



BACKCOUNTRY HUNTERS & ANGLERS NORTH DAKOTA

The North Dakota Chapter of Backcountry Hunters and Anglers opposes House Bill 1151 that has been introduced to the 68th legislative assembly by Representative Paul Thomas (Velva). This bill would strip authority from the North Dakota Game and Fish to implement their CWD Management Plan by prohibiting the Game and Fish from banning baiting practices in North Dakota.

While we do not have a stance regarding baiting ethics, we do have a stance on legislation or ballot initiatives that seek to restrict or control the ability of the wildlife professionals at the North Dakota Game and Fish to do their job. That job, according to state law, is managing the wildlife resource on behalf of the public, for current and future generations. The legislature should not be overruling biological decisions made by a network of professional and experienced biologists and veterinarians who specialize in the subject matter of North Dakota wildlife.

The North Dakota Game and Fish is an agency driven by wildlife professionals who are also North Dakotans who live, work, and hunt in North Dakota. Their mission is to *“protect, conserve and enhance fish and wildlife populations and their habitat for sustained public consumptive and non-consumptive use.”* We believe H.B. 1151 is in direct opposition to that mission.

While we understand that this is a controversial issue, and it is always difficult to change long used practices, the public’s deer resource must come first. We understand that baiting bans alone will not stop CWD, that deer do naturally congregate, and some of those natural occurrences will never be a variable managers can control in wild animals. But we also believe it is disingenuous to suggest that thousands of randomly placed bait piles and feeders on the landscape, being replenished repeatedly throughout the year, does not carry an increased and associated risk of disease transmission.

The scientific analysis around the effects and impacts of baiting on disease transmission is well established. Baiting unnaturally congregates deer, shrinks home range size, increases home range overlap, increases face to face contacts, and condenses feeding areas up to thousands of times. Scientific studies around Bovine Tuberculosis and baiting have been conducted in Michigan, and epidemiological research suggests that baiting and feeding of deer enabled the TB outbreak in Michigan to persist and spread, and that declines in TB prevalence were associated with a ban on baiting and feeding. In Wyoming, Brucellosis prevalence in elk that frequently visit feed grounds is 10X that of elk that do not frequent feed grounds. While a baiting study has not been performed specifically around CWD due to the limitations in feasibility and ethics of such a study, the science supporting lateral transmission of CWD amongst deer is strong and well documented. Increasing close contact beyond normal seasonal periods and intensifying that close contact between deer should be minimized as much as possible.

The North Dakota constitution states, “Hunting, trapping, and fishing and the taking of game and fish are a valued part of our heritage and will be forever preserved for the people and managed by law and regulation for the public good.”

The hunting practices of one user group does not outweigh what is beneficial for the entire public resource. This bill could undo over a decade of work by the North Dakota Game and Fish to slow the spread of CWD. This bill is not in the best interest of the deer held in public trust, or the public, who are beneficiaries of that trust. The North Dakota Chapter of Backcountry Hunters and Anglers finds H.B. 1151 to be in direct violation of the North Dakota constitution, the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation, the mission of the North Dakota Game and Fish, and a breach of the public trust doctrine that all deer in North Dakota belong to. We strongly oppose H.B. 1151.



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