

# Public Comments - January 8 to March 4, 2024

## Nonresident Waterfowl

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**Jake Sheffield**

**Brandon SD**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

As a SD resident who enjoys waterfowl hunting I directly oppose the increase in non-resident waterfowl licenses. Looking at the data from last year, there were almost half the amount of non-resident hunters to residents and in correlation the non-resident hunter satisfaction scores were higher than the residents. Where is the supporting data that correlates to a need to increase licenses? Simply saying we have a large amount of public hunting areas is not valid data. Additionally, I would like to know how many on the game commission are waterfowl hunters, understand waterfowl habitat, migration patterns, and what hunting pressure does to migratory bird populations. Increasing non-resident hunting without also balancing the scales in other areas is a recipe for poor quality hunting and negative effects for the wildlife.

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**Doug Welch**

**Sioux Falls SD**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

Hunting used to be a social event that often built relationships that benefited everyone. The bonus was an outdoor activity that rewarded you with the fowl that one was hunting. As the years have passed it has become more difficult to hunt.

The additional pressure of nonresident hunters will adversely impact resident hunters. I say this because I've witnessed it in both hunting and fishing. The GFP's ultimate quest is unknown for Residents. The impact of nonresident hunting and fishing is not a positive one. I'm not aware of meaningful, positive results for Residents. North Dakota provided an excellent experience when I was in the military, stationed in ND. South Dakota does not provide the same experience.

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**Ricardo Salas-Moala**

**Austin TX**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

I consider it a privilege to hunt in South Dakota. I wish the emphasis was on the quality of the hunts as opposed to adding more hunters. I don't think the data supports adding even more hunters and I think it will ruin the quality of the opportunities in the long term.

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**Kurt Lemkau**

**Brandon SD**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

I would highly discourage the increase number of out of state licenses for waterfowl hunting. My question is are you actually doing research on these items or are you just concerned of trying to increase your profits. Also not sure where you found an increase of public waterfowl hunting land. But pretty soon you won't have anyone hunting anywhere do to the build up or frustrations on trying to go hunting and there is no where to go. I went out at 2 am to try and get on public land this year multiple times and what I would call spot a or b was taken and then it was not even a fun adventure. My other fear is I have a 7 year old son. I believe waterfowl hunting should be in his life but will it be. Hard to say if these kids will even tolerate these issues that I have been encountering the same struggles as I do now.

Vote no to increased out of state licenses.

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**Curt Tesch**

**Rosholt SD**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

I don't know how this blank check Nonresident License increase got passed in the first place. There are too may nonresident waterfowl hunters now. The GFP has not asked for any increases so let's stay where we are.

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**Jeffrey Liudahl**

**Grenville SD**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

Way too many nonresident Waterfowl hunters in NE South Dakota!!! We are overrun with nonresident hunters with increasing lack of access to hunting opportunities.

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**Justin Allen**

**Pierre SD**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

I do not support increasing Non Resident waterfowl opportunities/licenses further in South Dakota and urge you as a commissioner to do the same. If we are worried about waterfowl hunters in SD lets work to create more quality opportunities for the resident waterfowl hunters to keep them actively hunting waterfowl. Work to retain and recruit new resident hunters. Creating more opportunities for NR hunters at the expense of residents is counter productive. Just like all forms of hunting, increasing NR hunters increases competition for quality hunting land which in turn increases leasing of land and use of guides/outfitters. Just last year GFP proposed and commission passed a 5% increase to NR waterfowl licenses. Now commission has proposed it again this year even though GFP did not recommend it. As commissioners please remember who you represent. The vast majority sportsman of SD do not want to see any increase to NR waterfowl licenses.

Thank you for your time,

Justin Allen  
Pierre, SD

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**Eric Paulson**

**Pierre SD**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

Seems like this comes up every year. But the numbers of ducks around don't support the constant increase. Look at the DU surveys annual. Starting in 2015:

2015 - less than 1% increase  
2016 - 2% decrease  
2017 - 2% decrease  
2018 - 13% decrease  
2019 - 6% decrease  
2020 and 2021 no surveys  
2022 - 12% decrease  
2023 - 13% decrease

In 2013 DU estimated 49.5 million ducks. In 2023 that DU ducks estimate is 32.320 million. That's a drop of about 35%! The big one, mallards, that everyone wants to hunt dropped 18% from 2022 to 2023 alone! And is down over 47% since 2015 (11.643 million in 2015 and 6.129 million in 2023)

Duck numbers are dropping and hunter numbers are also dropping due to pressure and competition. As the duck numbers drop the opportunities drop and hunters get more congested chasing few birds in the same spot. Talk to your average hunters, not commercial outfits with multiple scouters out driving around covering 1,000 miles a night scouting, 10 years ago your average Joe could go scouting after work and find multiple places to hunt rather easily for the next day before dark. Now you drive around all night and might be lucky to find 1 decent spot. And the odds of you being the only one to find that spot are pretty slim.

We need to stop saying that just because resident numbers are down that this endless opportunity abounds. It doesn't. The opportunity is less now than ever for a variety of reasons. Less ducks, more leasing, etc. Your die hard hunters are still around. They were the ones doing most of the hunting back when numbers were high. The people who quit likely didn't hunt much anyway and didn't impact the pressure a whole lot. Look at when resident hunters spiked in 2014 and the DU duck numbers. Duck numbers were high. As the duck numbers have plummeted so have the resident hunters. [https://gfp.sd.gov/UserDocs/nav/WATERFOWL\\_SUMMARY.pdf](https://gfp.sd.gov/UserDocs/nav/WATERFOWL_SUMMARY.pdf)

Bird habits have changed. Exhibit A is the Missouri River. Even 10 years ago there were hundreds of thousands of geese around. Now if the entire river hits 100,000 for the year that's big year! 100,000 used to be just what was in one bay! Birds' migratory paths have changed. Waterfowl habits have changed.

I would urge you to not increase non-resident licenses anymore and just give this subject rest for a while. The population numbers given by DU on an annual basis just don't support increases anymore. Until duck numbers bounce back lets stop pushing more nonresidents in which in turn push more residents to hang it up.

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**Renee Allen**

**Pierre SD**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

Dear Commission,

As a life long resident of SD I oppose the proposal to increase Non Resident waterfowl licenses and urge you to listen to vast majority resident waterfowl hunters of South Dakota and oppose the proposal as well. NR licenses were increased 5% just last year. In addition what used to be 10 continuous day NR statewide licenses were modified to two 5 day periods a few years ago as well. Between those two measures the days afield by NR waterfowl hunters has increase dramatically in the last 5 years. All of this has been at the expense of the resident hunters. Creating more opportunities for NR hunters at the expense of resident opportunities isn't right. I hope my kids and grandkids that choose to stay in SD get to experience the hunting we all did before its gone to outfitter/guides and NR hunting interests. Please oppose the increase to NR waterfowl licenses.

Renee Allen  
Pierre, SD

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**Quintin Biermann**

**Groton SD**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

I am writing to oppose the annual increase in non resident waterfowl licenses. SD has seen a steady increase in NR hunters. Opportunity to hunt and overall hunt quality is dwindling due to increased pressure as well as lack of access due to increased leasing by both outfitters and out of state hunters. I have been an avid outdoorsman my whole life, and enjoy hunting waterfowl with good friends and my children. I hope that by keeping our license numbers in check for non residents we can continue to have great waterfowl hunting for decades to come.

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**Chris Zabel**

**Clark SD**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

I do not support a increase to nr waterfowl licenses. Leasing of land and obtaining permission is already hard enough in northeast sd and Clark Co. Everyone comes for three week when the mallards show up and crowding is a real issue. Please to not support this proposal.

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**Cody Warner**

**Webster SD**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

The waterfowl hunting in South Dakota is second to none. I believe we have the right balance of residents and nonresidents that allow the SDGFP to maintain quality hunting. As we add more NR licenses, I believe the quality of the hunting will decrease. The vast majority of residents and NR's do not want any license increases. Please vote NO.

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**Phil Hudson**

**Huron SD**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

I oppose the 5% increase of nonresident waterfowl licenses. GFP commissioners should be focused on how to improve the quality of the waterfowl hunting experience for residents & our nonresident GUESTS vs allowing more & more people every chance they get. It is a shame how the game commission has treated SD residents on this issue and much trust in the commission has been lost.

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**Tim Anderson**

**Mankato MN**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

Please include in public comment section,

As a Non Resident hunter that has come to South Dakota for over 20 years waterfowl hunting I'm frustrated to see you are trying to increase NR waterfowl licenses again in South Dakota. We have come to SD to enjoy the great hunting. However that has really began to change over the last 10 years. Increased pressure from resident and NRs has increased the hunting pressure on public lands and gaining permission on private land has become much, much harder. Please do not increase NR waterfowl licenses.

Tim

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**Brett Kyle**

**Henry SD**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

Please no more NR waterfowl hunters or fisherman. We are being taken over in NE SD by guides, outfitters, leases. It is pushing the locals out quickly. Look out for the locals not out of staters. No more out of state waterfowl hunting licenses.

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**Aaron Leingang**

**Pierre SD**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

I do not want more NR waterfowl hunters for my son and I to compete with. I am pro NR youth waterfowlers as a recruitment tool but apparently that isn't important to NR waterfowlers as NR youth licenses go unfilled. I think more NR waterfowl tags would only benefit more wealthy NR waterfowlers who use guides and lock up private land so residents can't hunt. Thanks for your consideration

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**Alan Thomas**

**Huron SD**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

Please do not support the proposal to increase the Non Resident Waterfowl license number by 5%. This proposal is proposed without Waterfowl Management justification.

Do not pass this proposal.

Thank you

Alan Thomas

Huron. SD

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**Robert Naylor**

**Chapel Hill NC**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

I am a nonresident waterfowl hunter, and I've been coming to SD for the past 17 years (even the years I did not get drawn for NR Waterfowl). I also purchase a license for hunting pheasant each year, and sometimes make a second trip to SD just to hunt pheasants. Your amazing state of SD is probably as good as it gets in the entire country for hunting, and that presents a bit of a dilemma with the tradeoff between revenues from hunters and the rights of resident SD hunters and their family traditions over the years. I believe that nonresident waterfowl licenses should be restricted to the level they are currently set, or even reduced in the event resident hunters are seeing too much local pressure in their areas. Pheasant hunting (I assume) is the big revenue generator for the state, and nonresident waterfowl hunting is a very small fraction of that economic generation total. So it does not make any sense at all to ruin the resident waterfowl hunters long traditions and enjoyment of pursuing waterfowl without having to deal with too many nonresident hunters fighting over the same fields. Waterfowl are not disbursed "evenly" like pheasant, and even a small increase in nonresident licenses can make a dramatic negative impact to the enjoyment of the resident local waterfowl hunters. I would gladly sit out a season or two of hunting waterfowl in SD in deference to my SD waterfowl hunting friends in order to protect their rights to this important resource. Of course I would still come to SD and hunt pheasants and take pictures to remember each year. SD would still get my economic impact, and the resident waterfowl hunters would get to continue the great waterfowl hunting opportunities that they have enjoyed over their lifetimes. Its a win-win. Thank you. Robert Naylor, Chapel Hill, NC.

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**Paul Hansen**

**Brookings SD**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

Against additional Non-resident waterfowl licenses. Example last fall on weekend took daughter waterfowl hunting in Webster area. Up extra early and first 3 choices to hunt at all had Minnesota license plates already there. Tough to find places to hunt on weekends when most people can hunt. My guess is you are seeing FEWER RESIDENT waterfowl hunters, Thanks for you time Paul Hansen

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**Terry Menning**

**Aberdeen SD**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

Waterfowl hunting in south dakota is on the same path as what pheasant hunting is now. Paid hunting, guides, lodges. Increasing Waterfowl hunting opportunities for nonresident only compounds this issue. Increased pressure for limited land creates leasing period. Discouraged that the commission seems to be representing out of state hunting interests and revenue over protecting south dakota sportsmans quality opportunities the last several years. Please put yourself in the shoes of the average south dakota sportsman on these issues. Really the folks you are supposed to represent. Please do not increase nonresident Waterfowl licenses anywhere in south dakota.

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**Mark Smedsrud**

**Sioux Falls SD**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

As a lifelong resident that has enjoyed waterfowl hunting for 40 + years with my family and children I am opposed to the proposed increase in NR licenses. We have for years fought to maintain a balance of hunting satisfaction and quality hunting with residents and NR. This history goes back farther than I'm sure most of the commission can remember. For that past number of years mission creep has been evolving with more licenses allowed for the NR. Well as someone that has been a primary public land hunter, but someone not afraid to knock on doors to build relationships, the quality has been eroding again. When I visit the North east part of the state it is over inundated with trucks, trailers and outfitters following the migration. Knocking on doors is becoming harder and harder with the comments from land owners, sorry it's leased for waterfowl. This erosion of outfitters, NR willing to pay these fees and competition for public lands across the state weakens the residents leverage of living here as paying taxes and supporting our local businesses. I urge you to consider the consequences of increasing the NR quota at whose expense and benefit.

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**Jacob Johnke**

**Brandon SD**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

Always have issues with non residents, they have no respect for our wildlife. Ran into a bunch of groups last year, they shot their ducks and geese, didn't clean them, put them in the ditch and told me they are a pest bird anyways. .

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**Kaleb Pint**

**Sioux Falls SD**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

No comment text provided.

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**Kaley Smedsrud**

**Sioux Falls SD**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

No comment text provided.

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**Landon Krohn**

**Rowena SD**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

No comment text provided.

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**Mark Chamberlain**

**Brandon SD**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

No comment text provided.

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**Trent Johnke**

**Sioux Falls SD**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

No comment text provided.

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**Bruce Millikan**

**Sioux Falls SD**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

No comment text provided.



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**Tate Ivers**

**Brandon SD**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

No comment text provided.

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**Rich Visker**

**Sioux Falls SD**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

I oppose the increase in non-resident licenses. The success rate of the current system is still good. Regardless of that, an increased number has numerous side effects, more pressure on birds which decreases success rate, more pressure on land owners from additional hunters. The added pressure will also make for lower quality of hunts. It also makes it harder for residents and the current non residents that come here. These consistent license increases are going to drive residents to quit hunting. It makes it harder for all of the current hunters to get permission from a land owner.

All you are looking for is MONEY, not caring about the quality of hunts or anything else. If you want more money, make guides pay for a guide license like some states do.

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**David Ode**

**Pierre SD**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

Additional non-resident waterfowl licenses are simply not needed at this time.

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**William Koupal**

**Pierre SD**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

The proposal for an additional increase in nonresident licenses is universally opposed by resident waterfowlers, and for good reason. The proposal increases already intense competition for access, particularly in the eastern part of the state. Passage, in spite of overwhelming opposition, will add to the feeling that the commission is indifferent to the interests of South Dakota's sportsmen and women.

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**William Koupal**

**Pierre SD**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

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**Jeffrey Olson**

**Rapid City SD**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

Duck survey numbers show a decline in numbers the last two years and the GFP raises the non-resident numbers two year in a row. Please start looking at the science and listen to the sportsmen of our great state.

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**Charles Dieter**

**Brookings SD**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

The residents of South Dakota are tired of being bombarded with nonresident waterfowl hunters. Last year, I had 4 separate incidents where non-residents ruined a hunting trip. The Commission is supposed to protect hunting and fishing for residents of the state. We live here, pay taxes here, buy our things here and raise our kids here. Please do not support the increase in nonresident hunting licenses. If you want to add licenses, add them all to Fall River county rather to where residents hunt. Northeast SD is covered with NR hunters from November 1- Thanksgiving. They all come to a 5-county area during the same time frame. I am asking you to support the residents of the state by voting against the increase. For every NR license added, we will lose at least one resident waterfowl hunter. The SD Waterfowl Association has 500 members and all are opposed to the increase. The SD Wildlife Federation has 4,000 members all opposed to an increase in NR waterfowl licenses. That represents 4,500 people against the increase. How many letters of support have you received?

## Other

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**James Berger**

[See attachment #12233](#)

**Pierre SD**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

The suggested deer tag structure is not good for residents. It's tough enough to hunt this state as it is. Last year, limiting the number of non-resident public land tags was a step in the right direction. There is a way to ensure the outfitters can make their money while increasing opportunity for residents. Also, it's time to implement mandatory end of season reporting if you want to hunt the next year so GFP has more complete, accurate data to use in making decisions.

# Maximize hunting opportunities for unique hunters and minimize regulation complexity

- Limit buck licenses to 2
- Treat Special Deer as a Unit within either East River Deer or West River Deer
- Remove Draw 3
- Remove Draw 4

Drawing	Resident	Nonresident
Special Deer	Apply for either, but only successful for one. • If applied ER Special Deer or WR Special Deer, cannot apply for ER Deer or WR Deer in 1 <sup>st</sup> draw, respectively	
1 & 2	Max. 2 seasons (combination of apps & licenses) • Cannot apply if previously successful in season	Max. 2 seasons (combination of apps & licenses) • Cannot apply if previously successful in season
3	Apply for any season, provided no license in season	
4	Max. 5 applications.	
5	Unlimited applications, except max. 1 Special Deer license. First-come, first-served. Resident and nonresident licenses pooled.	

Talking: GFP



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**Weston Kenyon**

**Harrison AR**

**Position:** support

**Comment:**

I am strongly in favor of this beautiful spot remaining open and available for public use. It is being considered as a filming location for a film being written, and closing this runway strip would send the location manager back to square one. We need a small, public use airport. In addition to my personal reason, it sounds as though the recreational pilots who sporadically utilize this asset greatly appreciate it. Would love for it to stay. Thanks.

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**Joseph Newell**

**Brandon SD**

**Position:** other

**Comment:**

SB54 states that my residency is terminated if I :” purchases, or accepts a resident hunting, fishing, or trapping license”. Does this mean I lose my residency if I continue to use my lifetime licenses for MN I purchased twenty years ago? This would be totally unfair and unacceptable.

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**Ron Freeman**

**Mitchell SD**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

I oppose the proposal to increase the number of non-resident waterfowl licenses. As a life long resident of SD and avid waterfowl hunter, I have seen the numbers of non resident waterfowl licenses increase on a regular basis in the past 10 years. We are in the midst of a long term drought which reduces the number of lakes and sloughs we can hunt. Adding more non resident licenses will only increase the hunting pressure on the remaining lakes and resident hunters. Thank you for your consideration and i urge you to vote no on this proposal.

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**Christopher Lynch**

**Sedro Woolley WA**

**Position:** support

**Comment:**

Please continue Custer State airport. The value of strips like this is huge because they can never be cost effectively built again. I have flown to your state and will do so again, if the airports remain open. Thank you.

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**Jeff Miller**

**Lance Creek SD**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

Please don't shut down the Custer state park airport. We love coming and airplane camping there. Not many places besides Idaho to fulfill that adventure. Please keep open.

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**Jack Horn**

**Erie CO**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

No comment text provided.

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**Mike Brownlie**

**Chandler AZ**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

Please do not close airport camping at your airport

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**Bret Robertson**

**Box Elder SD**

**Position:** support

**Comment:**

I believe with the Black Hills not hitting the quota for years, there should be a lottery draw for the forest district to allow a certain amount of mountain lions to be harvested to assist with other wildlife #s! Also putting a cat up in a tree gives a hunter a opportunity to observe the cat, and can clearly see if it's a female with cubs!

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**Chris Kenefick**

**Omaha NE**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

I oppose closing/decommissioning Custer State Park airport.

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**Harvey Hampton**

**Simms MT**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

I oppose the consideration of shutting down the airport. "It's better to have and not need than need and not have". I don't know how SD aviation fuel tax dollars are spent but the airport should be kept in a useable condition. Given the stated amount of use, I personally wouldn't spend millions on it but I would keep it in an operable state

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**Maurice Brandt**

**Custer SD**

**Position:** other

**Comment:**

I filled out your PD survey online months ago, when it first came out. Since then, I have received two postcards from you requesting me to fill out the same survey. Why?

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**Clarke Crawford**

**Flagstaff AZ**

**Position:** support

**Comment:**

I support keeping Custer State Park Airport open. My wife and I fly to Custer State Park Airport at least 1-2 times every year. We enjoy this airport as our exclusive access point to the state park and the Black Hills. We have camped, at the airport, biked from the airport, and been picked up at the airport by hotels. This is a big asset for the area and South Dakota. It would be a huge loss to the state and local area if a way can't be found to keep it open.

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**Jim Gruber**

**Estelline SD**

**Position:** other

**Comment:**

I would like to comment. As a guide you cannot hunt on any of our million acres of public land. But I can guide fishing on our limited public lakes without even a license. N east sd basically is concentrated to Thompson poinsett waubay and bitter they rape our lakes without any contribution to our shrinking lakes. Why?

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**Jeff Baugh**

**Brigham City UT**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

I'm writing to oppose the closure of the Custer State Park Airport. I discovered this airport while vacationing in the area last summer (it was a great trip). My wife and I both commented on returning in the airplane and making a camping trip out of it. Backcountry airports like this are a true treasure to the flying community. Please keep it open.. thanks

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**Teddy J Ulrich**

**Glenwood WI**

**Position:** support

**Comment:**

Hound hunting is a traditional sport such as golfing bowling or any other sport

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**Dale Boyer**

**Elkton SD**

**Position:** other

**Comment:**

Please don't close Custer airport. I enjoyed my stop there a few years ago and am planning on coming back this year

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**Karen Haynes**

**Chamberlain SD**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

I am aware that there is not currently a comment period regarding the Nest Predator Program but I am choosing to stand in opposition to that program which starts, again, soon. Thousands of animals have been slaughtered since this program began and many of them no doubt leaving their young behind when they are killed. Yet, the state is not counting pheasants and there is no evidence that this program improves pheasant habitat at all. In fact, there is such an increase in farm raised pheasants there is probably very little effect. "Hunting and trapping heritage" is not appropriate in 2024 and children should be outside playing instead of killing animals.

Thank you for your consideration.

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**Austin Howard**

**Rapid City SD**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

I am opposed to SB 56. I do not support allowing all classes of e-bikes on the Mickelson trail due to the associated safety issues this would cause.

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**Lisa Pustejovsky**

**Rapid City SD**

**Position:** oppose

**Comment:**

I would like your department to withdrawal the request thru SB 56 to allow Class 2 and 3 E-bikes onto the Mickelson Trail. I use that trail every Spring, Summer and Fall and believe it would be a safety hazard on the trail. These are motorized vehicles in my opinion and have no place being on a trail that is for exercise and enjoying the beautiful Black Hills. Just the other day I was walking my dog on the bike path in Rapid City and almost got run down by a class 2 E-bike because of the speed they were going. This is a bad idea for the Mickelson Trail or any trail.

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**Taffy Howard**    [See attachment #12285](#)

**Rapid City SD**

**Position:** other

**Comment:**

No comment text provided.

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**Darva Rye**

**Gillette WY**

**Position:** other

**Comment:**

E-bikes on the Mickelson Trail. Our family is part of a trust property in the Mystic Valley. The Mickelson Trail is a historical trail. Listed in the top 10 nationwide. What possible financial gain can offset the preservation of this special, unique and beautiful area. 109 miles that is not duplicated anywhere in the world. Our family was associated with the "making" of the trail from its conception, corresponding with our late governor Mickelson. It was presented as a historical preservation idea to the adjoining landowners who wished to have their portion of the abandoned railroad right-of-way restored to their adjoining properties. It was presented as a SAFE, NON MOTORIZED, hiking, biking, running, equestrian trail for ALL families of ALL ages. We strongly OBJECT to the use of e-bikes of any kind on the Mickelson Trail at all, but apparently class 1 e-bikes have been allowed without public comment. We have already experienced the rudeness of e-bikers who think they "own the road". PLEASE then, DO NOT ALLOW any further expansion to class 2 or class 3 e-bikes on the trail .



Dear GF&P Commissioners,

2 March 24

I am writing to you out of concern for what is happening regarding the Mickelson Trail.

"A Piece of Heaven," that's how the PBS documentary describes the ***non-motorized, multi-use*** Mickelson Trail running 109 miles from Deadwood to Edgemont (please watch it if you have not already). Dedicated in 1991 and completed in 1998, it was designed for walking, jogging, horseback riding, and regular biking in the summers and snowshoeing or cross-country skiing in the winter (with limited access for snowmobilers to give them access to the network of snowmobiling trails in the northern Hills). Going from around 5,000 annual users to between 65,000-70,000, the trail has exploded in popularity, being named in 2013 as one of the top 10 rails to trails in the world (remember, this is all while e-bikes were available but were never allowed on this trail)!

Sold commercially in 1997, e-bikes were never allowed on the Mickelson until a couple years ago when, without any public comment period (and in violation of federal law), the new GF&P Secretary changed the usage of the trail and allowed Class 1 and 3 e-bikes (thankfully all I and my friends have seen on the trail though are Class 1s and most people I spoke with believed that was all that was allowed, either that or there were some people I spoke with who believe they are all still illegal and the people riding them are on the trail illegally).

Then this year, GF&P brought SB 56, a bill to allow ALL classes of e-bikes. Thankfully, it was amended in Senate Ag to only Class 1s and easily passed the Senate. The reason it so easily passed is because safety and common sense thankfully won out over what seems to be GF&P's sole concern of more users and more records to be broken and more money. GF&P refused to accept this though and asked House Ag to table it. They stated they plan to "study" the issue and come back again next year essentially with the same bill. One GF&P employee stated they have a group of "e-bikers breathing down their neck." E-bikers do not have preference over all the other users though, the Mickelson is not a bike path, intended only for bikers.

E-bikes though have increased exponentially on the trail as rental shops have popped up everywhere renting them. Thankfully, the rental shop and tour company owners I spoke to say they are only renting Class 1s and not the faster and more dangerous Class 3s. Why? Primarily for safety on the trail.

Class 1 e-bikes are called "low-speed pedelecs" or low-speed pedal electric vehicles. The motor assists the rider pedaling until a speed of 20 mph is reached and the motor stops assisting. Class 2 e-bikes can be completely throttle-driven, with the motor reaching speeds up to 20 mph, sustained. Class 3 e-bikes are back to being pedal-assist, but the motor will assist up to 28 mph. Class 3s are called "***speed*** pedelecs," and are typically sold as a "an urban commuter" bike or a "zippy errand runner," they are NOT typically sold for riding multi-use trails like the Mickelson. Why GF&P would ever think it's okay to put Class 3s on a trail where families with little kids are out walking is beyond me. I've had Class 3 e-bikes fly by me on other trails while I'm out jogging and not only do they about give me a heart attack (because they are so quiet and come up going 30 mph out of nowhere)

Horseback riders go about 4 mph, walkers between 3-5 mph, regular bikers average 10 mph. Force equals mass times acceleration, and with the heavier weight of an e-bike and the faster speed, the impact of an e-bike rider on a walker is ***4-5 times greater*** than the impact of a regular biker. People are literally dying due to collisions between walkers and e-bikes.

According to railstotrails.org, "Speed is fundamental to safety...making it the single most important factor in determining trail compatibility. Speed influences both the ***likelihood of crashes*** and the ***degree of harm*** when they happen."

NO ONE is being stopped from riding the Mickelson if it were to be limited to Class 1s, they are simply being told they have to ride a slower e-bike (that is more compatible with the other users) than they may want to. And posting a speed limit sign does nothing to regulate someone's speed, whereas limiting the class of e-bikes on the trail DOES (otherwise why not allow dirt bikes or mopeds and trust they obey the "speed limit"?!).

Many multi-use recreational trails limit e-bikes to Class 1. Just a couple examples are the Route of the Hiawatha in northern Idaho and the Great Northern Historical Trail in MT.

GF&P argues they can't enforce a ban on classes of e-bikes. Most e-bikes on the trail are rentals, and we can trust these businesses to obey the law. As for e-bikes owners, they know to check the trail before they ride to see if ANY e-bikes are allowed, and we will trust they also behave responsibly. We also have a trail patrol. They can easily see if the e-bike has a throttle (as Class 2s and 3s do) and educate the rider on what's allowed or not allowed, then if they are on a Class 2 or 3, they can politely ask them to disengage their throttle, keep their speed down, and make sure next time they ride they are on a Class 1. Do we not pass any laws simply because we don't want to mess with enforcing them? Of course not.

When Peter Norbeck designed the roads through the Hills, he was asked about the pigtails and switchbacks, and he replied, "It's scenic. You're not supposed to drive here at 60 mph, and to do the scenery justice, you should drive at no more than 20, to do it full justice you should **get out and walk.**" It seems GF&P has forgotten just how beautiful and special our Black Hills are and in their pursuit of ever-more crowds and ever-more money they are going to kill the goose that laid the golden egg.

The Mickelson Trail truly is "a piece of Heaven" that we have been blessed with, meant as a place to slow down, spend time with family, and enjoy the blessings God has given us.

I am asking you, the GF&P Commission members, to maintain the intended use of the Mickelson, because if we do not help conserve our natural resources for future generations (and first and foremost should be future generations of SOUTH DAKOTANS, THEY should be our first priority), they will be gone forever. E-bikes ARE motorized, and as such go against the intended use of the trail and go against the way it has been used for decades. I would rather NO motorized vehicles/bikes be allowed on the trail, but I and most everyone I know who uses the trail are willing to compromise with Class 1s...but anything else is unwise, reckless, and simply not safe.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter. There are a lot of South Dakota citizens who are concerned the Mickelson is headed in a direction that will lead to it no longer being an enjoyable recreational trail for families to get out and enjoy. I'm hoping you will help prevent that from happening.

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