

First I want to say thank you for the opportunity to speak on this. My name is Aaron Esquibel. I am here representing not only myself but Prairie Grit adaptive sports and I'm here to share my experience. I'm not talking in front of you today from the point of somebody who is pro-baiting or anti-baiting. I believe any talking point that views baiting as being anything more than a tool for hunting should be left out of this conversation. What I can tell you for sure is that I am conflicted. I'm not a Veterinarian. I'm not a wildlife biologist. There are people who are going to talk on both sides, who know much more than me. However, I do have a degree in biology and I know a bit on how to read research. The conclusion that I've come up with after doing my own research and talking to very knowledgeable people on both sides is that I just don't know. Because of that I am coming to you from the viewpoint of someone who would love to see continued research on the topic of chronic wasting disease. I believe it is our responsibility as hunters and conservationists to know what effect we do or do not have on the animals we hunt.

Here's something that I do know, I've spent the last three years assisting with facilitating hunting experiences for people with disabilities. I do know that we rely on the ability to bring the deer to us because our participants can't go to them. I know there are people out there who defend bait bans by saying "you're not real hunters if you can't hunt without bait." I've heard people say "you're just lazy and refusing to learn a new way to hunt".

I'm here to spread some light on what hunting in our life is like. Our participants deal with everything from degenerative neurological diseases, to congenital birth defects, as well as injuries resulting in the loss of the use of limbs. Our participants can't hike. They can't climb trees. They can't get way back in the bush and spot and stalk. The reality for us is that the work comes in the form of modification and preparation. There are logistics in our way of hunting that significantly increases the level of difficulty. If you want just a taste of it, I challenge you to spend one day in a wheelchair. Just a normal day-to-day with infrastructure designed for people with disabilities is Challenging. Now, transfer those challenges to the outdoors and understand the increased difficulty.

Some of the necessary things that we've done to make hunting accessible is build wheelchair friendly blinds, constantly grooming and maintaining trails into those blinds and work our tails off to try to get deer in front of those blinds, yes with the use of bait.

Two years ago we lost one of our best and most accessible blinds when the unit just north of Velva was shut down for baiting. That change made our trip between 40-50 miles each way to get to a unit where baiting is still allowed. That's almost 100 miles every time we try to bring one of our hunters out. We are a nonprofit organization, and we rely on volunteers. These bans make life for our volunteers and our participants significantly more difficult, and in some cases adds a layer of difficulty that completely takes away the ability for someone to get into the outdoors with any chance of success.

To wrap up my testimony I want to reiterate that I don't know the answer, and after many conversations with the game and fish department, wildlife, biologists, wildlife veterinarians and other concerned sportsman. The consensus is they don't know for sure either. For every "may" in the research there could be a "may not", but contrary to that every "may not" could also be a "may".

My purpose here today is to remind everyone that the decisions the game and fish have to make have consequences. The decisions the legislature has to make have consequences. The decisions that we have to make as hunters and conservationists have consequences. Some of the consequences are intended, but some were unknown. I am here spread light on the fact that one of these unknown consequence to baiting bans happens to affect people that I love dearly and that I spend numerous days a year hunting with. People with whom the only chance I have to enjoy the outdoors and enjoy hunting with them is in an adaptive blind with bait.

So to everybody in the room I want you to make sure that you're not taking this lightly. No matter what way this bill goes and no matter what way baiting in the future of North Dakota goes, I want you all to remember that there are people who are going to hurt because of the choice to ban baiting, so if you choose to do such a thing or choose to not lift the bans, you need to make sure that you're doing it based on something. You need to be certain. I need you to make sure that you're OK with those consequences.

Thank you for your time.

Aaron Esquibel