

**Testimony of Rob Sexton, Sportsmen's Alliance
to the Senate Sub-Committee on Finance
May 23rd, 2017**

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, my name is Rob Sexton, with the Sportsmen's Alliance. We are coordinating the efforts of 41 different sportsmen's organizations working to persuade the General Assembly to allow us to pay our own way as we have always done, by increasing hunting and fishing fees in Ohio. (Exhibit 1)

The last time the legislature increased fees was in 2003. Back then we promised it would last ten years. Since then the Ohio Division of Wildlife has cut staff from 505 to 425, consolidated offices and reduced forty vehicles from its automobile fleet, and now drives those vehicles 30,000 miles past the state recommendation.

We are confused about why the administration is opposing the paying customer's efforts to improve services. We're unhappy because fish hatcheries are not operating at full capacity, decreasing fish stocking. Because there is a backlog of shooting ranges not maintained and developed. Because there are 25 wildlife officers not in the field, because lack of funds to pay them or hold a cadet academy.

Two weeks ago, the Governor's senior staff directed us to conduct our own more in depth financial analysis of the situation, and to report back to them. These are our findings, which are especially important in light of Director Zehringer's testimony that the Ohio Division of Wildlife is solvent, and not in need of a resident fee increase.

Since 2003 cost increases approved by the legislature and governors have continued to increase at a rate of 2% annually. This compounding inflation has steadily eaten into the wildlife fund which has remained flat during this same period. The bottom line is that Ohio sportsmen and women are receiving less bang for our buck because that same dollar is funding inflationary costs the agency is unable to absorb because of its outdated fee structure. (Exhibit 2)

Over the next ten years, the Division of Wildlife will need \$73.2 million in additional funds even without replacing a single officer. (Exhibit 3) Adding twenty officers to that total brings the total operational need to \$92.6 million. (Exhibit 4)

It would have been possible five years ago to maintain solvency by increasing non-resident fees only. However, gun sales have fallen sharply over the last six months, which will result in a sharp decline in federal funds to the agency.

Based on feedback from the nation's top outdoor recreation economist, we project that the House passed non-resident fee increase would produce less than \$4 million per year, while causing 30%-40% of non-resident deer hunters go elsewhere because of the unprecedented increase. (Exhibit 5) The net result would be a \$52 million hole in the wildlife budget, and a loss of precious tourism dollars. (Exhibit 6)

Our coalition favors a package of non-resident increases, and a modest increase in resident deer permits, turkey permits and fishing licenses. We would leave resident hunting licenses at the current price. We project our package would raise \$6 million per year, leaving a \$32 million hole. (Exhibit 7)

Worse, we found a \$130 million backlog of capital projects that must be dealt with that further complicates the picture. I have more information on this situation if committee members are interested. (Exhibit 8)

Combined, the Division of Wildlife will be short \$222.5 million over the next ten years, a far cry from solvent.

In testimony last week, Director Zehringer suggested that our coalition does not represent Ohio's sportsmen and women. He said he met a man sitting on a white bucket that didn't want his fees raised and didn't belong to any of our organizations. I can't speak to this man on a white bucket, but our 41 organizations represent more than 113,000 of Ohio's sportsmen and women, and include more than 200 clubs and 160 local chapters.

Not one organization has rejected an invitation to join our coalition. These organizations simply want to do what we have always done, and that is pay our own way. These organizations have spent millions on conservation in Ohio, and

held thousands of events teaching young people to enjoy the outdoors. It's a tremendous insult to their decades of work to suggest they don't reflect real or genuine sportsmen and women.

With a \$222 million dollar hole to fill, it could not be more clear that fees need to be increased. We have taken care to follow the advice of top economic experts to minimize the potential for customer loss. While ODNR has justifiably invested hundreds of millions of dollars in capital improvements in state parks, it has not kept up with the wildlife's decaying infrastructure.

It is our hope that this process can begin with the balanced fee increase package. Our 41 organizations will thank you for standing up for Ohio's sportsmen and women, and for conservation. Thank you for your time.



Exhibit 1: Organizations Supporting Non-Resident and Resident Hunting/Fishing Fee Increases

These 41 organizations are highly concerned about the financial crisis of the Ohio Division of Wildlife and the declining quality that has resulted. This coalition asks the Governor, the Department of Natural Resources, and the Ohio General Assembly to support a balanced fee increase package.

Sportsmen's Alliance	Stark County Federation of Conservation Clubs
Ohio Conservation Federation	Scio Sportsman's Club
Ohio Chapter, National Wild Turkey Federation	Ohio Central Basin Steelheaders
National Wild Turkey Federation	Gallia County Conservation Club
Ducks Unlimited Ohio	Greene County Fish and Game Association
Pheasants Forever	Richwood Gun and Game Club
Buckeye Firearms Association	Pickaway County Sportsmen
Ohio Wildlife Council	Lansing Sportsmen's Club
League of Ohio Sportsmen	Fulton County Sportsmen
Buckeye Big Buck Club	Auglaize County Pheasants Forever
Ohio State Trappers Association	Moulton Gun Club
Lake Erie Charter Boat Association	Ashland County Pheasants Forever
Ohio Bowhunters Association	Richland County Conservation Association
Ohio Bass Federation	Ashland County Conservation League
Ohio Husky Musky Club	Steel T Precision
Trout Unlimited	Central Ohio Coon Hunters Association
Ruffed Grouse Society	Central Ohio Hunters and Anglers
Rocky Brands	Black Swamp Bucks
National Wildlife Federation	
Quail Forever	
Turn-In-Poacher	
SW Ohio Chapter, Safari Club International	
Northern Ohio Chapter Safari Club International	

Exhibit 2: State of Ohio's Budget w/o Capital Expenditure vs Division of Wildlife -- Fund 15, less PR/DJ (1999-2016)

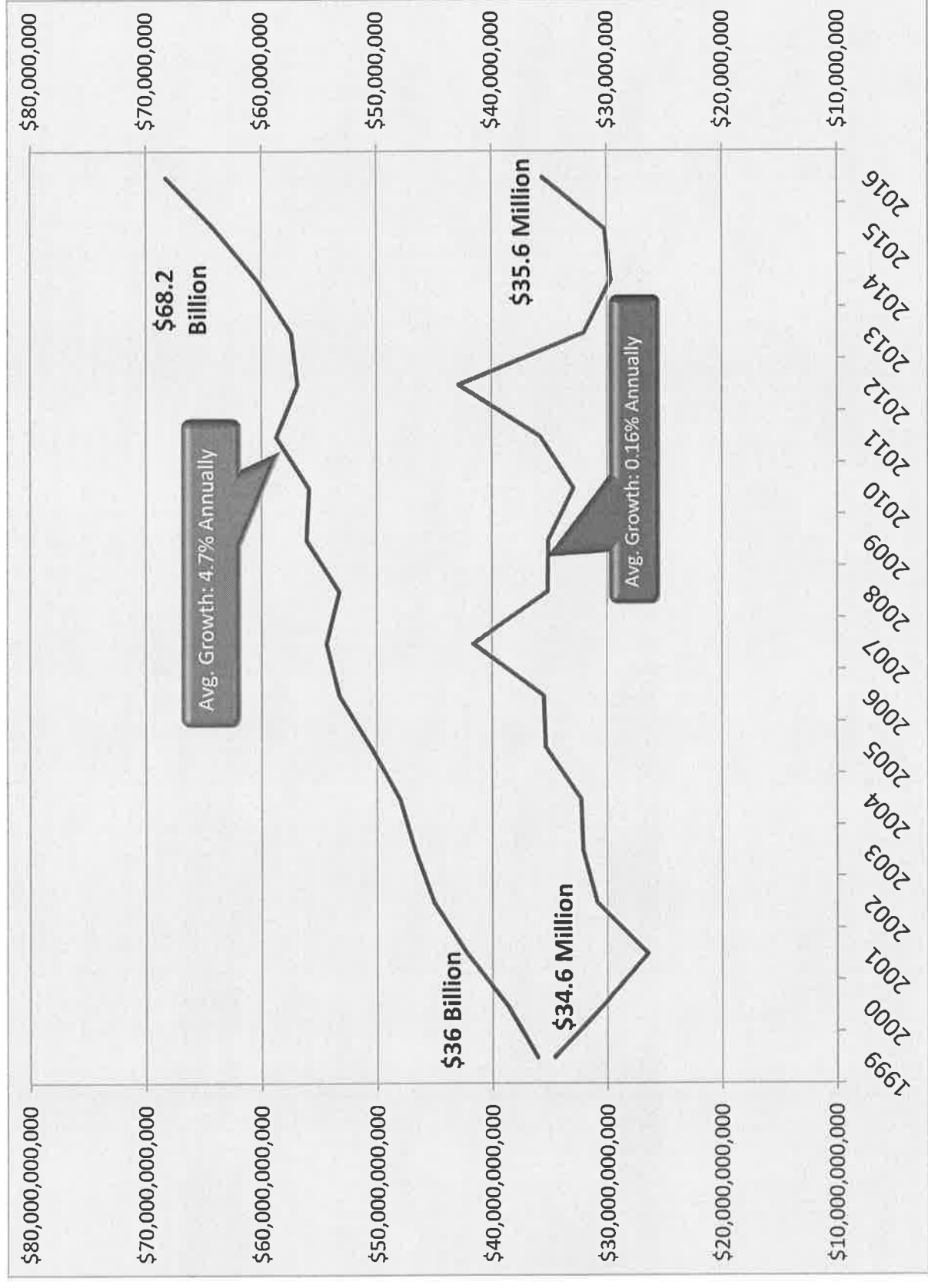


Exhibit 2: State of Ohio's Budget w/o Capital Expenditure vs Division of Wildlife -- Fund 15, less PR/DJ (2011-2016)

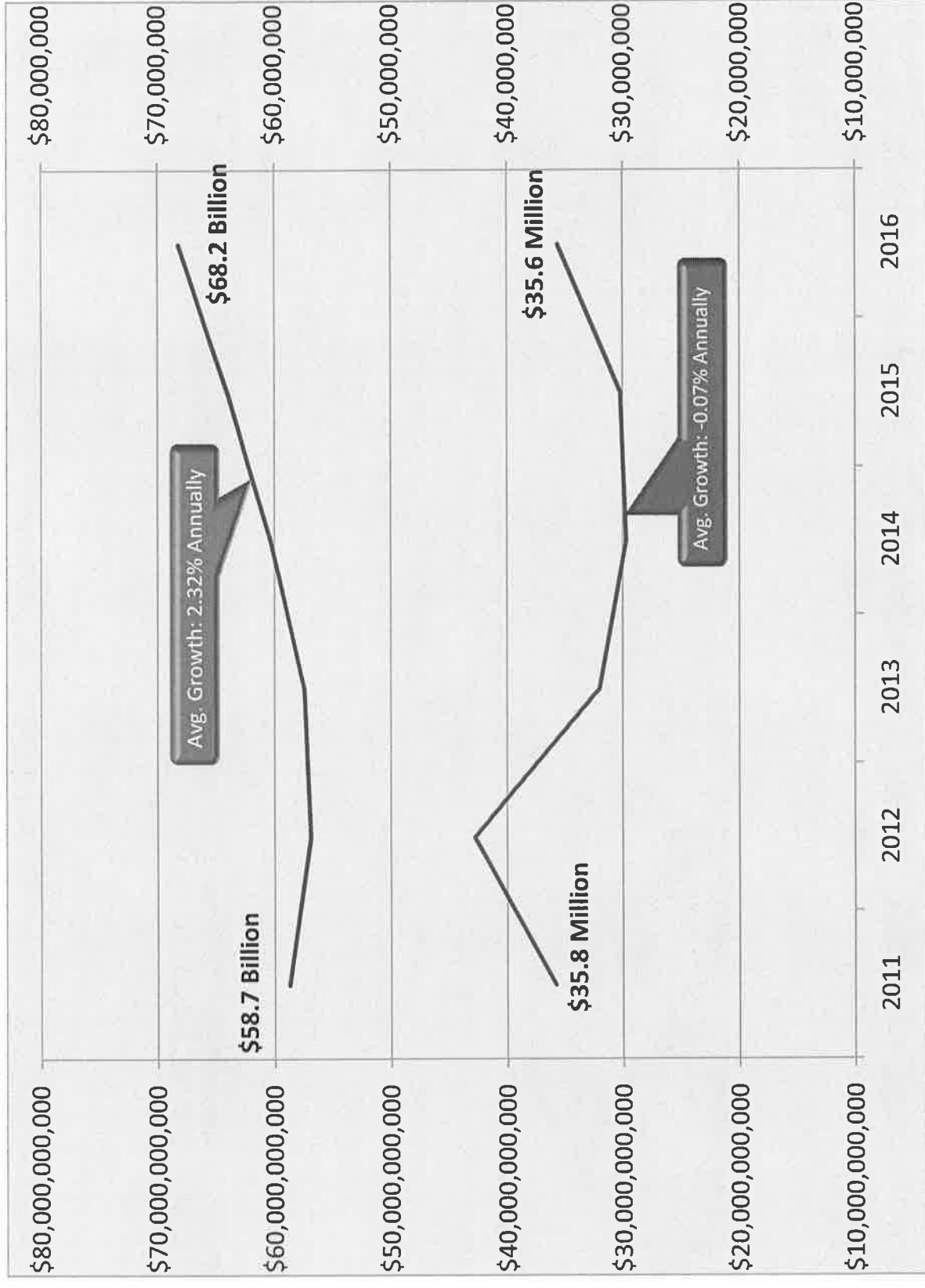


Exhibit 3: Existing Operations Inflation Impact

Year	Current Staff Payroll	Additional Cost	Non-Payroll Expense	Additional Cost
2018	\$39,500,000	\$0	\$16,176,837	\$0
2019	\$40,685,000	\$1,185,000	\$16,500,374	\$323,537
2020	\$41,905,550	\$2,405,550	\$16,830,381	\$653,544
2021	\$43,162,717	\$3,662,717	\$17,166,989	\$990,152
2022	\$44,457,598	\$4,957,598	\$17,510,329	\$1,333,492
2023	\$45,791,326	\$6,291,326	\$17,860,535	\$1,683,698
2024	\$47,165,066	\$7,665,066	\$18,217,746	\$2,040,909
2025	\$48,580,018	\$9,080,018	\$18,582,101	\$2,405,264
2026	\$50,037,418	\$10,537,418	\$18,953,743	\$2,776,906
2027	\$51,538,541	\$12,038,541	\$19,332,818	\$3,155,981
Subtotal:		\$57,823,233		\$15,363,482
Total				\$73,186,715

Exhibit 5: Non Resident Increase to \$375 Impact

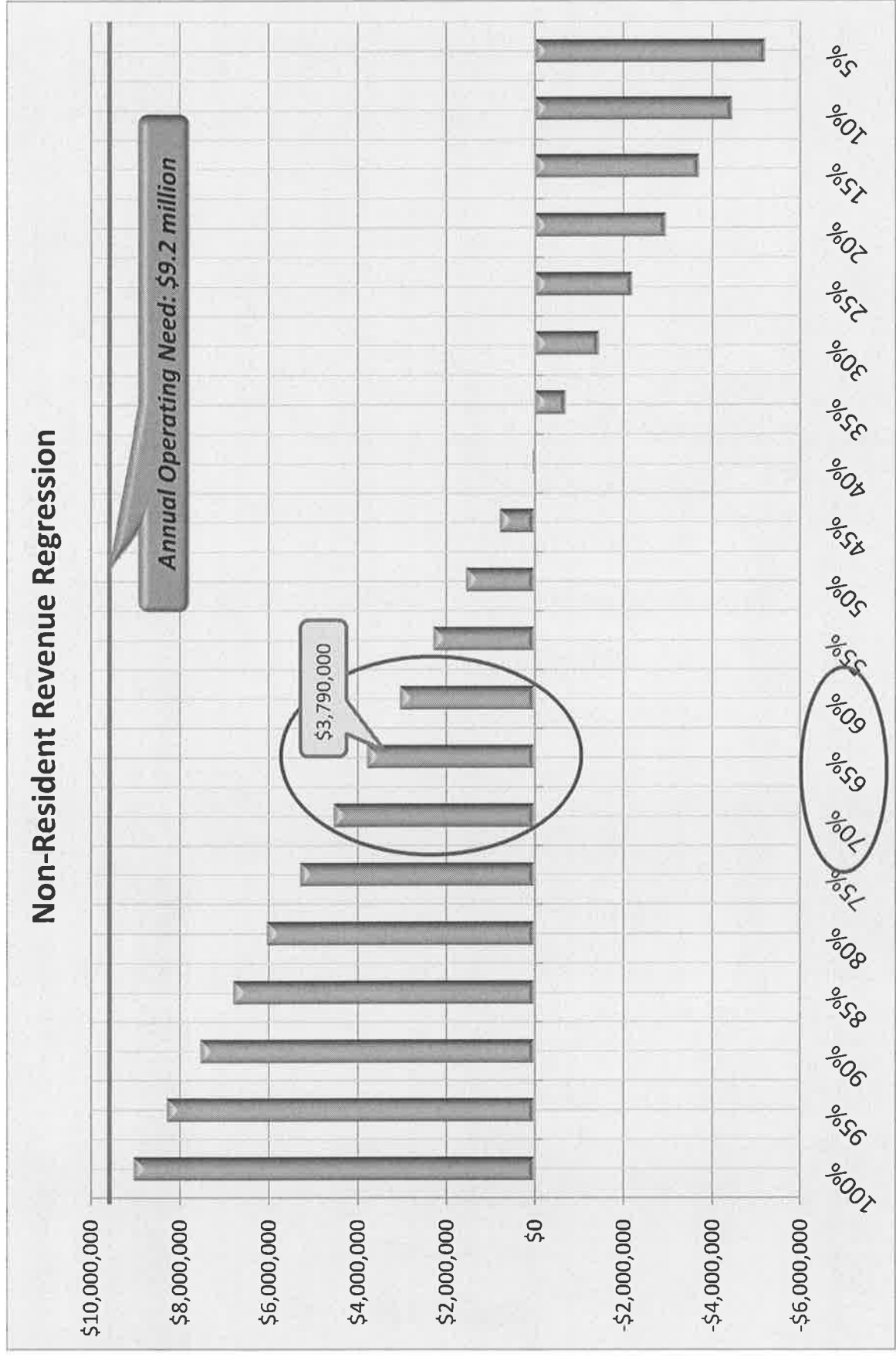


Exhibit 6: ODOW Funds Needed vs House Budget Non Resident Deer & Turkey Increase

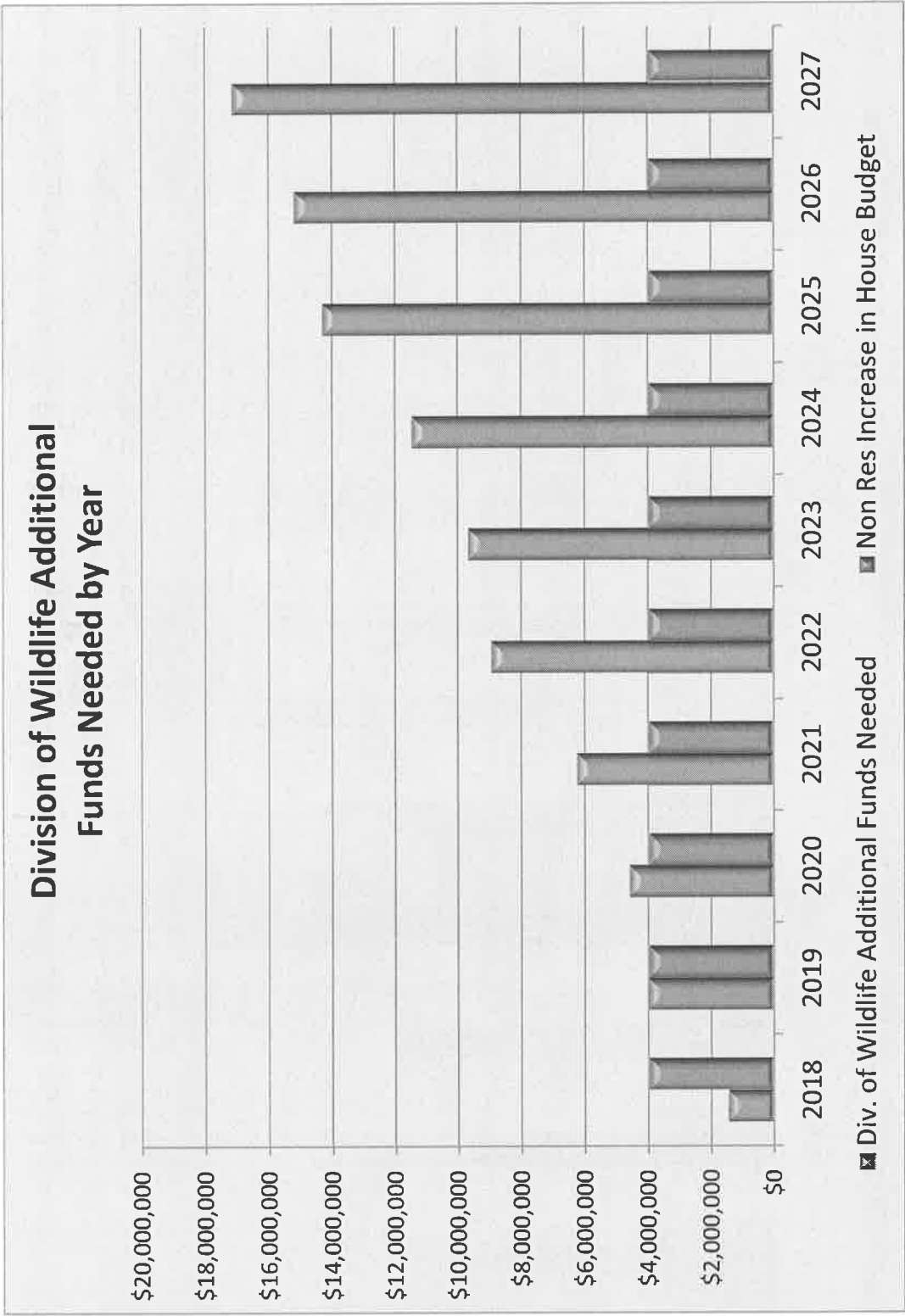


Exhibit 7: Hunting and Fishing License Fee Proposal

Non-Residents

Non-resident license – Currently \$125 – proposal - \$175

Non-resident deer permit – Currently \$24 – proposal - \$75

Non-resident fishing – Currently \$40 – proposal - \$50

*non-resident license + non-resident deer permit = \$250 total, which places Ohio right in line with other high quality deer states in the region, and still retains Ohio's competitive position.

Residents

Resident hunting license – Currently \$19 – proposal – No Increase

Resident either sex deer permit – Currently \$24 – proposal - \$29

Resident fishing license – Currently \$19 – proposal - \$24

Non-Resident / Residents

Spring Turkey Permit – Currently \$24 – proposal - \$29

Financial Projection

\$5.7 million - \$6.2 million annually

Exhibit 8: Summary Breakdowns

<i>Operational Needs</i>	10-Year Need
10-year Inflationary Increase on Existing Staff	\$57,823,233
10-year Officer (20) Costs w/ Inflation	\$16,445,819
Cadet Academy x 3	\$3,000,000
Non-Payroll Items Inflationary Increase	\$15,363,482
Total	\$92,632,534

<i>Capital Needs</i>	10 Year Need
Dam Repair/ Decommissioning	\$50,000,000
Boat Ramp Projects	\$32,400,000
Shooting Range Projects	\$25,550,000
Misc. Projects	\$14,300,000
Land	\$7,600,000
Total	\$129,850,000

* 20-year Construction Timeline, Costs Adjusted to 50%