

TESTIMONY OF

Karl Rockeman, Director of Water Quality

Good morning Chairman Luick and members of the Senate Agriculture Committee. My name is Karl Rockeman, and I am the Director of the Division of Water Quality within the North Dakota Department of Environmental Quality. The Division of Water Quality protects and monitors our water resources to ensure the quality of surface and groundwater for the public's use. I am here to testify in support of SB2342 and to offer some amendments.

Need for More Emphasis on Soil Health

The need to promote practices to improve soil health is as great as ever. I don't need to tell this committee about the importance of agriculture in our state, or the effect soil productivity has on economic activity. I will include an often-repeated quote that "... we owe our existence to a six-inch layer of topsoil and the fact it rains." Unfortunately, NDSU soil scientists have shown that we continue to lose topsoil at an alarming rate. Also, soil health will be an important factor in our state's carbon equation as we look at a carbon limited future. A statewide coordinated and sustained effort including research, education and technical support is needed to change the path we are on

DEQ's Current Role in Soil Health

What happens on the soil affects our water resources, and the Water Quality Division has been involved in promoting soil health practices for many years. Our Nonpoint Source Pollution Program currently has cooperative agreements with 18 soil conservation districts to support educational programs or provide technical and financial assistance to ag producers implementing soil conservation practices that improve water quality and soil health. These practices include no-till, cover cropping, and grazing management. For example, in the last ten years, the Nonpoint Source Program has used federal Section 319 grant dollars and state and local match to implement these practices on over 64,000 acres in North Dakota, in addition to several statewide and local information and education programs.

The DEQ has also partnered with NDSU extension to develop a soil and water conservation leadership academy for Soil Conservation District board members and staff. This includes various topics such as board roles and responsibilities, hydrology, project management, effective meetings, marketing, and many other skills. This training has been provided to 19 different sessions since 2018, with two more planned this spring.

Other considerations

We'd ask this committee to consider how best to implement the grant and education programs included in Section 12 to keep the administrative overhead low, including using existing

programs that may have processes already in place and to leverage additional federal funding where available.

Also worth consideration is whether a private organization, the Soil and Water Conservation Society, should be noted directly or if it would be better leaving the responsibilities for administrating the programs to a governmental entity who would then collaborate with all NGO's advocating for soil health.

Specific Amendments

Page 10; line 13 – add Non-governmental entities (NGO's) (i.e. commodity groups, ND Grazing Coalition, ND Stockman's Association etc.) as "Eligible entity"

Page 10, line 30. Page 11 line 20 & line 25 Page 12, line 10 Remove references to Soil and Water Conservation Society

Page 11; Line 18 – Non-governmental entities and qualified private crop consultants should be added as technical assistance providers

Page 12; Line 1 –add training for local technical assistance providers to clarify that "Training the Trainer" is also eligible.

Mr. Chairman and committee members, this concludes my testimony. I ask for your support for SB2342 with the requested amendments. I would be happy to answer any questions.