



## **North Dakota Farm Bureau opposes proposed ballot measure to use 5% of oil money for conservation/wildlife programs**

### **The issue**

Non-profit conservation groups and wildlife groups are circulating petitions to put a constitutional amendment on the ballot. The amendment would create a special fund for wildlife and conservation groups to receive funding from oil and gas tax revenue. The measure would create a Clean Water, Land and Outdoor Heritage Fund and a nine member board to govern the fund.

Five percent of all oil and gas gross production and oil extraction taxes collected by the state would be designated to this fund. According to the North Dakota Legislative Council, under current oil production this would generate \$175 million each biennium or \$87.5 million each year.

The board would include four members appointed by legislative leaders, four members appointed by the Governor from a list of names submitted by the State Game and Fish Director, and one appointed by the North Dakota Chapter of the Wildlife Society.

### **What can the money be used for?**

- Protect, improve, maintain and restore water quality through the restoration and protection of rivers, streams, lakes or other surface waters, groundwater, wetlands, grasslands, prairies and forests;
- Improve natural flood control through the restoration and protection of natural areas along, rivers, streams, lakes or other surface waters, groundwater, wetlands, grasslands, prairies and forests.
- Protect, restore, and create wildlife and fish habitat on private and public lands, through grassland, prairie, wetland, stream, lake and forest recreation, creation, and protection;
- Conserve natural areas for people through the establishment and development of parks and other recreation areas; and
- Encourage beginning farmers and ranchers and enhance working farms and ranches through conservation programs and conservation incentives.

### **Why we oppose**

- \$175 million over two years is a LOT of money...too much money for a single-vision special interest group.
- Much of this money could be spent on securing easements for wetland and grassland easements. NDFB opposes easements for more than 20 years or one generation. Long-term and perpetual easements restrict land use for future owners.
- These non-profit conservation groups (Ducks Unlimited, North Dakota Natural Resources Trust, Nature Conservancy, etc.) already have a significant amount of land set aside for waterfowl/wildlife habitat. We don't believe they need any more. Additional money spent on wildlife habitat is simply unnecessary. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service, North Dakota Natural Resources Trust, etc. already have significant amounts of money for conservation easements.
- NDFB members support land conservation and even feed the wildlife throughout the year. Farmers and ranchers are good stewards of the land. Their livelihood depends upon it.
- State agencies, tribal governments, local governments, political subdivisions and non-profit organizations could apply for grants. If state or local governments use the money to purchase parks or recreation areas, state or local taxpayer dollars would have to be used to maintain the property. Can taxpayers afford this or even want it?
- Wildlife and recreation should not take precedence over agricultural production. Many of these conservation programs limit the ability of farmers and ranchers to manage the adjacent land as they see fit. Wildlife, recreation and agriculture can all co-exist with sound land management.

- If this measure were to pass, the oil tax money that is currently spent on road infrastructure, the additional needs of oil patch counties, and property tax relief would probably not be available.
- Proponents have admitted they want this program, because many acres of USDA Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) land will be coming out and they want to replace that land for wildlife enhancement. NDFB has opposed the CRP program because it takes land out of production, thereby negatively impacting rural communities because farmers are not spending money for farm inputs.