

HB1357

North Dakota Parks and Recreation Department

Transportation Committee

327E, 10:15 am

Thursday, January 28, 2021

Ryan Gardner, West Region Manager

Good morning Chairman Ruby, members of the committee: my name is Ryan Gardner, West Region Manager, with North Dakota Parks and Recreation Department. I am testifying on behalf of the Department and providing neutral testimony for HB 1357 relating to permits for entry to state parks: to provide a continuing appropriation.

The North Dakota Parks and Recreation Department (Department), as defined in century code, a vehicle entry permit is currently required to access a North Dakota State Park. Users can purchase a daily permit for \$7 or an annual permit for \$35. Discounted permits are available for North Dakota residents aged 65 and older and North Dakota veterans with service-related disabilities up to 50% for \$28. A free lifetime permit is available to North Dakota veterans with 50% or greater service-related disabilities. Additionally, all North Dakota volunteer first responders, with red license plates, have free access to all state parks.

The requirement that a second or subsequent annual permit issued to a permit holder, which may be used by members of the permit holder's household for \$20, will result in a loss of revenue for the Department due to a second permit being purchased at a lower price. The fiscal note provided shows a decrease in revenues by \$42,800 based on reduced revenue from sales of multiple passes. Revenues that are received from permits and camping accommodations are invested back into the parks to keep up with maintenance and providing amenities as customer preferences continue to evolve. The fiscal note also shows an increase in the cost required for programming and testing of our point of sale system to support this bill. This is required to ensure that our current point of sale system can perform the duties outlined in this bill.

Lack of internet or cell phone connectivity within our state parks will hamper the implementation of this legislation. As park staff are patrolling the park for compliance, staff may not have the service needed to conduct compliance checks. Most park locations only have internet and cell phone service at the entry of the park. This will result in additional staff time and resources invested into this process. Customer service will be impacted due to a lack of connectivity and may result in a negative experience. The fiscal note is silent on the cost of the broadband infrastructure upgrades required to ensure that the Department can support this legislation.

The proposed requirement of maintaining a computerized database that contains a record of identifying information for all individuals issued a permit may reduce some of the flexibility associated with the vehicle permits. At this time, annual vehicle permits are a static cling. Meaning they can be transferred between vehicles as needed. The fiscal note does not show the increased cost of changing the pass from a transferrable cling to a sequentially numbered sticker for one vehicle.

Tying the annual vehicle permit to a specific vehicle will take more administrative time when the permit is purchased. Information related to vehicle registration and identifiable household information would need to be collected. In addition, individuals or companies often purchase the annual vehicle permit and give them as gifts since no identifiable information is collected at this time. For example, we have a company that annually purchases 100 passes for its employees since the permit is transferrable.

The Department is always interested in providing the best customer service and experience and open to exploring all options.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my remarks; I would be pleased to answer any questions that the committee may have. Thank you for your time and consideration.