



**BACKCOUNTRY
HUNTERS & ANGLERS**
OHIO

Opponent Testimony, HB 33
Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
Nathan Voris, Ohio Backcountry Hunters & Anglers
May 10, 2023

Chairman Schaffer, members of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify. My name is Nathan Voris, and I am a board member of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers Ohio Chapter, the fastest growing conservation organization in the country, with 600 very active members in Ohio. Our mission is to ensure Ohio's outdoor heritage of hunting and fishing in a natural setting, through education and work on behalf of wild public lands, waters, and wildlife.

We support the Department of Natural Resources general revenue fund amount that was in the executive version of the bill. I am speaking today to voice STRONG levels of opposition to the substitute budget bill regarding funding and authority of the Ohio Division of Wildlife.

Backcountry Hunters and Anglers opposes the elimination of \$2.5M in Conservation and Habitat Protection funding. We are blessed that even with less than 5 percent public land, Ohio has an extremely strong outdoor economy. According to the Bureau of Economic Analysis, Ohio's outdoor economy accounts for nearly 138,000 jobs (increase of 12% since 2020) and has a value of \$12.8 Billion (increase of 23.3% since 2020). Habitat acquisition and improvement has contributed to that growth. By completely reducing this funding request, you in turn reduce the chances for building on that economy, as well as the important recreation opportunities that funding can provide. This is not just a hunter and angler issue. Public lands are enjoyed by nearly every Ohioan in some way, hikers, bikers, birders, youth baseball games, and family picnics. It also provides critical habitat to non-game species, such as migratory songbirds, monarch butterflies, and other at-risk species.

Backcountry Hunters and Anglers opposes the reduction of \$2M for Project Wild-based education to an insulting \$125k. Project Wild is a proven education platform and



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supports fulfillment of State Science standards. As a Scout Leader and a certified Hunter Education Instructor, who has educated hundreds of youth on STEM, conservation and outdoor education, I can tell you firsthand the importance of hands on, dynamic education – to connect our youth to the outdoors. This is a vital program that will pay large dividends in the future.

Turning to the authority of the Ohio Division of Wildlife: Backcountry Hunters and Anglers opposes the reduction to that authority in this Bill, and believe it negatively impacts their ability to protect our game species our sporting heritage and all the law-abiding sportsmen and women in the field every day. The proposed changes within this bill would directly, and negatively, impede our Wildlife Officers from effectively being able to perform their duties. Wildlife is held in the public trust and our Officers need the ability to protect the resource, without being burdened by the restrictions of a warrant. We need to support the rule of law in the field and on the water in the same way we do anywhere else. This Bill doesn't do that.

Backcountry Hunters and Anglers also opposes changing the opening day of deer firearm season to the Friday after Thanksgiving, from the traditional Monday after Thanksgiving. A 2020 Ohio hunting survey finds shows strong support for the traditional date, as the new date would likely interfere with holiday gatherings and family events. Outside of that Backcountry Hunters and Anglers are strong supporters of sound science-based wildlife management. Season dates and bag limits are modeled to reflect changes in species ecology and yearly cycle. We support the current date of proposed season and bag limits presented by the Division of Wildlife and approved by the wildlife council. We oppose seasons set based on legislation. Suggestions to think that this change in season dates would increase revenue are unlikely and would serve no foundation for these changes.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. The Ohio chapter of Backcountry Hunters and Anglers encourages you to take our recommendations and concerns into consideration during your deliberations.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for your time. I would be happy to entertain questions from the committee.

