

The Ray Family farm  
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Chairman Vitale, Vice Chair Kick, Ranking Member Denson, and members of the House Energy and Natural Resources Committee, my name is Shawn Ray and I appreciate the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on HB 553.

My family support the provisions within HB 553 that provide needed assurances for those taking and possessing coyotes in Ohio. It is very important to me that Ohio maintains an open season on coyotes, whether through hunting or trapping. It is also important to maintain an exemption from obtaining a fur taker permit for those hunting or trapping coyotes.

My family and I operate the “The Ray Family Farm” in Noble County, Ohio. We own 227 acres, with 20 acres for hay, a herd of 25 Goats plus offspring, and a herd of 145 sheep plus offspring. We operate as a pasture-based operation, meaning the animals rarely see the inside of the barn.

Coyotes have posed a constant threat to my sheep and goats for the last twenty years. Early on in this coyote experience we suffered some losses of lambs and kids. To assist in controlling the problem, we added guardian animals to operation. These included Lamas, Donkeys, and guard dogs. None have been 100% successful, all bring additional management issues, and all bring additional cost. We currently utilize 2 donkeys and 1 Great Pyrenees guard dog.

Our guard animals are generally effective at keeping the coyotes at bay. However, in the summer of 2014, we had a group of coyotes that figured out how to draw the guard animals to a different direction, while their partners came in the backside and took lambs. When the lambs are newborns they just disappear. As they become older, the coyotes leave the carcass for you. Generally, they eviscerate them first and if have time will then proceed to consume muscle; the carcass is normally left for you laid out in a very distinctive fashion. In 2014, they killed over forty lambs before we could wean them early and secure them inside our barn lot. Then they went bigger and took a few ewes. This was a gut-wrenching summer, leaving us depressed and questioning if we could continue in the business that my family loves. Later that summer we were able to have an expert coyote trapper come in and begin trying to take out the problem coyotes. It took a couple of months for this problem group of coyotes to take the bait. Eventually, in one eight-acre field at the corner of our farm, he took out five coyotes. The next year we had no losses of lambs or kids to coyotes. Plus, we suddenly saw a large return in turkey and deer numbers.

We have continued to have the trapper on our farm ever since as part of the management scheme along with the guard animals. In the Late Summer of 2018, despite these constant tools, we lost another dozen lambs before we could get them weaned and more secure in the barn lot. We asked the trapper to return earlier, and from August to early April, he removed 16 coyotes off of 20 acres of our farm. In 2019, we did not experience any coyote losses. From November, 2019 to April, 2020 another 11 coyotes were removed. We saw a coyote in the lambing pasture just yesterday but am not aware if we lost any newborn lambs.

Early on in our coyote problem years, there was an indemnity fund to reimburse us for those losses. The bureaucracy required the dog warden to see the dead carcass in the field in order to confirm it was not killed by a dog. Then we had to contact the game warden to view the carcass to sign off that it was killed by a coyote. It was very difficult and unpleasant to keep a lamb carcass preserved from the vultures in the warm summer months. The minimal reimbursement was appreciated but when it went away, it was a relief to not deal with the government bureaucracy.

I also wish to state my opinion that Fish and Game laws are in place to insure we maintain a sustainable population of our native species. Coyotes are not actually native to Ohio. We may never be able to eradicate them from our state. The state has no statistics to support what the coyote population is, no statistics to support the perceived threats of coyote trappers taking non-target species, and no statistics to indicate a threat to the population levels of the very few non-target animals that maybe taken by coyote trappers. From my view, these non-target species appear to be thriving. Several species of wildlife also appear to be benefiting from our taking of coyotes from the area, especially turkey and deer.

Maintaining an open season for taking and possessing coyotes and maintaining an exemption from obtaining a fur taker permit provides my family the options and flexibility I need to protect my property or enlist the help of others without undue burden. Thank you again, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, for this opportunity to testify today in support of HB 553. Please contact me at 740-525-1345 or via email at [therayfamilyfarm@yahoo.com](mailto:therayfamilyfarm@yahoo.com).