

Chairman, committee members,

My name is Keith Daniels, a board member of the Ohio Conservation Federation, current president of the Ohio State Trappers Association, and a life long sportsman. I am presenting today on behalf of the OCF.

It is approaching nearly two decades since the last fee increase. Having personally worked with ODOW in trapper education programs since assuming the role of OSTA Education Coordinator in September of 1997, I was part of the expansion and continued development of the program, working closely with ODOW for the next 15 years. A fairly extensive hands on education program was developed with the aid of subsidy money from ODOW. During this time I saw first-hand what a funding shortage can do when license fees were not raised when needed and requested. Available subsidy was not only frozen it was actually cut from previous levels to a lower, fixed amount. During this time the service provided by the Ohio Division of Wildlife has diminished. At risk are our relationships with conservation-trained professionals, fish-filled waters, and access to public hunting. Ohio's hunters, trappers and anglers expect value from their license and permit fees and our members overwhelmingly embrace a modest increase, with the Ohio Conservation Federation officers and directors voting unanimously to support the Conservation Reinvestment Initiative.

Clubs from all over Ohio rely upon collaboration with, and funding from the Division of Wildlife to carry out many family, youth, and veterans-oriented programs. Each year they work closely with ODOW to deliver publicly-available family fishing, summer-long youth archery, junior rifle, and steel challenge programs. Hunter and trapper education courses serve as an opportunity to recruit youth for deer and turkey hunts each fall and spring, Disabled Veteran's Hunts, fishing workshops, trapping workshops and wildlife diversity events. None of these would likely occur if not for guidance and assistance from the Division of Wildlife.

We are fortunate to have dedicated Wildlife Officers in most counties, but not all. Without a strong, competent, and complete set of 88 Wildlife Officers, Investigators, Supervisors and District staff the sportsmen and women of this state are at a disadvantage and not getting the full value of their now diminished license fees.

The month of April signified the start of spring in Ohio and the start of fishing season. Anglers, from all over the state, young and old, look forward to the ODOW's annual fish stockings. More than 60 ponds, lakes and reservoirs are stocked, including Forest Hill, Little Turtle and Veterans Ponds, Glacier, Hinkley, Jefferson, Petros, Punderson, Dow, Monroe and Wolf Run lakes, Ohio Canal Lock #4, Barnesville Reservoir, and the list goes on, which all receive state-raised trout each year. Local residents and visitors alike benefit from these put-and-take stockings. Other species of fish are stocked in lakes all across Ohio, not just for put-and-take but to help maintain a healthy population and environment. Hatcheries, boat ramps, and fishing access in disrepair or in need of modernization result in fewer fish available for stocking and fewer successful days of fishing.

Hunters, anglers, trappers, hikers, campers, horseback riders, mountain bikers and many, many others cringe at the prospect of permanently losing access to the AEP ReCreation Lands. The 60,000 acres that have been managed cooperatively by ODNR and AEP for the last 50 years represent 10% of all the publicly available hunting lands in Ohio. Losing this nearly contiguous piece of recreational land would be a set-back that Ohio's sportsmen and women would likely never recover from. We especially appreciate Governor DeWine's commitment to fund the acquisition of these vitally important lands.

Programs aimed at recruitment, retention, and reactivation of hunters and anglers, conserving tracts of public lands for future generations, access to fishing and boat ramps, and the stocking of fish in ponds and lakes results in more than just a tug on the line or the sizzle in a skillet. This re-investment in conservation through the DOW is indeed an investment in the future. More and better opportunities mean more anglers, hunters and trappers, a strengthened outdoors economy, and an overall increase in the well-being of Ohio's citizens.

The Ohio Conservation Federation encourages the committee to support the Conservation Reinvestment Initiative.