



# Ohio Department of Natural Resources

JOHN R. KASICH, GOVERNOR

JAMES ZEHRINGER, DIRECTOR

**House Energy and Natural Resources Committee  
Testimony in Support of House Bill 518  
Provided by Ohio Department of Natural Resources Director James Zehringer  
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Good afternoon Chairman Landis, Vice Chairwoman Hagan, Ranking Member O'Brien and members of the House Energy and Natural Resources Committee. My name is Jim Zehringer, Director of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR), and I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 518. With me today to assist in answering any questions and providing additional testimony is Mike Miller, Chief of the ODNR Division of Wildlife.

House Bill 518 is a common sense proposal designed to better accommodate the sportsmen and women of Ohio. Under the leadership of Governor Kasich, the ODNR Division of Wildlife has been focused on recruitment and retention, while improving customer service and providing more public access for sportsmen and women.

During this administration, the ODNR Division of Wildlife has tackled a wide variety of issues and worked to improve our overall operations to ensure that Ohio's sportsmen and women's dollars are being spent wisely.

One important change we've recently made is to transition the ODNR Division of Wildlife license purchasing program to an electronic system, which has allowed sportsmen and women to obtain their licenses, tags and permits by using their computers or smart phones. Currently, the system provides service to more than 1 million customers, and it processes more than 2 million licenses, tags and permits annually. This system has streamlined the sales process, simplified website navigation, allowed for free license reprints and enabled permits to be emailed directly to our customers.

Additionally, by reprioritizing how we are investing sportsmen's dollars, we have been able to fund more efforts in the ODNR Division of Wildlife's law enforcement program. Most recently, we announced that we will once again hold a Wildlife Officer Cadet Academy, which will bring 11 more wildlife officers to the division. These officers will patrol counties that have long been without a dedicated officer. Also, in January of 2018, ODNR Division of Wildlife's law enforcement section was proud to announce they are joining more than 20 states in the adoption of a wildlife K-9 program. One wildlife officer from each of the five wildlife districts will become a handler in the program. These highly skilled K-9s are trained to detect hidden wild game, such as white-tailed deer, turkey, waterfowl and fish, along with other non-game scents like ginseng and gun powder. They will also have the ability to track people and will be used to find lost hunters and people hunting without permission. Currently, three of the five K-9s and their handlers are in a 10-week training academy. The other two K-

9s and their handlers will begin training in summer of 2018. This program will not only keep these officers safer, but it helps our officers conduct investigations efficiently.

The ODNR Division of Wildlife has also focused on the removal and repair of their unsafe dams. Within the last three years, the dams at Jockey Hollow Wildlife Area and the Class I (high-hazard) dam at Killdeer Upground Reservoir were decommissioned. Additionally, the removal of the Six Mile Dam on the Walhonding River is currently being coordinated. Engineering design for repairs to meet current dam safety standards is underway at Veto and Knox Lake Class I (high-hazard) dams and at Big Island Mitigation Wetland Dam. Maintenance and repairs have been made at many other Wildlife dams across the state. Removal and maintenance on Wildlife dams is costly, which is why ODNR requested funds for dam improvements apart from the Wildlife Fund in the Capital Budget Bill (House Bill 529 and Senate Bill 266). The General Assembly approved the unprecedented amount of \$11.4 million for dam rehabilitation and facility improvements on ODNR Division of Wildlife-owned properties. This much needed funding can now be invested in dams at wildlife areas while sportsmen's dollars can be spent on the programs, projects, studies and staff where they more directly meet the needs of Ohio's outdoor sport enthusiasts. In addition, Emergency Preparedness Plans have been prepared for all classified dams on Wildlife properties. The public's safety is and always will be a top priority for the department,

The ODNR Division of Wildlife has also been very active on expanding and improving public access around the state. For example, this fall, archery lotteries were held for the first time at Deer Creek, Findley, Malabar Farm and Maumee Bay state parks, opening up more than 1,600 acres that were formerly closed for archery deer hunting. In places such as Cooper Hollow, Oxbow Lake and Willard Marsh wildlife areas, there are newly-planted dove fields to allow more controlled dove hunts. At Indian Creek and Spring Valley wildlife areas, there are new canoe/kayak launch sites, and vegetation was removed to allow for more fishing access.

These are all different ways we are transitioning to make these recreational opportunities more appealing to all customers.

As we reflect on all that has been accomplished, we understand national trends in hunting and fishing participation has varied over the past several years. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service under the U.S. Department of the Interior recently did a report detailing national trends in hunting and fishing participation. They found that from 2011 to 2016, angling participation has increased by 8 percent, from 33.1 million anglers in 2011 to 35.8 million in 2016. Total expenditures by anglers increased 2 percent during that same period. Over that five-year period, the fishing industry experienced an increase of \$1.1 billion from \$45 billion in 2011 to approximately \$46.1 billion in 2016. The report also notes that the greatest increases were seen in the Great Lakes area, with a 10 percent boost in participation.

Hunting participation has experienced a different turn. From 2011 to 2016, participation has dropped by about 2 million participants, and total hunter participation is at around 11.5 million. Total expenditures by hunters have also declined. From 2011 to 2016, there has been a decrease of 29 percent, taking the \$36.3 billion dollar industry to \$25.6 billion.

These national trends impact Ohio, and it is important that we address these issues before such decreases become paralyzing to Ohio's economy. At this point in time, the ODNR Division of Wildlife is stable, and we are able to operate as a division, while better serving the sportsmen and women of Ohio. However, we need new, innovative ideas that will retain our current customer base while also recruiting new participants. We believe this proposed legislation will address these previously mentioned concerns as we focus to strengthen the three R's of wildlife management: Recruitment, Retention and Reactivation.

The ODNR Division of Wildlife chief will share many of the details of the bill in a moment, but a couple highlights of this legislation are:

The ODNR Division of Wildlife is improving customer service and doing away with old practices, such as fishing licenses only being valid until the following February. Fishing licenses under this legislation will now be valid for one year from date of purchase. So whether you buy a license in March or November, you will now be able to fish for a full year. This will allow more anglers to feel they are getting their money's worth and encourage new anglers to try the sport for multiple seasons.

Also, under this bill, instead of buying a one-year resident fishing or hunting license, which is the only current available option, Ohioans will be able to purchase multi-year licenses, including a lifetime license. There is a 10 percent discount to people who wish to purchase multi-year licenses. This will save customers time and money, while providing more options to a variety of hunters and anglers. Avid sportsmen and women will enjoy this, as well as people who do not hunt or fish very often. For example, a sportsman or woman who doesn't regularly hunt or fish may not purchase a license simply because they don't go enough to get their money's worth. With a multi-year license, there is a better chance they will hunt or fish because they will have more time for such activities without having to purchase a new license as frequently.

As previously mentioned, these are just a couple items House Bill 518 addresses. To provide greater detail on this legislation, I will turn to Mike Miller, Chief of the ODNR Division of Wildlife. Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you again for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 518.