



# Ohio Department of Natural Resources

JOHN R. KASICH, GOVERNOR

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**House Energy and Natural Resources Committee  
Testimony in Support of Substitute Senate Bill 257  
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 Substitute Senate Bill 257.

First, I would like to thank the sponsors, Senators Uecker and Senator O'Brien for their hard work and willingness to work with everyone involved. Also, I'd like to thank Representative Dever and Representative Cera for their companion language, House Bill 518. Over in the Senate, I'd like to thank Chairman Balderson and the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee for unanimously passing out Substitute Senate Bill 257, and President Obhof and Senate leadership for passing this legislation out of the Senate 33-0. There are no known opponents to this legislation.

Substitute Senate Bill 257 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. Three of the five K-9s and their handlers just finished the 10-week training academy, and we held a ceremony for them this morning in the Statehouse. 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). 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 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 a one-year, a three-year, a five-year, a 10-year, or a lifetime license. We worked hard with various conversation groups to establish a reasonable price that will bring in revenue, yet provide an incentive for the customer. The goal is to 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.

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.

Another great item in Substitute 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.

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 veteran’s 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 Substitute 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.

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.

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. A number of reasons can cause this previously mentioned decrease, 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.

In conclusion, Substitute 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 Landis for the opportunity to speak on Substitute Senate Bill 257. I would be happy to answer any questions you have at this time.