questions. Thank you.