



Attn: Members of the House Committee on Energy & Natural Resources
Re: House Bill 1538 – Fishing Contests
Date: February 1, 2023
Position: Support

Honorable Members of the House Committee on Energy & Natural Resources,

I write to you today on behalf of the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation in support of House Bill 1538, a bill that would eliminate constraints on fishing contests that currently make many of those contests unfeasible and impractical to conduct. This bill does not eliminate the ability of the North Dakota Game and Fish Department (GFD) to conduct science-based fish and wildlife management, nor does it prohibit the GFD from denying permit applications when appropriate, but rather creates conditions that encourages competitive angler participation, eliminate barriers for youth fishing contests, benefits the fundraising capabilities of charitable organizations, and will have a positive impact on the local economies near popular fishing destinations. Furthermore, the changes presented in this bill will result in increased funding for the North Dakota GFD through the Sport Fish Restoration Program and additional non-resident license sales. I respectfully urge the members of this committee to support the passage of HB 1538.

Founded in 1989, the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation (CSF) is the informed authority across outdoor issues and serves as the primary conduit for influencing public policy. Working with the Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus (CSC), the Governors Sportsmen's Caucus (GSC), and the National Assembly of Sportsmen's Caucuses (NASC), CSF gives a voice to hunters, anglers, recreational shooters, and trappers on Capitol Hill and throughout state capitols advocating on vital outdoor issues that are the backbone of our nation's conservation legacy.

The present language creates unnecessary barriers to hosting fishing contests in the state. Under the current law, organizers must pay a conservation fee of at least 10% of the gross proceeds from the same entry or participation fees to the North Dakota Game and Fish Department. Despite common misconceptions, large fishing tournament organizations do not generate significant revenues from a single tournament event, and those tournaments with at, or near, 100% payback to participants are often in the negative with expenses versus receipts prior to being subject to the 10% conservation fee. For this reason, larger multi-day professional or semi-professional fishing tournaments simply will not host events in North Dakota, resulting in lost economic gains for local communities near popular fisheries.

Your Inside Connection to Outdoor Legislation

Data have shown that fishing contests have a positive and even substantial economic impact on local communities. For instance, in a study of the economic impact of black bass tournament angling at Sam Rayburn Reservoir, Texas, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department personnel determined that black bass tournament angling contributed a greater percentage of annual economic expenditures and value (74% and 66%, respectively) than non-tournament angling¹. In addition, larger professional tournaments have been documented to have a disproportionately larger economic impact than smaller tournament events²³. Furthermore, and even more relevant for North Dakota, a study by the University of Wisconsin – La Crosse found walleye anglers have a higher tendency to spend more money per day and more days in host communities than any other species-specific tournaments⁴.

Many communities in other states actually invest in bringing fishing tournaments to their area because of the return-on-investment fishing contests generate. For instance, in 2015 the Adirondack Coast Visitors Bureau paid \$24,800 in host fees for six professional or semi-professional tournaments over the course of the year. Those six tournaments had an overall economic effect of \$2.2 million, and the associated economic impact report concluded, "...bass fishing tournaments represent a remarkable return on investment for the Plattsburgh community."⁵

Additionally, the present fishing contest definition only exempts contests with participants younger than sixteen years of age and that do not charge entry fees. This requirement discriminates against high school anglers sixteen and older. High school fishing competitions are one of the fastest growing youth sports in the nation because it is more inclusive for students regardless of athletic abilities, compared to traditional high school sports. Yet, high school fishing teams are not commonplace in North Dakota because they are subject to the same permit requirements to host an event as a major tournament organization.

The language proposed by HB 1538 remedies these challenges by removing the conservation fee mandate and establishing a flat permit fee based on participant size, raising the minimum entry fee subject to the permitting requirements to \$50.00, and exempts high school fishing contests from permitting requirements that will allow North Dakota youth anglers to be on par with their peers across the country.

¹ "Black Bass Tournament Characteristics and Economic Value at Sam Rayburn Reservoir, Texas," Journal of the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies 1:26–32, 2014.

² "Economic Value of the Tournament Black Bass Fishery on Lake Guntersville, Alabama," Auburn University, Master's Thesis, May 9, 2015.
https://etd.auburn.edu/bitstream/handle/10415/4607/Economic_Value_of_Tournament_Black_Bass_Fishing_on_Lake_Guntersville_15_05_07.pdf?sequence=2

³ "Bassmaster Classic generated \$35M economic impact," Birmingham Business Journal, May 5, 2020.
<https://www.bizjournals.com/birmingham/news/2020/05/05/bassmaster-classic-generated-35m-economic-impact.html>

⁴ "Tournament Angling in Wisconsin: The Economic Impact of Bass, Salmon, and Walleye Fishing Tournaments on Host Communities," University of Wisconsin – La Crosse, Master's Thesis May 2015.
https://minds.wisconsin.edu/bitstream/handle/1793/73369/Erickson_Sara_Thesis.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

⁵ "2015 Economic Impact Study – Pro Bass Fishing Tournaments," SUNY Plattsburgh, in conjunction with the Adirondack Coast Visitors Bureau. February 9, 2016.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/293653159_2015_Bass_Fishing_Economic_Impact_Study

In closing, the proposed language of HB 1538 does not interfere with the North Dakota GFD's ability to carry out science-based fish and wildlife management. Rather, this legislation would likely increase the funding available to the GFD through Sport Fish Restoration dollars and increased fishing license revenue, while encouraging increased participation in recreational fishing in North Dakota and substantially benefiting local economies.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the members of the committee to support HB 1538.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert A. Matthews". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "R" and "M".

Robert Matthews

Senior Coordinator, Upper Midwestern States

Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation

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