

Submitted on behalf of the members of the Lake Region Anglers Association

Jay Hagen, President

March 14th, 2023

Dear members of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee

**Senator Dale Patten (Chairman); Senator Jeffery J. Magrum (Vice-Chairman);
Committee Members, Senator Todd Beard; Senator Keith Boehm; Senator Jordon L.
Kannianen; Senator Greg Kessel**

The Lake Region Anglers Association's (LRAA) Executive Officers and Board of Directors, by a vote of 11 to 0 asks the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee to give House Bill 1538 a "Do Not Pass" recommendation.

We would like to share a bit about our organization the Lake Region Anglers Association. We were established in 1975 based on six founding principles;

1) Conservation, 2) Preservation, 3) Fellowship, 4) Sportsmanship, 5) Lake Access, 6) Youth Education and Activities.

First in relation to HB 1538 let us say we fully support any changes that benefit our Youth, Veterans and Non-Profit organizations. What we are not in support of is the elimination of the conservation fees generated by what tournaments pay as a percentage of their entry fees and replacing this fee with a tournament application fee. The current rules allow for 100% of the conservation dollars to be returned back to the local entities and communities where the fishing tournaments are held. Installing a fishing tournament application fee in place of a conservation fee as HB 1538 does not allow for funds to be returned back to the communities that host these fishing tournaments which hamper our ability to support the resources in the future.

Our organization the Lake Region Anglers Association has been a beneficiary of the conservation dollars generated from tournaments held in the Lake Region.

We feel it important to share with you how the conservation dollars we receive are generated, how we attempt to maximize those conservation dollars, and lastly, how we have spent the Conservation Dollars we receive.

How conservation dollars we receive are generated;

The Lake Region Anglers Association holds five (5) member fishing tournaments each year and our members are comfortable in knowing that a portion of the entry fees from our tournaments goes towards a conservation fee that in turn is used to support our local resources. In doing so we are able to honor two (2) of the principles that we were founded on, the Conservation of and Preservation of the resources we utilize.

The Lake Region Anglers have also been fortunate in that when many other entities who hold fishing tournaments within the Lake Region file their fishing tournament applications, they often designate our organization as the beneficiary of the conservation dollars generated. It has been expressed to us that they choose to do so as they are comfortable in knowing that our organization will spend those dollars wisely for the benefit of the resource they are utilizing.

How we attempt to maximize conservation Dollars;

When our organization receives one (\$1) conservation dollar we often are able to generate up to four (\$4) dollars of benefit in support of our resources and facilities. We are able to do this working with the North Dakota Game and Fish Department on a 75% (ND Game & Fish) 25% (LRAA) cost share basis. Our organization has been fortunate to receive conservation dollars averaging in the neighborhood of around \$2,000 to \$2,500 on an annual basis. If our designated project in working with the North Dakota Game and Fish Department qualifies for the 75% / 25% cost sharing program, our \$2,000 worth of conservation dollars can become up to \$8,000, funds all of which are used for resource and facility improvements.

Here are some recent and past projects that LRAA has spent conservation dollars on;

1) on the installation and maintenance of Four (4) Handicap Fishing Ramps providing Lake Access to provide fishing opportunities for the disabled,

- 2) on a Stairs project over the rocks / rip-rap off of North Dakota State Highway 57 in support of Lake Access to provide fishing opportunities for shore fisherpersons,
- 3) on Lake Access Ramp projects at Lakewood Landing, at Henagar Landing, at East Bay Landing and at 6 Mile Bay Landing,
- 4) on the purchase of docks, the spring installation, fall removal of docks and the ongoing maintenance of the docks at these Lake Access sites,
- 5) in support of area Fish Cleaning Stations, namely the All-Season Station facility, the Lakewood Landing facility, the Henagar Landing facility, and the Six Mile Bay Landing facility,
- 6) a) in support of Youth Education and Activities Youth Exploratory Days with students from Central Middle School in Devils Lake,
 - b) with on the water outings involving area Cub and Boy Scout groups,
 - c) with the Lure Em' for Life Summer Youth Camp in educating and taking the youth attending the camp out on an on the water fishing experience
 - d) through our support of the Annual Angler Young Angler (AYA) Fishing Tournament a tournament that since its inception in 2008 has exposed a total of 1114 youthful anglers to the sport of fishing over its (14) year history,
- 8) in support of Veterans groups like the Wounded Warriors organization,

All of the projects, activities mentioned above have benefitted through dollars generated from our fund-raising projects and through the use of conservation dollars provided to our organization.

We have read all of the testimony provided from those "In Opposition" to and from those "In Favor" of HB 1538. We have read numerous comments from those submitting testimony "In Favor" of HB 1538 relating to the how neighboring states have no or a lower fee for tournaments than the state of North Dakota does. In response to these comments, what we can say that members of our organization and community hear time and time again from out of state anglers on how impressed they are with our fishing opportunities, with our supporting facilities, (namely our Lake Access points, our Boat Ramps, our Fish Cleaning Stations) and how they wish that their states had such facilities. We do not know if the other states lack of or reduced fees are the reason why our resource and facilities are the envy of those out of state anglers but it is our belief based on what we have been able to

accomplish in developing, improving and maintaining these facilities that this may be part of the reason why.

We as an organization are not against fishing tournaments, as shared in our testimony we hold five (5) of our own fishing tournaments annually. We do wish to ask the larger out of state fishing tournaments, their organizers and anglers to view how through the use of conservation fees the resource and facilities have benefitted.

We at the Lake Region Anglers Association support the maintaining of a conservation fee for tournaments, but equally it is our objective to work to restore the cap of \$5,000 per event for the conservation fee, as it was prior to the October of 2020 administrative rule change. This proposal would benefit everyone, which we believe was proven out as there was little to no prior opposition from any of the in-state or out of state fishing tournaments, their organizers or the anglers when the conservation fee was in place and had the \$5,000 capped amount.

The passage of HB 1538 will adversely affect and limit the good that Non-Profit organizations like the Lake Region Anglers Association are able to do for our resources and communities if the conservation fee is eliminated. All anglers, recreational and tournament anglers alike all wish to come to a location that provides them a quality fishing experience and locations that have the resources and facilities in place to accommodate their needs. It has long been an objective of the Lake Region Anglers Association to provide such a venue.

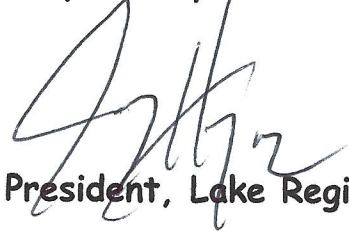
In closing there are three (3) points that we wish to emphasize:

- 1) We agree there is a need to address any inequities as related to fishing opportunities for Youth events, for Veteran's groups and for Non-Profit entities,
- 2) We wish to express that the regulation of fishing tournaments is best addressed as it has been in the past, through the North Dakota Game and Fish Department under its Administrative Code and Rule's process versus enacting new legislation via HB 1538 that would become a part of the North Dakota Century Code. As noted previously the Administrative Code and Rules process has worked since its inception absent one issue, the October 2020 administrative rule change that eliminated the cap of the \$5,000 conservation fee amount which adversely affected the high dollar entry fee, larger fishing tournaments.
- 3) It is our opinion that the issues raised in HB 1538 are easily fixable by establishing a committee to work with the North Dakota Game and Fish Department through their Administrative Code and Rules process. Our group the Lake Region

Anglers Association along side of the North Dakota Sportfishing Congress (a group that represents the majority of the fishing clubs in North Dakota), would commit to be a part of a committee to work with North Dakota Game Fish personnel, with the North Dakota Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Boards, and with a group of individuals and businesses from those who submitted testimony "In Favor" of HB 1538 to resolve the issues in question, all without the need for any new legislation. This can be done in a manner that is workable for all of the affected groups.

The Lake Region Anglers Association asks that Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee votes a "Do Not Pass" recommendation on HB 1538 for the following reasons; 1) we are against the elimination of the conservation fee for tournaments and 2) our belief that all of the issues brought forth in HB 1538 can be resolved in manner that does not require new legislation.

Respectfully submitted,



President, Lake Region Anglers Association

LRAA - Executive Officers - President Jay Hagen; Vice President Cory Everson; Secretary Jamie Lehmann; Treasurer Vince Bechtold; Past President Edward Dosch

LRAA - Members of the Board of Directors - Shelby Vasichek; Bryan Lang; Chad Estenson; Kyle Reimer; Kraig Gellner; Jason Albert