

1/18/2023

Chairman Porter and all members of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee,

My name is Chris Jorde and I am a 4th generation business owner, farmer/rancher, & landowner from Towner (District 6). I am testifying in favor of HB 1151.

My farm/ranch consists of mainly sandy soils that makes it very challenging to grow crops in years where limited precipitation is available, such as in last year's drought (2021). I mention this to start out because growing food plots are also almost impossible in dry years also. The crops I grow are Alfalfa, Corn, Oats, Soybeans, and cover crops; with a majority of my acres being in Alfalfa production to accommodate the sandy soils that I practice conservation on. Obviously with these crops grown bring a very large deer herd to my farm/ranch for those reasons every year! Like any other farm/ranch management, managing the deer herd that frequents my property is just part of the job. Most of my pasture land that consists of poplar trees and native grasses is within a very large block of mostly privately owned land similar to my own. This chunk of land is approximately 3 miles by 5 miles (approximately 9,600 acres) with no major roads within. Within this land is a very large deer herd (400-500) which has excellent cover and habitat, however does not have any agricultural crops within that only start on the outside borders on 2 sides. The other special feature about this chunk of land is that over time all of the farmsteads/ranch headquarters have been developed on the borders. Over the last few years, 2 large feedlots have been developed also in close proximity.

In the year 2000, I purchased a quarter of land from my grandfather with the intent of wintering my livestock on this land because of the excellent cover available on the border like others had done. Now I knew that with the large amount of deer in the area that I would have to do some major research and work to make both deer and livestock thrive in the environment. My grandparents had received a habitat award for this land in the 1980's from the Game & Fish department so I knew that keeping deer out of the feed that I planned to have there would be a challenge. Working with Game & Fish like most landowners do, we came up with a plan to erect a deer proof hay yard to try to mitigate any problems with feedstuffs. I took this process one step further, an old rancher once told me "Feed the best and they will stay out of the rest." So this is what I did from past experience seeing Game & Fish manage livestock feed problems thru their intercept feed program. So every fall, I would keep back 10-15 large 2nd, 3rd, & occasionally 4th cutting alfalfa bales to feed the deer periodically throughout the winter months. Feeding these bales in the best deer habitat I had within this large chunk of land proved to be the best thing to do as very seldom would I ever or other landowners have deer coming close to their winter hay supplies because they finally received quality feed in their prime habitat and were content staying there. Solving land management issues with a common sense approach goes a very long way! With the effectiveness of this practice, in 2008 I also started feeding high quality feeds and minerals to this deer herd year round all over my farm/ranch and actually was able to spread this large herd into smaller herds that would prove to be a valuable tool to help aid in disease control. This was a large benefit to all the hunters that had access and adjacent landowners in the area because the deer were everywhere!

Then in 2010, I started an Ag-Tourism business that promoted people coming to my farm/ranch and experiencing what we had to offer on 7-day stays on a working farm/ranch with abundant amounts of wildlife to experience. I went as far as going to hunting/outdoor shows in other states to promote my place as well as the state of North Dakota. Working with ND Tourism, offers were made to carry tourism

literature promoting ND in exchange for booth reimbursement at these shows. Now what I was doing was not unheard of because many other farmers/ranchers were doing the same thing to supplement their operations in “leaner” times also as North Dakota tourism promoters as well.

So when my area (3A4) lost the ability to hunt over feed that we had been doing many years in 2021, many producers lost valuable incomes and revenue that was being brought to the state of North Dakota thru tourism dollars and were not being spent in our communities. Most producers in my area were only bringing in ¼ to 1/3 of what typically came before the rules changed; that is a major revenue loss to the state of North Dakota thru tourism! Many people love to experience hunting in North Dakota because of our large deer numbers and the ability to hunt open areas of land over feed that they may not be able to do in other places.

I know that most people say that management decisions should only be left to Game & Fish professionals with Biology degrees, but what about all the Farmers/Ranchers, Landowners, and Sportsmen who hold degrees in Farm/Ranch Management, Animal Science, Economics, or even Biology or Wildlife Management? These professionals also know what they are talking about too! Livestock producers know that most disease problems are usually feed related. I don't know very many producers that don't take their jobs seriously because in all reality, sick animals don't make you money and only cost you! So that is why landowners and producers want to have the ability to manage their property the way that they see fit! All landowners know that there has to be a balance between livestock and wildlife for all to strive on their private lands. With more than 90% of the state privately owned, you would think that the people who own the land and are driving part of the state's economy should be in control of their own property! As far as any possible disease outbreaks that could happen in the future, I believe that the North Dakota Board of Animal Health has the ability to control the ability and Game & Fish should not.

Now with the hunting over feed ban in place, more producers are having more trouble controlling the deer populations in their feed supplies with the fear of breaking the law if they feed and hunt over it while the Game & Fish can still “intercept feed” and not spread disease. The 2 large feedlots in the area now are having deer depredation problems that are causing them new problems that seemed to be under control for so many years before. Being able to hunt over food is a very effective and valuable tool that needs to be available for producers to continue to use to properly manage the deer herds on their property!

In closing, land & wildlife management should be done by the owners of the property since most land in our state is privately owned. Landowner, Game & Fish, & Sportsmen relations all need to be developed in the future for success!

For these reasons I ask that you support HB 1151 and allow this valuable tool to be used again to aid in controlling the wildlife population on privately owned lands in North Dakota!

Thank You for your time and the jobs you do!

Respectfully,

Chris Jorde – Heart J Ranch

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