

The Hazen sportsmen oppose HB 1538.

We feel that fishing tournaments congregate people in select, desirable areas for the purpose of winning and making money. This essentially is exploiting our natural resources for profit.

Tournaments target the larger fish which means smaller fish are released after being boated. How many of these fish survive? We must also consider the larger fish permanently removed from the system. In regards to catch and release tournaments how many of these fish survive? We know not all because we have seen after these types of tournaments the dead walleyes floating in the release area.

The point has been made that fishing tournaments are a way to get children into fishing, we totally disagree. No matter the age, people who participate in tournaments have already been "hooked" on fishing. People just starting out in fishing don't own the type of equipment that the people who fish tournaments do. Our annual local Cops and Kids fishing event is a good example of how to get children into fishing. Basic, easy to use equipment, supervision by experienced fisherman and plenty of bluegills, rainbow trout, bullheads and crappies eager to bite. Sometimes the word tournament is used in the description for these get togethers but the only thing it has in common with big money tournaments is the congregation of people and the word tournament.

HB 1538 proposes to drop the 10% conservation fee and add an entrance fee at a maximum of \$2,500. The Governor's cup took in \$9,200, This money is put right back into the local area for fish cleaning stations, boat ramp upgrades and repair, bank stabilization etc. If this bill would of been in place during this particular tournament the Beulah area would of received \$6,700 less and lets take into consideration that the \$2,500 is not guaranteed but is the maximum and sometimes there is matching money offered. A lot more can be accomplished with matching \$9,200 then \$2,500. No matter which way this bill goes the Game and Fish department will still have the responsibility to maintain these areas to acceptable standards. That takes money, will the average fisherman have to take on this burden if not enough funds are generated?

Another point being made is local communities would be able to take in extra funds generated from these tournaments. Once again that would be making money off of our natural resources. If hosting these tournaments is that valuable is 10% too much to ask to help maintain what we have? If the tournament officials do not want to pay the conservation fee maybe these communities could work with them to come up with the money?

The conservation fee has been in place for about forty years. A 2021 survey showed that 92% of the fishermen who do not participate in tournaments, 68% of the fishermen who compete in tournaments, and 60% percent of the tournament sponsors are satisfied with how things are being handled in regards to the conservation fee so why is this bill even being considered?

A look at the submitted testimonials in favor of this bill shows multiple non residents weighing in supporting this bill. Is it proper to have non residents trying to influence our legislative process?

We would like to thank you for your time and consideration,

Sincerely,
Sheldon Cieslak,
President, Hazen Sportsmen