



Subject: Proposed HB 166

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Governor DeWine has presented his proposed budget bill, which includes requests for increased funding for the Division of Wildlife and other important programs for Ohio's natural resources.

Consequently the bill was reviewed and passed by the Ohio House of Representatives. With that, it is now on the floor of the Ohio State Senate to ultimately be voted upon and hopefully approved.

As staunch supporters of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources and the Ohio Division of Wildlife, we the League of Ohio Sportsmen (LOOS), the Ashtabula County Conservation League (ACWCL) and the Trumbull County Federation totaling 200,000 members strong are asking, respectfully, that you support the measures that Governor DeWine has outlined in his budget in regards to the Ohio Division of Wildlife.

We, the aforementioned conservation organizations do hereby pledge our support and sponsorship in regard to the below listed items that Governor DeWine has proposed in the budget bill:

- A fee increase in licensing in the following areas: annual fishing licenses (+\$6), one-day fishing licenses (+\$3), resident adult deer and turkey permits (+\$7), and youth deer and turkey permits (+\$3.50).

This represents the first fee increase for Ohioans since 2004, Which equates to 15 years. Since then, inflation has risen 33%. The total average increase requested is 32%, just under the rate of inflation.

- The bill also provides for the Chief's authority to adjust future license fees in small increments as needed to stay abreast of rising inflation rates.

Increased funding will be used to:

- Improve Ohio's state fish hatcheries and fishing access.

Ohio's state fish hatcheries produced 44 million fish last year. A number of Ohio's six state fish hatcheries are currently operating with outdated facilities and equipment. Without increased funding it is projected that there will be a 10% decrease in fish stockings. These funds will help stabilize hatchery production and ensure future stockings.

- Improve public shooting ranges.

Funds will also be used to add several new archery ranges throughout the state as well as renovate and staff existing state shooting ranges.

- Protect and improve significant access to hunting, trapping, and fishing lands. The ODOW and ODNR are currently in negotiations with American Electric & Power (AEP) and some of their conservation partners to acquire the remaining acreage within the AEP ReCreation land in Guernsey, Morgan, and Noble counties.

- The bill includes an additional \$47 million dollars to help with the purchase of AEP ReCreation lands.

- Currently ODOW and ODNR are obligated to purchase approximately 13,000 acres, but hope to acquire access to the entire 60,000 acres. Along with this they plan to develop a program and provide assistance and funding to private landowners to allow access on their property for hunting, fishing, and trapping through a new public access program.

- Ensure state wildlife officer presence in each county and on Lake Erie.

There are still three vacant counties and four open Lake Erie enforcement positions. If the budget funding request is approved by the legislature to fill these vacancies the plan is to conduct another training academy soon.

Lastly, a brief comment being, if we, the Ashtabula County League along with the Trumbull County Federation as well as our 28 Conservation Clubs and 10,000+ members support the purchase of the AEP lands, it speaks volumes as to our support concerning this endeavor. Many of us from up north will never use these amenities, yet we know it is the right thing to do for all the sports men and women of the great State of Ohio.

In closing, we, the above referenced organization thank you in advance for your consideration in this matter and respectfully ask for your support in these areas of the proposed House Bill 166.

Respectfully
Dale W Sunderlin
President
Ashtabula County Wildlife Conservation League
V.P. District 3 League of Ohio Sportsmen.