



Ohio Department of Natural Resources

JOHN R. KASICH, GOVERNOR

JAMES ZEHRINGER, DIRECTOR

**Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee
Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 257
Provided by Ohio Department of Natural Resources
Chief of the Division of Wildlife Michael Miller
March 21, 2018**

Good afternoon Chairman Balderson, Vice Chairman Jordan, Ranking Member O'Brien and members of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee. As Director Zehringer stated, my name is Mike Miller, and I am the Chief of the ODNR Division of Wildlife. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 257.

I appreciate the Director mentioning some of the highlights of this bill. To elaborate on what was previously stated, one of the goals with this legislation is to establish resident multi-year and lifetime licenses. In the proposal there will be the option of purchasing a one-year, a three-year, a five-year, a 10-year, or a lifetime license. In Ohio, residents have never had the option to buy anything more than a one-year hunting or fishing license. We are currently in the bottom 25 percent when it comes to license options. Now, with this legislation, these new license options will be available for both hunters and anglers.

We looked at other states around the United States that have implemented similar multi-year licenses and overall found very positive results. In Pennsylvania, during the implementation of their multi-year fishing license, they increased revenue by \$1.5 million dollars and sold 64,000 more licenses over a three-year period.

With the expectation that these new licensing options will create additional revenue, we wanted to make sure that these funds are used for the appropriate purposes. As a result, we have created the multi-year license fund. These funds will continue to help maintain best wildlife management practices while benefiting the sportsmen and women of Ohio. All proceeds from the multi-year and lifetime hunting and fishing licenses will be held in this new fund and distributed in the appropriate years. We have been working together with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to ensure that we will continue to receive federal reimbursement. These monies are distributed through the Pittman–Robertson Act and Dingell–Johnson Act.

In addition to the multi-year and lifetime licenses, under this proposal, the Chief of the Division of Wildlife will now have the authority to create combination packages. This type of discretion will allow for the division to move quickly to address the changing needs and concerns of our sportsmen and women while providing them with a new level of convenience. For example, husband and wife combination licensing, or weekend hunting/fishing combination packages would become potential options.

The ODNR Division of Wildlife has examined other states to see what they have to offer. We found that the top 10 states selling hunting licenses, tags, permits and stamps all have some type of combination license, and six of the 10 states possess a lifetime license. These states include Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas and Wisconsin. Although the previously mentioned states are geographically different and provide a variety of hunting experiences, these states all realize that to have a prosperous and customer-friendly wildlife program, they must offer a wide array of license options to their customers.

Second, all states bordering Ohio have a lifetime hunting or fishing license, combination licenses, or both. Ohio is the only state that has none of the above. It is time that Ohio adopts this practice if we want to be competitive with popular hunting/fishing states, such as Michigan and Texas.

The Director also mentioned that this bill would be revising effective dates of fishing licenses. As previously indicated, fishing licenses will now be valid from the date of purchase for one year. Current law states that fishing licenses are only valid from the first day of March of the current year and expire on the last day of February of the following year.

When talking with anglers on this particular provision, we have generally received positive feedback. Sportsmen and women that particularly like this provision are those who enjoy ice fishing, which is most popular between December and February. With the current law, a fishing license expires the last day of February. A lot of people who ice fish won't buy their license until later in the year, and they truly do not get their money's worth when it is only valid for a couple of months until expiration. This is an unneeded deterrent to participation that will be remedied with this new bill.

Another great item in Senate Bill 257 is the establishment of the Nonresident Lake Erie Permit. Currently, we are one of very few states that allows harvesting walleye during the spawning season. With Lake Erie being right in our backyard, and Ohio having a robust walleye population, we can accommodate a fishing season during this time. Many non-residents come to Lake Erie and Ohio to fish for walleye during spawning season because their own states close fishing in their inland lakes, such as Michigan and Wisconsin. Ohio experiences a great economic boost during these months.

This permit will only apply to nonresidents and is an annual fee of \$10 in addition to the purchase of a nonresident fishing license. The dates of the permit are from January 1st to April 30th. The money collected from this permit will go back to Lake Erie and its tributaries. Several initiatives funded with these monies are aquatic invasive species prevention, securing more public fishing access and other fish management purposes on Lake Erie. Lake Erie is one of our greatest natural resources, and anything we can do to help it is a benefit to all Ohioans.

A provision that will benefit various organizations and strengthen our goal to become more customer-friendly is giving discretion to the Chief of the ODNR Division of Wildlife to exempt people from being required to have a fishing license. We often have out-of-state groups, youth events and veterans organizations wanting to have a one-day or weekend fishing event. Currently, if a group such as Wounded Warriors wanted to hold a one-day fishing tournament, all participants would need to purchase a fishing license prior. This requirement can be cumbersome for many large groups and serves as a deterrent, which encourages organizations to hold their events in other states. With the Chief's new authority to waive that license for the day, the organization can have a hassle-free event, and Ohio benefits because events like this often bring an increased economic impact. Furthermore, we have a new group engaged in fishing, which plays into our mission of Recruitment, Retention and Reactivation.

Reducing burdens and expanding opportunities are the overarching themes of Senate Bill 257. The previous items mainly focused on fishing with the mention of multi-year hunting licenses. The following items continue that trend but concentrate on different hunting aspects we are trying to improve. For example, in this legislation, we have proposed to eliminate current law that says one can only hunt with an apprentice hunting license or an apprentice fur taker permit for a maximum of three times. As long as a person is accompanied by an individual who is licensed and has taken the hunter education course, it shouldn't matter how many times they want to hunt as an apprentice hunter. The three-license cap is unnecessary and dissuades people from hunting altogether.

After three apprentice licenses, the hunter must either take the hunter education course to continue hunting/trapping or simply be unable to hunt/trap anymore as an apprentice. Unfortunately, the latter often occurs, and we have just lost another participant. If we eliminate this problem, we have a better chance of keeping current apprentice hunters and allowing people to hunt at their own comfort level.

With the decision to modify current apprentice licenses and fur taker permits, we have also taken the opportunity to create a new apprentice senior hunting license and fur taker permit. This will open up apprentice hunting for seniors and further expand our customer base.

Eliminating unnecessary obstacles to the average hunter and angler continues to be one of our main goals, and another provision we think will help is allowing mobility-impaired people to hunt from any All-Purpose Vehicle on private and public land. Current law only allows mobility-impaired people to hunt with an electric all-purpose vehicle on public land. This change would allow for gas powered all-purpose vehicles to be used, while also expanding hunting access to private property.

This provision has been the result of various constituents reaching out and asking for a change. It is our responsibility at ODNR to listen to the sportsmen and women of Ohio, and we believe this change is necessary.

The final provision, but one of the most important provisions, is allowing nonresident youths to hunt at a resident youth price. Youth are the future of hunting and fishing, and we should be doing everything we can to encourage youth to hunt, fish and get outdoors. Unfortunately, in Ohio alone, youth hunting license sales decreased approximately 10 percent from February 2017 to February 2018. This previously mentioned decrease can be caused by a number of reasons, but raising costs for out-of-state youths doesn't help. When costs are too high, parents are often deterred from bringing their children to participate, and the state ends up losing out on added revenue as well as tourism dollars.

Currently the nonresident youth license is \$174 and a deer permit is \$74. For an adult to bring one child with them, it will cost them an additional \$248. If a nonresident youth were at the same cost of a resident youth, a license would be \$9 and a deer permit would be \$11.50, totaling \$20.50 per child. That number may seem low, but when a family comes from out-of-state, they have other expenses that add up. For example, lodging, food, gas, flights and souvenirs are all costs that are associated with hunting trips. In addition to those added costs, we have just introduced a child to the sport of hunting, and recruitment is achieved.

In conclusion, Senate Bill 257 is a common sense bill that provides more license opportunities for hunters and anglers, while eliminating current regulatory burdens. This bill is aimed to better serve the sportsmen and women of Ohio, and we believe this is a step in the right direction. Thank you again Chairman Balderson for the opportunity to speak on Senate Bill 257. I would be happy to answer any questions you have at this time.