

2025 SENATE ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES

SB 2340

2025 SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Energy and Natural Resources Committee Room JW216, State Capitol

SB 2340
1/31/2025

A BILL for an Act to provide for a legislative management study to evaluate the evolving fire service operational and response needs of the state.

9:00 a.m. Chairman Patten opened the meeting.

Members present:

Chairman Patten, Vice Chairman Kessel, Senators: Beard, Boehm, Enget, Gerhardt, and Van Oosting.

Discussion Topics:

- Regionalized fire districts
- Fire response coordination, funding, and training
- Reactionary response
- Personal experience testimony
- Emergency manager role
- Communication with other departments
- US Fire Service collaboration
- Regional Hazmat teams

9:01 a.m. Senator Greg Kessel, District 39, introduced the bill and submitted testimony in favor #33164.

9:08 a.m. Douglas D. Nelson, State Fire Marshal of ND State Fire Marshal's Office, testified in favor and submitted testimony #32504.

9:14 a.m. Matthew J. Clark, Fire Chief of City of Williston, testified in favor and submitted testimony #32923.

9:23 a.m. Kyle Shockley, Chief of Billings County Rural Fire Prot. Dist., testified in favor and submitted testimony #33069.

9:35 a.m. Michael W. Smith, Director of Williams County Emergency Management, testified in favor and submitted testimony #33003.

9:52 a.m. David Uhlich, Fire Chief of Watford City Fire Department, testified in favor and submitted testimony #33126.

9:56 a.m. Ken D. Wangen, Fire Chief of Carrington Volunteer Fire and Rescue, testified in favor and submitted testimony #33100.

Additional written testimony:

Jeremy Presnell, City of Dickinson FD, submitted testimony in favor #32334.

Wayde Sick, State Director of ND Dept. of Career and Technical Education, submitted testimony in favor #32629.

Rick W. Schreiber, Fire Chief of Arnegard Rural Fire District, submitted testimony in favor #32961.

Dennis Pathroff, Power Companies of ND, submitted testimony in favor #33099.

John W. Hejl, Chief of Casselton Fire Department, submitted testimony in favor #33124.

Karolin Jappe, Emergency Manager of McKenzie County submitted testimony #33155.

10:10 a.m. Chairman Patten closed the hearing.

Kendra McCann, Committee Clerk

CITY OF
DICKINSON | Department of Fire
North Dakota

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill No. 2340

January 27, 2025

Mr. Chairperson and Members of the Senate Committee Name:

My name is Jeremy Presnell, and I serve as the Fire Chief for the City of Dickinson, North Dakota. I am submitting this testimony on behalf of the Dickinson Fire Department and the City of Dickinson in strong support of Senate Bill No. 2340, which proposes a legislative management study to evaluate the evolving fire service operational and response needs of our state. As a fire service leader deeply involved in both urban and rural emergency response, I believe this bill is essential to ensuring the safety and resilience of North Dakota communities.

The fire service in North Dakota is facing unprecedented challenges due to increasing call volumes, greater demand for specialized training, and the complexity of emergencies, including wildland-urban interface incidents. Senate Bill No. 2340 takes a comprehensive and forward-thinking approach by addressing critical aspects of fire service operations:

1. **Coordination of Resources:** Enhanced coordination among existing state resources will lead to improved organization, mobilization, and training, ensuring that fire departments across the state can respond effectively to emergencies.
2. **Regional Response Teams:** Establishing fire service regional response teams will enable swift and efficient deployment of resources, particularly in areas that may lack the capacity to handle large-scale or complex emergencies on their own.
3. **Standardized Training and Authority:** Standardized training and clearly defined authority for fire service operations will promote consistency and preparedness across all levels of emergency response.
4. **Staffing and Structural Needs:** Evaluating staffing capabilities, cross-training opportunities, and backfill provisions will ensure the fire service has the personnel and resources to meet growing demands. Additionally, this evaluation can help address workforce retention and benefits, both of which are vital for sustaining the fire service.
5. **Fiscal Support:** Transitioning to a restructured model of fiscal support that reduces dependency on local property taxes will provide equitable funding and alleviate financial

strain on local communities. This will ensure the sustainability of fire services across North Dakota.

6. **Unified Fire Service Model:** Reviewing and updating state laws and administrative rules to implement a unified fire service model will streamline operations and enhance collaboration among stakeholders.

This bill also calls for collaboration with key partners, including the State Fire Marshal, North Dakota Firefighter's Association, North Dakota Forest Service, and other critical stakeholders. Their collective expertise will ensure that the study provides actionable recommendations that reflect the unique needs of North Dakota's diverse communities.

Senate Bill No. 2340 is not just about addressing the challenges of today but also preparing for the challenges of tomorrow. By investing in this study, the state legislature will provide a roadmap to strengthen our fire service infrastructure, improve emergency response capabilities, and protect the lives and property of North Dakota residents.

I urge the members of this committee to support Senate Bill No. 2340 and prioritize the safety and well-being of our communities. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeremy Presnell
Fire Chief
City of Dickinson, North Dakota



TESTIMONY

Douglas Nelson, State Fire Marshal

Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee

January 31st, 2025

To the Honorable Senator Patten, Chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, and Committee members,

My involvement in the October fires started on the Monday following the large weekend fires. Our office was requested to investigate two of the fires. As I surveyed the area what I noticed beyond the damage, losses, and charred remains, was that fire departments were still running emergent to contain and control hot spot fires over 48 hours after the fires had started. Many of the same people that started working these fires on Saturday morning, were still working these fires on Monday afternoon. This was not only true in Williams County, but I have spoken with responders from the other fires as well and know that they as well were working tirelessly day in and day out to control the fires.

This is evidence of the strength of our communities, volunteers, and all responders that helped to control and recover from these fires. However, this is the second time within three years that our state has run into these types of conditions and experienced whole towns threatened by the speed and intensity of fires. We need to ensure that we are supporting and preparing local front-line firefighters to the fullest through studying fire service responsibilities, coordination and response to emergencies.

As I drove back to Bismarck from Williams County, the question that arose in my mind after noting this is, "am I doing enough?". Is there more that my office can do to help the State during large scale or state fire emergencies. If the answer is yes, then we should be doing that. In North Dakota, we take pride with being as efficient and effective as we can with what we have. If there is a way that we can further support local jurisdictions and state agency partners, we should have the authority, training and organization to jump in and help.

The State Fire Marshals Office is comprised of 10 dedicated staff to our specialty of fire prevention through fire investigation, plan review, fire inspections, and community risk reduction. Part of our training is to train in firefighter certifications, and most of our staff are current or have been firefighters in their careers. Our office has this training and experience, yet we lack any authority to assist or help during these statewide or large-scale emergencies. Now, I am not stating that our small staff can make a significant impact just by activating us, but what I suggest that we study is how all of our resources at the state

and local level can be involved in an organized framework for response to support one-another. By evaluating what is possible in coordination with the Department of Forestry, North Dakota Firefighters Association, the Department of Emergency Services, the North Dakota National Guard, and other state agency partners, we may be capable of much more together with an organized plan.

We also could benefit from studying how our local jurisdictions are part of our state-wide response. Identifying training levels, mobilization plans, coordination of resources, will help ensure we are prepared for the next long-term or large-scale fire service emergency.

Not only wildfires, but large-scale structure fires, floods, tornados, structural collapse, or other emergencies, we can prepare this framework together. It is well known that the volunteer fire service is challenged with recruitment and retention issues. With no quick solution foreseeable to this, identifying how we mobilize and support each other at the local and state level is more important than ever. We have an opportunity to identify the most efficient and more importantly effective ways for our fire service to prepare itself and to support ourselves within the state for any fire emergency.

I have spoken to many fire chiefs on the heels of this fire. What I have learned is that we don't have the answer right now, but need time and funding to study what is the best operational coordination for our state fire service to work with and support each other. This study will give us the opportunity to get stakeholders to the table, have the discussions, ideas and agreements in place to move forward with a prepared fire service in North Dakota. The State Fire Marshal's Office supports Senate Bill 2340, and we ask for your support to better prepare our fire service.



Senate Energy and Natural Resources

SB2340

January 31, 2025

Chairman Patten and members of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee. My name is Wayde Sick, and I serve as the State Director for the Department of Career and Technical Education. I am submitting testimony in support of SB2340.

This study, which includes Career and Technical Education, would help address the workforce needs of the fire service industry. I am optimistic the results of this study will open more opportunities for North Dakota students to learn about career opportunities in fire service through career exploration and high school fire service programs.

This concludes my testimony, and I am happy to stand for any questions.



January 27th, 2025

North Dakota Insurance Commissioner's Office
North Dakota State Fire Marshal's Office

RE: Support for SB-2340

Chairman and Committee Members

I am Dr. Matthew J. Clark, the City of Williston's fire chief. On behalf of the Williston Fire Department and the City of Williston, I extend our strong support for Senate Bill 2340, which proposes a comprehensive study to evaluate and address the evolving fire service operational and response needs within the state of North Dakota.

As outlined in SB 2340, the proposed legislative management study is essential for ensuring that the state's fire service infrastructure is equipped to meet the demands of modern emergency response. Specifically, the focus on improving coordination, creating regional response teams, and standardizing training reflects an understanding of the complex challenges faced by fire departments across North Dakota.

In Williston, we are acutely aware of the increasing demands on our fire service as we address the needs of a growing population, evolving risks, and limited resources. The growth of our community, driven in large part by the expansion of the oil and gas industries, has significantly increased the demand for emergency services. Additionally, our region is routinely impacted by severe storms and experiences elevated emergency call volumes, further underscoring the need for a comprehensive evaluation of fire service capabilities. The proposed study's emphasis on evaluating staffing, training, equipment, and structural needs is crucial for enhancing our ability to protect lives and property effectively.

Additionally, the exploration of alternative funding mechanisms, as detailed in SB 2340, could significantly reduce reliance on local property taxes, creating a more equitable and sustainable financial model for fire services statewide.

The collaborative approach outlined in the bill, which includes consultation with key stakeholders such as the North Dakota Firefighter's Association, the North Dakota Fire Chief's Association, and other relevant entities, ensures that the study will benefit from the collective expertise and insights of the fire service community. We believe this collaborative framework will yield actionable recommendations that align with the realities and needs of fire departments throughout the state.

Furthermore, the consideration of wildland-urban interface fire prevention codes and emergency response operational initiatives directly addresses the unique challenges posed by North Dakota's diverse landscape. These efforts are critical for safeguarding our communities and ensuring resilience in the face of natural and human-made emergencies.

The Williston Fire Department and the City of Williston are committed to supporting initiatives that strengthen North Dakota's fire service capabilities and enhance the safety and well-being of our residents. We stand ready to contribute to this important study and collaborate with state leaders to implement its recommendations.

We urge you to advance SB 2340 and prioritize the vital work it seeks to accomplish. Together, we can build a stronger, more responsive fire service that meets the needs of all North Dakotans.

Thank you for your leadership and commitment to public safety.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Clark', with a large, sweeping flourish extending from the end.

Dr. Matthew J. Clark

Fire Chief, Williston Fire Department



Arnegard Rural Fire District

Rick Schreiber – Fire/Med Chief, 1st Asst. Chief JC Collison, 2nd Asst. Chief Wes Kindel
Arnegard Fire Department 307 133rd AVE. Po Box 735 Arnegard ND, 58835

January 30th, 2025
RE: Support for SB-2340

Chairman and Committee Members,

I am Mr. Rick Schreiber, the Arnegard Rural Fire District (ARFD) Chief and Board President. I would like to extend our support for Senate Bill 2340.

After the 700-acre fire storm we experienced on October 5th we are intimately aware of the increased demands that are put on our firefighters particularly our volunteer organizations.

Recruitment and funding continue to be a problem across the country with fire and EMS organizations closing their doors almost daily. Staying ahead of this and trying to find viable solutions is just a good idea. After-all, we're all in this thing together.

I would be happy to stand for any questions.

Respectfully,

Rick Schreiber, Board President	1.701.570.1097
JC "Jeff" Collison, Vice President	1.303.886.8756
Michelle Schreiber, Secretary/Treasurer	1.307.620.1704
Jim Larson (Captain), Voting member	1.701.570.4283
Jeff Kindel, Voting Member	1.701.713.6691



Senate Bill 2340 Testimony: In Favor – DO PASS
January 31, 2025 | 9:00 am | Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee

Chairman Patten and Committee Members,

I am Mike Smith, the Director of Emergency Management for Williams County, on behalf of Williams County Emergency Management, I express my strong support for Senate Bill 2340. This bill proposes a legislative management study to evaluate and improve fire service operational and response needs in North Dakota. This legislation represents an essential step forward in addressing the critical challenges we face as a county situated at the heart of the Bakken oil and gas industry.

Williams County continues to experience an increased demand for all-hazards emergency response due to several converging factors. The high-volume transportation of hazardous materials, driven by the oil and gas sector, poses significant risks to public safety and necessitates a well-prepared and coordinated response framework. Furthermore, the region's population growth, coupled with natural weather events like wildfires and severe storms, places additional strain on our emergency response systems and the rural and city fire services that operate in Williams County.

SB2340's emphasis on studying fire service coordination, training, and resource mobilization directly aligns with the needs of Williams County. Specifically:

1. **Addressing Increased Calls for Service:** The volume of emergency response calls in Williams County has risen significantly due to industrial activity and population growth. A regional response model, as proposed in SB 2340, would ensure a more efficient allocation of resources to handle these demands.
2. **Managing Hazardous Materials and Industrial Risks:** The Bakken region's reliance on the transport and storage of hazardous materials heightens the importance of specialized training and a unified response framework. By establishing authority for standardized training and operational protocols, SB 2340 will help improve preparedness and safety for responders and the community.
3. **Adapting to Natural and Human-Caused Disasters:** From wildfires to extreme weather events, the county regularly faces emergencies that require coordinated efforts across multiple jurisdictions. SB 2340's focus on evaluating staffing abilities, training needs, and resource distribution is crucial for building resilience to these challenges.
4. **Supporting Volunteer Firefighters and Retention:** Our volunteer fire service faces recruitment and retention challenges, which further exacerbates response difficulties. The study's evaluation of fiscal support mechanisms and minimum training requirements will aid in sustaining this vital workforce and enhancing their capabilities.

I commend the bill's inclusive approach, which seeks input from stakeholders such as the State Fire Marshal, the North Dakota Firefighters Association, and the Department of Emergency Services. Collaboration between these entities is essential to create a cohesive and effective response model for North Dakota's diverse needs.

In closing, I urge the members of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee to support SB 2340. This study will not only benefit Williams County, but also strengthen the state's capacity to protect lives, property, and resources in the face of growing challenges.

Thank you for considering my perspective. I would be happy to provide further input or collaborate on this initiative as needed.

Sincerely,

Michael W. Smith, CEM, Director of Emergency Management
 Williams County, North Dakota

Michael W. Smith, CEM | Director, Emergency Management

PO Box 2047 | 3429 4th Ave W | Williston, ND 58802-2047 | Office 701.577.7707 | mikesm@co.williams.nd.us



Billings County Rural Fire Protection District
 Po Box 596, Belfield ND, 58622
 Chief Shockley 701-690-0041

January 29, 2025

To: Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee

Subject: SB 2340

My name is Kyle Shockley, I currently serve as the Fire Chief and Emergency Manager of Billings County. I have been a firefighter for 25 years, in North Dakota, serving in multiple different positions as both a Volunteer and Career firefighter. Out of those 25 years I have been a Fire Chief for 17 of those years. I served as the Assistant Emergency Manager of Billings county for 2 ½ years and now as the Emergency Manager for the past 3 ½ years.

Through my years of service, I have primarily worked in the SW and SE regions of the state but I also have some time spent in the NW region. My multiple roles in emergency services over the years have taken me to many different places and has given me a good look at the emergency responses that happen across North Dakota. When I read SB 2340 I gave it a lot of thought, kicked around some ideas. Taking some of my past experiences with working floods in the Red River Valley, responding to Hazmats, taking command of the Medora Fire in 2021; seeing what other fire chiefs and emergency managers have encountered even in just recent years, I easily came to the conclusion that this study is just what North Dakota needs. This state has never put together a study like this in the past, and bringing in all of the stakeholders from the local level up to the state level will only make us all better prepared for the future.

I have read the majority of the testimonies that you have heard today or are about to hear and I agree 100% with every word on those testimonies. With that being said I'm going to give some bullet points on what this study can help North Dakota emergency responders with to better prepare for the future.

1. Almost every emergency agency has a plan for an initial response to an incident and a plan for those initial calls for mutual aid. These plans are excellent and will always play a vital role in emergency responses, but what happens in the cases like what happened in western North Dakota in 2021 and fall of 2024 when you have every fire department out on fires for several consecutive counties, along with a large amount of state and federal resources?
 This study will help us build a larger tiered response system that goes beyond our neighbors in surrounding counties.
2. North Dakota is made up of about 94% of volunteer firefighters. What happens when the volunteers in a drought area of the state are running multiple calls all week long and then the National Weather Service calls for a Red Flag Warning all weekend? I do believe that this study will help us build a protocol to easily allow fire districts to backfill their fire stations during those High Danger days which would allow us to take a more proactive stance for responding to incidents. This study could also build a plan for reimbursing these districts that come to help backfill our stations.
3. In the North Dakota fire service, we not only deal with private property, we also respond to fires on federal lands in many areas throughout the state. My fire district deals a lot with the US Forest Service (USFS). In 2017, we had 1 large fire, and 3 large fires in 2021. At these fires I was approached to sign a US Forest Service Delegation of authority while still actively working with my fire department and neighboring departments to get fires contained. With the wording in these delegations if their rules are not followed or they want to assess charges for the fire, the named individuals who sign their delegation could become partially financially responsible for the costs of resources used. This concerns me because I have had

conversations with fire chiefs who also deal with the USFS and have been approached to sign these delegations and they had no idea what they were signing, they were just told that they needed to. Not sure if this committee is aware that the Elk Horn fire in McKenzie County back in October had costs racked up to 1 million dollars. For the USFS to think it's ok to possibly put a fraction of that cost onto a North Dakota Fire District is not ok, and even a small fraction of that amount could bankrupt a fire district. With this study we can come up with a plan to not only assure that all fire chiefs in the state know the rules, but to also give them the tools they need to not get their fire department into a financial bind. This study could also help us build a protocol on who and when do these delegations from federal agencies get signed.

With this study I know the North Dakota Fire Service, Department of Emergency Services, along with other responders in the state can come up with a final product that can be a great benefit to everyone. This would help give fire departments and emergency managers more tools to take more of a proactive stance vs. being reactive.

The Billings County Rural Fire Protection District is in favor of Senate Bill 2340, and asks for your support in helping all of the North Dakota Fire Service better prepare for the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kyle Shockley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Kyle" and last name "Shockley" clearly distinguishable.

Kyle Shockley, Fire Chief
Billings County Rural Fire Prot. Dist.



Good morning, Chairman Patten and members of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee,

The Power Companies of North Dakota (“PCND”) urges a “Do Pass” recommendation on SB 2340.

PCND is a coalition of the state’s leading shareholder-owned gas and electric utilities. Our members include MDU Resources Group, Xcel Energy, Otter Tail Power Company, and ALLETE. Together, PCND members serve over 427,000 North Dakota customers, employ over 1,200 North Dakotans, and manage significant power generation and transmission infrastructure across our state.

Today, we express PCND’s strong support for SB 2340, the legislative management study on the fire service regional response model.

The proposed study is essential to strengthening the state’s emergency readiness and response to wildfires. Coordinated fire service operations and regional response teams will help mitigate the impact of wildfires, ensuring uninterrupted power supply, protection of essential infrastructure, and public safety.

PCND is committed to participating in this important study and offering our members’ expertise to help develop effective and actionable recommendations.

Accordingly, PCND strongly urges a “Do Pass” recommendation on SB 2340.

Thank you, Chairman Patten and committee members.

Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee

Date 1/31/2025.

Testimony on Senate Bill 2340

Submitted by: Ken Wangen, Fire Chief Carrington Volunteer Fire and Rescue,

Chairman Patten and the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, Good Morning. For the record my name is Ken Wangen, I am the Fire Chief for Carrington Volunteer Fire and Rescue. I want to thank you for considering Senate Bill 2340.

July 5th, 2024, 3:43 A.M. Carrington Volunteer Fire and Rescue was paged out for a Vehicle/Locomotive/Train Fire involving unknown hazmat. The First Trucks left at 3:48 thinking we were dealing with a small-scale fire, we responded with 2 trucks (1 pumper 1 pumper/tanker). Upon leaving city limits and seeing a large orange glow to the southeast an all call was issue. At 4:15 A.M. first units arrived on scene advising that we had a multicar derailment with a large fire and hazmat release. We immediately went into defense mode and notified the population of Bordulac and the endangered farms around the area giving the option of evacuation or shelter in place (2 homes choose to evacuate). The area was then secured off as best we could. Recon teams were set to identify the front and rear of the derailment stack, estimate the number of cars, and find the train crew. Command was in in contact with CPKC's Hazmat Response Division, Devils Lake Fire, Jamestown Fire and Grand Forks for advice and information exchange. Recon returned the stack consisted of cars containing Methanol (6) cars, Anhydrous (11) cars and Medical Grade Plastic pellets (12) cars) the train crew was safe and uninjured. Unified command was established, and we continued monitoring, setting a staging zone and securing immediate site.

The fire while impressive and looked like nightmare because of the billowing black smoke, it wasn't. The fire was advantageous as it burned off the Methanol and Anhydrous Ammonia, unfortunately the plastic beads acted very much like an oil fire and made it impossible to extinguish had we tried to and would have created a larger clean up mess.

Issues we encountered:

Weather: The Hazmat and control of release was not a big issue for this incident. What was an issue? the wind or more precisely the lack of it. We had no wind to help dissipate the plume or fumes. Rain caused it and it rained heavily the first couple days adding to the already full water shed creating a muddy and wet hot zone. The nightly temperature inversion with no wind made working at night impossible, this alone extended the response multiple days.

Personnel for extended or multiple operational cycles: Having a rotating stream of personnel to maintain coverage was an issue, #1 because it was the 4th of July weekend, #2 prior experience indicated it was going to be a long incident. We called in firefighters from New Rockford, Sykeston, Harvey, Pingree, Kensal, Jamestown Rural and Devils Lake. We ran out of local and regional personnel by day 8 and had to bring in contract firefighters to continue to provide coverage for the site. Thankfully the release mitigation of the cars at that point was more of a maintenance issue, and the contract firefighters in the hot zone were reassigned.

Equipment needs: We called for equipment from the Harvey, New Rockford, Rugby, Kensal, Pingree, Jamestown Rural Fire Departments, Cass County and the Devils Lake Search and Rescue Airboats provide for direct hazmat control. The Stutsman County Sheriff Drone Team provided for overview and planning operations. When you look at the distance we needed to go to find certain pieces of equipment it is a very large footprint. Even then some of the equipment such as the tankers were not suitable for the layout of the Hot Zone or refill point. Some of the Fire Departments nearer Carrington don't even have tankers, let alone firefighters that could commit hours/days.

Controlling access to the sight. As you can imagine the Carrington Volunteer Fire Department could not spare personnel to provide access control. At the time of the incident we had 1 sheriff in Foster County, Wells County was also down on deputies, thankfully Stutsman County Sheriff and the North Dakota Highway Patrol were able to provide some personnel, CPKC rail police were onsite and brought in contracted security of the staging and rail owned properties but that did not stop people from accessing to close to the site (this was how the internet and

Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee

Date 1/31/2025.

Testimony on Senate Bill 2340

Submitted by: Ken Wangen, Fire Chief Carrington Volunteer Fire and Rescue,

viral news pictures got out). Access to road barricades and things of that nature was a big struggle. Our county road super and shared Emergency Manager called though out the region depleting the local supply. Because of this we would often have to chase down people that tried to drive through the sight, passing Firetrucks, Side Boom Dozers, Backhoes, and rock trucks along the way.

In reflection: The scary part is none of these issues faced are a solely related to a train derailments or Hazmat, well the Devils Lake Region Search and Rescue and Cass County airboats were.

Manpower, Tankers, Portable Pumps, Portable Lighting, Road Access Control are needed for many fire suppression applications. October reminded us wildfires can happen at any time in North Dakota, California is currently reinforcing it. I bet a lot of the issues seen over the days and weeks of the western North Dakota fires were probably the same issues my department had, I also have no doubt they also seen issues we did not. For that reason, I believe a study addressing NDFS, DES, NDFA, NDFM communications, fire department needs/readiness and funding is warranted. I urge a do pass on SB 2340. I stand for any questions.

Ken Wangen



First Picture about 4:30 a.m. 45 minutes after dispatch.



Drone image around 10 A.M. the 5th

SB 2340
Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee

Good Morning, My Name is John Hejl and I am the fire chief in Casselton ND.

Casselton Fire is 100% volunteer. This fire department provides fire protection for the cities of Casselton and Amenia as well as 12 townships in the surrounding area. This primary fire coverage area is 385 square miles and covers just over 4,500 North Dakotans. Not every fire department in North Dakota provides extrication; many of our neighboring departments do not. We are dispatched out automatically if extrication is needed for a number of our neighboring departments bringing our total extrication zone up to 745 square miles. The Insurance Services Organization has given us an ISO score of 4 putting us in the top 1% of fire departments in North Dakota when it comes to preparedness and proven efficiency.

Volunteer and Career departments across the state pull funding from a variety of sources; grants, taxes, general funds of cities and townships, a statewide insurance rider and of course donations and fundraisers. Those funding sources should mirror their uses. Career or volunteer, metro or rural you will be hard pressed to find two identical departments. At Casselton Fire roughly 1/3 of our call volume comes from Casselton, 1/3 from our rural addresses, and 1/3 from Interstate 94 of which we cover 33 Miles; from Mapleton to Tower City. The Interstate and the State Highways that run through our area make us focus on extrication and dealing with hazardous situations and substances that would otherwise not be an issue in our area.

Fairly regularly the fire service becomes a catch all for emergency response. We take pride in calling ourselves an "all response agency". If a problem doesn't involve medical treatment or law enforcement issues, we as a service are called upon and expected to have the answers. We are called upon for those issues as well. While giving an address in Casselton many years ago, then Governor Dalrymple stated that when growing up if someone had a problem and didn't know what to do; he was told to call the fire department because they can handle anything. This means that our largely volunteer fire service is expected to be prepared for water rescue, body removal, extrication, hazardous materials response, rail response, technical rescues, medical responses, and don't forget actual fires – structural and wildland. Regionally and locally departments across the state prioritize training hours based upon their location. Terrain, population density, industry and infrastructure play a large role in what we purchase and train for. The needs and priorities of our fire service will be different from one department to the next and one region to the next.

Planning and being prepared for the unforeseen emergencies of an entire state is a large task. Much like eating an elephant; we need to start one bite at a time. Every department will have slightly different priorities, areas of focus, and scope of service. Paired regionally, departments complement each other best when a base level of training is set and parameters

of coordination and authority are agreed upon beforehand to ensure an effective response when assistance is requested. A study of current plans, infrastructure, and levels of preparedness will help our state's emergency responders find cracks in our current system and better prepare and prioritize for our future.

Please help the fire service in our great state so that we can better serve our citizens.

Regretfully I cannot be here in person or online this morning as I am at a funeral. If you have further questions please reach out at any time.

Thank You

John Hejl
Chief, CFD
701-238-3734
Johnhejl32@gmail.com

January 30, 2025

David Uhlich

Watford City Fire Chief

Chairman Patten and members of the Committee

Thank you for your time this morning as I speak in support of SB-2340. My name is David Uhlich, Watford City fire Chief. I have been a volunteer firefighter since November 2001, serving as Chief since 2018.

During my time as a firefighter and especially the last few years as the chief I have seen multiple large scale incidents. Being an all volunteer department I have seen the struggles that are thrown on many departments during these emergencies. We are all trained and prepared for them , but the real issue emerges when they become a prolonged event. During the initial attack we rely on neighboring departments for support and additional resources, but as the incident grows or the longer it continues it is sometimes difficult to continue to fight as effectively as when we first arrived. We also sometimes run into an incident where we may not have all the needed equipment and training to mitigate the emergency situation.

With such a large portion of the firefighters in North Dakota being volunteers, I feel this is our chance to improve support and assist them on this complex incidents.

I feel that all fire departments are willing to work together and we know that our environment and jobs will forever be changing. With your support I feel we can make all of our emergency responses better and more effective.

With SB-2340, I feel we can find a way to better response from other departments after we have used our mutual aid partners. As we learned last fall, when the departments you normally call on are busy you have to reach out even further. Making backfilling and being able to cover the other calls easier. A regional response group that can work together and train together for better response may also be possible. Setting up regional groups could also allow for team meetings and planning, so we know what resources and staffing we would have available if needed.

Sincerely,



David Uhlich WCFD Chief

TESTIMONY

Karolin Jappe, McKenzie County
Emergency Management
Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee

January 31, 2025


Honorable Senator Patten, Chairman of the Senate Energy
and Natural Resources Committee, and Committee members

As the Emergency Manager of McKenzie County I want you to know that I am here in support of SB 2340. In McKenzie County we have 11 volunteer fire departments that protect our County. Two of those fire departments are Montana departments who have always showed up in time of need. We also have a department from Williams County that protects a corner of our County. I share this with you as when we have a strong fire going out of control we have all 11 departments showing up.

This past October was a true test of all our capabilities. These departments as well as other county fire departments that I've not mentioned, worked tirelessly sometimes going from one fire to another. Splitting our resources to try and get ahead of the fires was a challenge to say the least. The winds were unlike any I've seen and I could tell our firefighters were tired, but I knew they were not about to stop.

On Saturday, October 6th after another couple of fires had just started, one of my fire chiefs asked me to call out the National Guard. It was getting more that we could handle. I had sent out 4 emergency alerts in twelve hours, two of them were to evacuate people from their homes in two different areas in McKenzie County. I could continue, but what I would really like to do is say that we need to rethink the way these large fires are being fought and to find a win win solution. It something that doesn't happen every day or every year, but when it does, what we really need is to get a more coordinated and prepared response to large-scale fires. The strain on resources, particularly with so many departments stretched thin, speaks to the importance of having a plan in place for such high-intensity situations.

Having a plan that anticipates the scale of these events, and a system in place that allows for quick mobilization of the right resources, could make a world of difference in maintaining safety and ensuring that firefighters aren't put in positions where they're overwhelmed. It's vital that the state and local leaders are thinking ahead to address these types of challenges before they become full-blown emergencies. I ask for your support of this bill not only for our firefighters, but for the citizens we all serve.



Chairman Patten, Members of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, for the record my name is Greg Kessel, State Senator from District 39. I appear before you today in support of SB 2340.

The devastating October wildfires highlighted critical shortcomings in our state's emergency response capabilities. While our brave firefighters, assisted by civilians and industry, valiantly battled the flames, the loss of life, homes, livelihoods, and critical infrastructure underscored the urgent need for significant improvement.

The October fires were not an isolated incident. Our state faces recurrent challenges from wildfires due to our dry climate, strong winds, and increasingly frequent extreme weather events. The 2021 Medora fire and the 2017 fire season serve as stark reminders of this recurring threat.

The recent wildfires exposed critical deficiencies in our current system:

- * Inadequate Coordination: Challenges arose with communication, organization, and coordination between local, state, and federal agencies.
- * Resource Limitations: Replenishment of depleted firefighting resources proved challenging, hindering effective response efforts.
- * Over-reliance on Federal Assistance: Differing command structures, firefighting strategies, and equipment, along with unforeseen costs imposed by federal agencies, created significant obstacles.

This presents an opportunity to proactively enhance our state's emergency response capabilities. We must:

- * Strengthen Local Response: Empower and support our frontline responders through improved training, funding, and mobilization capabilities.
- * Leverage State Resources: Utilize the expertise and resources of the National Guard, State Fire Marshal's Office, Department of Forestry, Department of Emergency Services, and other relevant agencies.
- * Foster Public-Private Partnerships: Collaborate with private industry to identify and leverage their resources and expertise.
- * Improve Coordination and Communication: Establish clear lines of communication and a robust command structure to ensure efficient and effective response across all levels of government.

SB 2340 provides the necessary framework for conducting a comprehensive study to address these critical issues. This study will:

- * Assess current capabilities and identify gaps.
- * Explore innovative solutions for resource mobilization, training, and coordination.
- * Develop a roadmap for enhancing the state's fire service preparedness and response capabilities.

Investing in this study is not about solving past problems, but about proactively preparing for future emergencies. By strengthening our fire service, we can better protect our communities, our economy, and the lives of our citizens. Therefore, Chairman Patten, Members of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, I urge your support for SB 2340 and would be open to any questions.

2025 SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Energy and Natural Resources Committee Peace Garden Room, State Capitol

SB 2340
1/31/2025

A BILL for an Act to provide for a legislative management study to evaluate the evolving fire service operational and response needs of the state.

10:53 a.m. Chairman Patten opened the hearing.

Members present:

Chairman Patten, Vice Chairman Kessel, Senators: Beard, Boehm, Enget, Gerhardt, and Van Oosting.

Discussion Topics:

- Committee Action

10:53 a.m. Senator Beard moved a do pass.

10:53 a.m. Senator Gerhardt seconded the motion.

Senators	Vote
Senator Dale Patten	Y
Senator Greg Kessel	Y
Senator Todd Beard	Y
Senator Keith Boehm	Y
Senator Mark Enget	Y
Senator Justin Gerhardt	Y
Senator Desiree Van Oosting	Y

Motion Passed 7-0-0

10:53 a.m. Senator Kessel will carry the bill.

10:54 a.m. Chairman Patten adjourned.

Kendra McCann, Committee Clerk

REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE
SB 2340 ([25.1248.01000](#))

Energy and Natural Resources Committee (Sen. Patten, Chairman) recommends **DO PASS** (7 YEAS, 0 NAYS, 0 ABSENT AND NOT VOTING). SB 2340 was placed on the Eleventh order on the calendar. This bill does not affect workforce development.

2025 HOUSE ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES

SB 2340

2025 HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Energy and Natural Resources Committee

Coteau AB Room, State Capitol

SB 2340

3/20/2025

A BILL for an Act to provide for a legislative management study to evaluate the evolving fire service operational and response needs of the state.

9:00 a.m. Chairman Porter called the meeting to order.

Members Present: Chairman Porter, Vice Chairman Anderson, Vice Chair Novak,
Representatives: Dockter, Hagert, Headland, Heinert, Johnson, Marschall, J. Olson,
Ruby, Conmy, Foss

Discussion Topics:

- Firefighter training
- Safety Services
- North Dakota Fire Safety Resources

9:00 a.m. Senator Greg Kessel, North Dakota Senator for District 39, introduced the bill.

9:06 a.m. Doug Nelson, State Fire Marshall, testified in favor and provided testimony #42508.

9:16 a.m. Corey Johnson, Assistant Chief at the Williston Fire Department, testified in favor and provided testimony #42877.

9:28 a.m. Dennis Pathroff, Lobbyist for Power Companies of North Dakota, testified in favor and provided testimony #43006.

Additional written testimony:

Wayde Sick, State Director at the North Dakota Department of Career and Technical Education, submitted testimony in favor #42980

Kenneth Wangen, Chief at Carrington Volunteer Fire and Rescue, submitted testimony in favor #43133

John Hejl, Chief at Casselton Fire Department, submitted testimony in favor #43173

Kyle Shockley, Fire Chief at Billings Country Rural Fire Protection District, submitted testimony in favor #43188

9:29 a.m. Chairman Porter closed the hearing.

Leah Kuball, Committee Clerk



TESTIMONY

Douglas Nelson, State Fire Marshal

House Energy and Natural Resources Committee

March 20th, 2025

Representative Porter, Chairman of the House Energy and Natural Resources Committee, and Committee members,

My involvement in the October fires started on the Monday following the large weekend fires. Our office was requested to investigate two of the fires. As I surveyed the area what I noticed beyond the damage, losses, and charred remains, was that fire departments were still running emergent to contain and control hot spot fires over 48 hours after the fires had started. Many of the same people that started working these fires on Saturday morning, were still working these fires on Monday afternoon. This was not only true in Williams County, but I have spoken with responders from the other fires as well and know that they too were working tirelessly day in and day out to control the fires.

This is evidence of the strength of our communities, volunteers, and all responders that helped to control and recover from these fires. However, this is the second time within three years that our state has run into these types of conditions and experienced whole towns threatened by the speed and intensity of fires. We need to ensure that we are supporting and preparing local front-line firefighters to the fullest through studying fire service responsibilities, coordination and response to emergencies.

As I drove back to Bismarck from Williams County, the question that arose in my mind after noting this is, “am I doing enough?”. Is there more that my office can do to help the State during large scale or state fire emergencies. If the answer is yes, then we should be doing that. In North Dakota, we take pride with being as efficient and effective as we can with what we have. If there is a way that we can further support local jurisdictions and state agency partners, we should have the authority, training and organization to jump in and help.

The State Fire Marshals Office is comprised of 10 dedicated staff to our specialty of fire prevention through fire investigation, plan review, fire inspections, and community risk reduction. Part of our training is to train in firefighter certifications, and most of our staff are current or have been firefighters in their careers. Our office has this training and experience, yet we lack any authority to assist or help during these statewide or large-scale emergencies. Now, I am not stating that our small staff can make a significant impact just by activating us, but what I suggest that we study is how all of our resources at the state

and local level can be involved in an organized framework for response to support one-another. By evaluating what is possible in coordination with the Department of Forestry, North Dakota Firefighters Association, the Department of Emergency Services, the North Dakota National Guard, and other state agency partners, we may be capable of much more together with an organized plan.

We also could benefit from studying how our local jurisdictions are part of our state-wide response. Identifying training levels, mobilization plans, coordination of resources, will help ensure we are prepared for the next long-term or large-scale fire service emergency. This study is needed not only to prepare for sporadic large responses, but to determine and implement a continual situation of preparedness across the state.

Not only wildfires, but large-scale structure fires, floods, tornados, structural collapse, or other emergencies, we can prepare this framework together. It is well known that the volunteer fire service is challenged with recruitment and retention issues. With no quick solution foreseeable to this, identifying how we mobilize and support each other at the local and state level is more important now than ever. We have an opportunity to identify the most efficient and more importantly effective ways for our fire service to prepare itself and to support ourselves within the state for any fire emergency.

I have spoken to many fire chiefs on the heels of this fire. What I have learned is that we don't have the answer right now, but need time and funding to study what is the best operational coordination for our state fire service to work with and support each other. This study will give us the opportunity to get stakeholders to the table, have the discussions, ideas and agreements in place to move forward with a prepared fire service in North Dakota. The State Fire Marshal's Office supports Senate Bill 2340, and we ask for your support to better prepare our fire service.



March 20th, 2025

House Energy and Natural Resources Committee
600 East Boulevard Avenue
Bismarck, ND 58505

RE: Support for SB 2340

Chairman Porter & Committee Members,

My name is Corey Johnson. I am the Assistant Chief of Operations for the City of Williston Fire Department. I am here today on behalf of the City of Williston and the Williston Fire Department to express our strong support for SB 2340. This critical legislation proposes a comprehensive legislative management study to evaluate and address our great state's evolving fire service operational and response needs.

Our state is not immune from large-scale incidents that devastate our local communities, regions, and state. In recent years we have seen wildfires, tornadoes, crippling winter weather, and train derailments. Although our emergency services handled these situations well, many weren't without significant loss, including the loss of life, as we experienced during the Ray/Tioga wildfires. These incidents are complex and unpredictable and adequately providing public safety services to communities across the state often requires a systematic and team-oriented approach.

These many incidents have demonstrated that we can and must do better. The study proposed by SB 2340 focuses on improving coordination, creating regionalized response teams, and standardizing training. SB 2340 reflects the collaborative approach necessary to make a statewide impact by including the state's major fire service stakeholders, such as the North Dakota Firefighter's Association, the North Dakota Fire Chief's Association, the North Dakota State Fire Marshal's Office, the North Dakota Forest Service, the North Dakota Department of Career and Technical Education, and other stakeholders.

In Williston, we are acutely aware of the increasing demands on our fire service as we address the needs of a growing population, evolving risks, and limited resources. The growth of our community, driven largely by the expansion of the oil and gas industries, has significantly increased the demand for emergency services. Additionally, our region is routinely impacted by severe storms and experiences elevated emergency call volumes, further underscoring the

need for a comprehensive evaluation of fire service capabilities. The proposed study's emphasis on evaluating staffing, training, equipment, and structural needs is crucial for effectively enhancing our ability to protect lives and property. Additionally, exploring alternative funding mechanisms detailed in SB 2340 could significantly reduce reliance on local property taxes, creating a more equitable and sustainable financial model for fire services statewide.

The Williston Fire Department and the City of Williston are committed to supporting initiatives that strengthen North Dakota's fire service capabilities and enhance the safety and well-being of our residents. We stand ready to contribute to this critical study and collaborate with state leaders to implement its recommendations.

We respectfully ask for your support to help advance public safety in North Dakota by recommending SB 2340 to the House floor with a "do pass" recommendation. Together, we can build a stronger, more responsive fire service that meets the needs of all North Dakotans.

Thank you for your leadership and commitment to public safety.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Corey A. Johnson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end.

Corey A. Johnson, Assistant Chief of Operations
City of Williston Fire Department
(701) 572-3400 ext. 2317
coreyj@ci.williston.nd.us



House Energy and Natural Resources

SB2340

March 20, 2025

Chairman Porter and members of the House Energy and Natural Resources Committee. My name is Wayde Sick, and I serve as the State Director for the Department of Career and Technical Education. I am submitting testimony in support of SB2340.

This study, which includes Career and Technical Education, would help address the workforce needs of the fire service industry. I am optimistic the results of this study will open more opportunities for North Dakota students to learn about career opportunities in fire service through career exploration and high school fire service programs.

Thank you.



Good morning, Chairman Porter and members of the House Energy and Natural Resources Committee,

The Power Companies of North Dakota (“PCND”) urges a “Do Pass” recommendation on SB 2340.

PCND is a coalition of the state’s leading shareholder-owned gas and electric utilities. Our members include MDU Resources Group, Xcel Energy, Otter Tail Power Company, and ALLETE. Together, PCND members serve over 427,000 North Dakota customers, employ over 1,200 North Dakotans, and manage significant power generation and transmission infrastructure across our state.

Today, we express PCND’s strong support for SB 2340, the legislative management study on the fire service regional response model.

The proposed study is essential to strengthening the state’s emergency readiness and response to wildfires. Coordinated fire service operations and regional response teams will help mitigate the impact of wildfires, ensuring uninterrupted power supply, protection of essential infrastructure, and public safety.

PCND is committed to participating in this important study and offering our members’ expertise to help develop effective and actionable recommendations.

Accordingly, PCND strongly urges a “Do Pass” recommendation on SB 2340.

Thank you, Chairman Porter and committee members.

Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee

Date 1/31/2025.

Testimony on Senate Bill 2340

Submitted by: Ken Wangen, Fire Chief Carrington Volunteer Fire and Rescue,

Chairman Porter and the House Energy and Natural Resources Committee,

I want to thank you for considering Senate Bill 2340.

July 5th, 2024, 3:43 A.M. Carrington Volunteer Fire and Rescue was paged out for a Vehicle/Locomotive/Train Fire involving unknown hazmat. The First Trucks left at 3:48 thinking we were dealing with a small-scale fire and we responded with 2 trucks (1 pumper 1 pumper/tanker). Upon leaving city limits and seeing a large orange glow to the southeast an all call was issue. At 4:15 A.M. first units arrived on scene advising that we had a multicar derailment with a large fire and hazmat release. We immediately went into defense mode and notified the population of Bordulac and the endangered farms around the area giving them the option of evacuation or shelter in place (2 homes choose to evacuate). The area was then secured off as best we could. Recon teams were sent into the hot zone to identify the front and rear of the derailment stack, estimate the number of cars, and find the train crew. Command was in contact with CPKC's Hazmat Response Division, Devils Lake Fire, Jamestown Fire and Grand Forks for advice and information exchange. Recon returned the stack consisted of 29 cars later to be found containing Methanol (6) cars, Anhydrous (11) cars and Medical Grade Plastic pellets (12) cars the train crew was safe and uninjured. Unified command was established, and we continued monitoring, setting a staging zone, and securing the immediate site. We also started calling for assets (air boats, tankers, pumps, road barricades and about anything you could think of).

The fire while impressive, looked like nightmare because of the billowing black smoke, it wasn't. The fire was advantageous as it burned off the Methanol and Anhydrous Ammonia, unfortunately the plastic beads acted very much like an oil fire and would have made it impossible to extinguish had we tried. Trying would have created a larger clean up mess, especially if we would have used Class B foam with forever chemicals.

Issues we encountered:

Weather: The Hazmat and control of release was not a big issue for this incident. What was an issue? the wind or more precisely the lack of it. We had no wind to help dissipate the plume or fumes. Rain caused it and hampered efforts as it rained heavily the first couple days adding to the already full water shed, thus creating a muddy and wet hot zone. The nightly temperature inversion with no wind made working at night impossible, this alone extended the response multiple days.

Personnel for extended or multiple operational cycles: Having a rotating stream of personnel to maintain coverage was an issue, first because it was the 4th of July weekend, second prior experience indicated it was going to be a long incident. We called in firefighters from New Rockford, Sykeston, Harvey, Pingree, Kensal, Jamestown Rural and Devils Lake. We ran out of local and regional personnel by day 8 and had to bring in contract firefighters to continue to provide coverage for the site. Thankfully the release mitigation of the cars at that point was more of a maintenance issue, and the contract firefighters in the hot zone were reassigned.

Equipment needs: We called for equipment from the Harvey, New Rockford, Rugby, Kensal, Pingree, Jamestown Rural Fire Departments, Cass County and the Devils Lake Search and Rescue Airboats provide for direct hazmat control (used them as fans to dissipate the fumes). The Stutsman County Sheriff Drone Team provided for overview and planning operations. When you look at the distance, we needed to go to find certain pieces of equipment we were lucky we have good connections and the responding department could afford to loan us the equipment. Even then some of the equipment such as the tankers were not suitable for the layout of the Hot Zone or refill point. Some of the Fire Departments nearer Carrington don't even have tankers, let alone firefighters that could commit hours/days.

Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee

Date 1/31/2025.

Testimony on Senate Bill 2340

Submitted by: Ken Wangen, Fire Chief Carrington Volunteer Fire and Rescue,

Controlling access to the sight. As you can imagine the Carrington Volunteer Fire Department could not spare personnel to provide access control. At the time of the incident we had 1 sheriff in Foster County, Wells County was also down on deputies, thankfully Stutsman County Sheriff and the North Dakota Highway Patrol were able to provide some personnel, CPKC rail police were onsite and brought in contracted security of the staging and rail owned properties but that did not stop people from accessing to close to the site (this was how the internet and viral news pictures got out).

Access to road barricades and things of that nature was a big struggle. Our county road super and shared Emergency Manager called though out the region depleting the local supply. Because of this we would often have to chase down people that tried to drive through the sight, passing Firetrucks, Side Boom Dozers, Backhoes, and rock trucks along the way.

In reflection: The scary part is none of these issues faced are a solely related to a train derailments or Hazmat.

Manpower, Tankers, Portable Pumps, Portable Lighting, Road Access Control are needed for many fire suppression applications. Having a better understanding of how to access these assets and work and communicate with state agencies will go a long way towards making the fire service better.

October reminded us wildfires can happen at any time in North Dakota, California reinforced it. And the outbreak near Glen Ullin showed us we have a tinder box to deal with.

I bet a lot of the issues seen over the days and weeks of the western North Dakota fires were probably the same issues my department had; I also have no doubt they also seen issues we did not. For that reason, I believe a study addressing NDFS, DES, NDFA, NDFM communications, fire department needs/readiness and funding is warranted. I urge a do pass on SB 2340.



4:30 a.m. 45 minutes after dispatch.



Drone image around 10 A.M. the 5th about 5 hours into the incident

SB 2340
House Energy and Natural Resources Committee

Good Morning Chairman Porter and House Energy and Natural Resources Committee, My Name is John Hejl and I am the fire chief in Casselton ND.

Casselton Fire is 100% volunteer. This fire department provides fire protection for the cities of Casselton and Amenia as well as 12 townships in the surrounding area. This primary fire coverage area is 385 square miles and covers just over 4,500 North Dakotans. Not every fire department in North Dakota provides extrication; many of our neighboring departments do not. We are dispatched out automatically if extrication is needed for a number of our neighboring departments bringing our total extrication zone up to 745 square miles. The Insurance Services Organization has given us an ISO score of 4 putting us in the top 1% of fire departments in North Dakota when it comes to preparedness and proven efficiency.

Volunteer and Career departments across the state pull funding from a variety of sources; grants, taxes, general funds of cities and townships, a statewide insurance rider and of course donations and fundraisers. Those funding sources should mirror their uses. Career or volunteer, metro or rural you will be hard pressed to find two identical departments. At Casselton Fire roughly 1/3 of our call volume comes from Casselton, 1/3 from our rural addresses, and 1/3 from Interstate 94 of which we cover 33 Miles; from Mapleton to Tower City. The Interstate and the State Highways that run through our area make us focus on extrication and dealing with hazardous situations and substances that would otherwise not be an issue in our area.

Fairly regularly the fire service becomes a catch all for emergency response. We take pride in calling ourselves an "all response agency". If a problem doesn't involve medical treatment or law enforcement issues, we as a service are called upon and expected to have the answers. We are regularly called upon for medical and law enforcement issues as well. While giving an address in Casselton many years ago, then Governor Dalrymple stated that when growing up if someone had a problem and didn't know what to do; he was told to call the fire department because they can handle anything. This means that our largely volunteer fire service is expected to be prepared for water rescue, body removal, extrication, hazardous materials response, rail response, technical rescues, medical responses, and don't forget actual fires – structural and wildland. Regionally and locally departments across the state prioritize training hours based upon their location. Terrain, population density, industry and infrastructure play a large role in what we purchase and train for. The needs and priorities of our fire service will be different from one department to the next and one region to the next.

Planning and being prepared for the unforeseen emergencies of an entire state is a large task. Much like eating an elephant; we need to start one bite at a time. Every department will have slightly different priorities, areas of focus, and scope of service. Paired regionally,

departments complement each other best when a base level of training is set and parameters of coordination and authority are agreed upon beforehand to ensure an effective response when assistance is requested. A study of current plans, infrastructure, and levels of preparedness will help our state's emergency responders find cracks in our current system and better prepare and prioritize for our future.

Please help the fire service in our great state so that we can better serve our citizens.

If you have further questions please reach out at any time.

Thank You

John Hejl
Chief, CFD
701-238-3734
Johnhejl32@gmail.com



Billing County Rural Fire Protection District
 Po Box 596, Belfield ND, 58622
 Chief Shockley 701-690-0041

March 20, 2025

To: House Energy and Natural resources Committee

Subject: SB 2340

Chairman Porter & Committee Members, my name is Kyle Shockley, I currently serve as the Fire Chief and Emergency Manager of Billings County. I have been a firefighter for 25 years, in North Dakota, serving in multiple different positions as both a Volunteer and Career firefighter. Out of those 25 years I have been a Fire Chief for 17 of those years. I served as the Assistant Emergency Manager of Billings county for 2 ½ years and now as the Emergency Manager for the past 3 ½ years.

Through my years of service, I have primarily worked in the SW and SE regions of the state but I also have some time spent in the NW region. My multiple roles in emergency services over the years have taken me to many different places and has given me a good look at the emergency responses that happen across North Dakota. When I read SB 2340 I gave it a lot of thought, kicked around some ideas. Taking some of my past experiences with working floods in the Red River Valley, responding to Hazmat's, taking command of the Medora Fire in 2021; seeing what other fire chiefs and emergency managers have encountered even in just recent years, I easily came to the conclusion that this study is just what North Dakota needs. This state has never put together a study like this in the past, and bringing in all of the stakeholders from the local level up to the state level will only make us all better prepared for the future.

I have read the majority of the testimonies that you have heard today or are about to hear and I agree 100% with every word on those testimonies. With that being said I'm going to give some bullet points on what this study can help North Dakota emergency responders with to better prepare for the future.

1. Almost every emergency agency has a plan for an initial response to an incident and a plan for those initial calls for mutual aid. These plans are excellent and will always play a vital role in emergency responses, but what happens in the cases like what happened in western North Dakota in 2021 and fall of 2024 when you have every fire department out on fires for several consecutive counties, along with a large amount of state and federal resources?
This study will help us build a larger tiered response system that goes beyond our neighbors in surrounding counties.
2. North Dakota is made up of about 94% of volunteer firefighters. What happens when the volunteers in a drought area of the state are running multiple calls all week long and then the National Weather Service calls for a Red Flag Warning all weekend? I do believe that this study will help us build a protocol to easily allow fire districts to backfill their fire stations during those High Danger days which would allow us to take a more proactive stance for responding to incidents. This study could also build a plan for reimbursing these districts that come to help backfill our stations.
3. In the North Dakota fire service, we not only deal with private property, we also respond to fires on federal lands in many areas throughout the state. My fire district deals a lot with the US Forest Service (USFS). In 2017, we had 1 large fire, and 3 large fires in 2021. At these fires I was approached to sign a US Forest Service Delegation of authority while still actively working with my fire department and neighboring departments to get fires contained. With the wording in these delegations if their rules are not followed or

they want to assess charges for the fire, the named individuals who sign their delegation could become partially financially responsible for the costs of resources used. This concerns me because I have had conversations with fire chiefs who also deal with the USFS and have been approached to sign these delegations and they had no idea what they were signing, they were just told that they needed to. Not sure if this committee is aware that the Elk Horn fire in McKenzie County back in October had costs racked up to 1 million dollars. For the USFS to think it's ok to possibly put a fraction of that cost onto a North Dakota Fire District is not ok, and even a small fraction of that amount could bankrupt a fire district. With this study we can come up with a plan to not only assure that all fire chiefs in the state know the rules, but to also give them the tools they need to not get their fire department into a financial bind. This study could also help us build a protocol on who and when do these delegations from federal agencies get signed.

With this study I know the North Dakota Fire Service, Department of Emergency Services, along with other responders in the state can come up with a final product that can be a great benefit to everyone. This would help give fire departments and emergency managers more tools to take more of a proactive stance vs. being reactive.

The Billings County Rural Fire Protection District is in favor of Senate Bill 2340, and asks for your support in helping all of the North Dakota Fire Service better prepare for the future.

Sincerely,
Kyle Shockley, Fire Chief
Billings County Rural Fire Prot. Dist.

2025 HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Energy and Natural Resources Committee

Coteau AB Room, State Capitol

SB 2340

4/10/2025

A BILL for an Act to provide for a legislative management study to evaluate the evolving fire service operational and response needs of the state.

10:42 a.m. Chairman Porter called the hearing to order.

Members Present: Chairman Porter, Vice Chairman Anderson, Vice Chair Novak,
Representatives: Dockter, Hagert, Headland, Johnson, Marschall, Olson, Ruby, Conmy,
Foss

Members Absent: Representative Heinert

Discussion Topics:

- Committee action

10:44 a.m. Representative Dockter moved a Do Pass.

10:44 a.m. Vice Chair Anderson seconded the motion.

Representatives	Vote
Representative Todd Porter	Y
Representative Dick Anderson	Y
Representative Anna Novak	Y
Representative Liz Conmy	Y
Representative Jason Dockter	Y
Representative Austin Foss	Y
Representative Jared c. Hagert	Y
Representative Craig Headland	Y
Representative Pat D. Heinert	AB
Representative Jorin Johnson	Y
Representative Andrew Marschall	Y
Representative Jeremy L. Olson	Y
Representative Matthew Ruby	Y

Motion carried: 12-0-1

Bill carrier: Representative Dockter.

10:44 a.m. Representative Ruby moved to place SB 2340 on the Consent Calander.

10:45 a.m. Representative Dockter seconded the motion.

10:45 a.m. Representative Ruby rescinded the motion.

House Energy and Natural Resources Committee

SB 2340

04-10-25

Page 2

10:45 a.m. Chairman Porter closed the hearing.

Leah Kuball, Committee Clerk

REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE
SB 2340 ([25.1248.01000](#))

Energy and Natural Resources Committee (Rep. Porter, Chairman) recommends **DO PASS** (12 YEAS, 0 NAYS, 1 ABSENT OR EXCUSED AND NOT VOTING). SB 2340 was placed on the Fourteenth order on the calendar.