



Brian Rees Testimony

Conservation Reinvestment Initiative

Tuesday, April 9th

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. My name is Brian Rees and I am a resident of Napoleon, Ohio in Union County. I am here as a concerned sportsman and as a representative of Ducks Unlimited, an organization comprised of more than 20,000 members and volunteers across Ohio.

My family and I have resided in Napoleon for many years and I have been involved with DU since childhood. DU is a non-profit wetlands conservation organization that has invested over \$32 million to conserve over 85,000 acres in Ohio to-date. We partner with the Department of Natural Resources' Division of Wildlife on numerous habitat related programs and projects. The Ohio Division of Wildlife enjoys a reputation as being one of the best, and most professional, conservation agencies in the country.

Over the years that we have partnered with the Division, we can attest that they have used their funds in a conservative and responsible manner, resulting in a multitude of benefits to Ohio's citizens. The budget of the Division is comprised entirely of revenues generated by the sale of hunting and fishing licenses as well as from the federal excise taxes collected on certain outdoor equipment items that comes back to the state each year. As is the case in any business, the cost for providing quality customer service goes up over time due to inflation and natural market place demands. It is therefore important that a self-funded agency adjust the fee structure periodically to maintain healthy levels of investments in staff and in on-the-ground work to keep Ohio's outdoor heritage and our \$1.4 billion hunting and fishing-based economy going strong.

It is therefore my hope that the committee will support the license fee adjustments included in the Governor's budget. As a longtime volunteer for Ducks Unlimited, I interact with many Ohio sportsmen and women on a regular basis, and there is support for this in my community. Sportsmen and women are responsible for the recovery of numerous species of North America's wildlife and it is through our investments in professional fish and wildlife management and deliberate public policy decisions made by conservation-minded lawmakers that have led to the abundant wildlife populations that we enjoy today. We must continue this legacy and this model of professional fish and wildlife management.

Failure to adjust license fees will further exacerbate the financial stressors that the Division is currently under. Thanks in part to the great partnership forged between Ducks Unlimited and the Ohio Division of Wildlife, we have successfully conserved over 85,000 acres across the state benefiting both people and wildlife. We plan to do work this year on no less than eight wildlife management areas, begin engineering of another 230-acre restoration at Howard Marsh, invest \$2.2 million in private-land work along the Toussaint River and much more.

Continued success of our conservation mission in Ohio relies heavily on the financial health of the Division. Therefore, we are supportive of the Governor's Conservation Reinvestment Initiative and the provisions therein.

Another exciting aspect of the Governor's budget proposal is the H2Ohio Initiative that would establish new funding for critically important wetland restoration work throughout the state. From the 1780s to the 1980s wetland area in Ohio declined by 90% and so if we are going to get serious about improving this state's water quality, habitat, and hunting opportunity, we need to start investing considerably more in wetland work. The H2Ohio Initiative is that serious investment that we need, and DU stands ready to help deliver wetland restoration work at an accelerated pace across Ohio should this funding program get implemented.

The Conservation Reinvestment Initiative represents a strong step in the right direction. Ohioans carry-on a conservation legacy rivaled by few others in this country. Our investments in the state's natural resources are a testament to this and we are proud to continue supporting our wildlife, wild places, landowners, and our outdoor heritage in this way long into the future.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide comment on this issue and ask that the committee support the Conservation Reinvestment Initiative.

Thank you,

Brian Rees