

Chairman Uecker, Vice Chair Brown and members of the committee: my name is Stefan Marsh and I represent the Liberty Sportsmen's Club.

We are a small group of conservation-minded outdoor enthusiasts based in Liberty Township between Powell and Delaware. The club was founded in 1941. Our members have a unique appreciation for the quality and diversity of Ohio's natural resources. Many of us enjoy hunting whitetail deer but believe non-resident hunters do not pay their fair share.

Ohio Auditor Dave Yost would seem to agree. His February 2015 performance review of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) recommended process improvements to inform the appropriateness of hunting license and permit fees. According to the review, a better process would account for inflation, surrounding state pricing for similar licenses, market sensitivity and customer feedback. The audit concluded that increasing non-resident deer permit fees is appropriate but left specific details to ODNR.

Southwick Associates, a market research and economics firm engaged by ODNR to assess hunting license fee structures, provided the details and secondary support for our belief that non-resident deer hunters do not pay their fair share. Preliminary assessment results suggest an underpriced market where non-resident hunting license and deer permit fees could be adjusted from \$149 to \$250 without adverse effects.

We take both studies seriously. Ohio has not raised hunting licenses since 2004 but inflation has risen more than 25% in the same period. Ohio sells deer permits to residents and non-residents at the same price. This practice – described in the audit report as “relatively unique within the industry” – is a source of special concern because Ohio is regarded as a top-10 state for deer hunting but ranks 35th nationally when costs are examined. Indeed, North American Whitetail magazine's 2014 feature article of the nation's 20 best deer hunting states ranked Ohio six and stated “...the DIY guy can easily find public ground and a \$150 non-resident license is affordable as well”. Sales of 38,000 hunting licenses and 41,000 deer permits to non-residents provide confirmation, as do anecdotal accounts from club members who feel out-of-staters are well-represented in their hunting lease agreements because “they know Ohio is an inexpensive place to take a trophy buck”.

We urge you to support ODNR's modest proposal. It takes small steps to realign the cost and value of deer hunting without maximizing license revenue or creating a chilling effect where non-resident deer hunters might reconsider future license and permit purchases. If the proposal is enacted, the adjusted cost of \$250 is still significantly less than the average non-resident cost (\$350) to hunt deer in other high quality states. More importantly, enactment would generate approximately \$3-3.5M of additional license revenue to enable ODNR to match federal Pittman-Robertson funding for wildlife-related projects and programs beneficial to hunters, anglers, boaters, bird watchers, campers, recreational shooters and others who enjoy the great state of Ohio as much as we do.

Respectfully,

Stefan Marsh
Secretary, Liberty Sportsmen's Club