

To: Chairman Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and Members of the House Finance Committee

From: Matt Misicka, Executive Director
Ohio Conservation Federation

Date: 10 March, 2025



Re: Interested Party Testimony for the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Executive Budget (HB 96)

Chairman Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and Members of the Committee, I am testifying as the Executive Director of the Ohio Conservation Federation, which educates and advocates for the wise use and stewardship of Ohio's natural resources on behalf of Ohio's hunters, anglers and trappers. Across the board, Ohio's sportsmen and women support robust funding for our state parks and forests, scenic rivers and natural areas, public hunting and fishing opportunities, and healthy water and wildlife. Today, I would like to focus on two areas of the budget.

Ohio's Sportsmen strongly support the proposed increase to non-resident hunting and fishing fees.

Ohio is *THE* destination state for trophy-class whitetail deer hunting and world-class walleye fishing in the Midwest. The updated non-resident fee structure in HB 96 would bring Ohio in line with other top-five deer hunting states and better reflects what it costs Ohio hunters and anglers to hunt and fish out-of-state. Additionally, these changes extend the period before Ohio will have to consider raising the cost of resident licenses.

However, Ohio's sportsmen are strongly opposed to proposed changes to the state's land royalty funding language (ORC Sec 131.50).

Ohio hunters pay excise taxes on the purchase of firearms, ammunition, and archery equipment as part of the Federal Wildlife Restoration Act (aka Pittman-Robertson or simply PR). This money is then returned to sportsmen in the form of matching dollars to enhance wildlife and habitat conservation. To receive Ohio's share of these funds and remain in compliance with federal law, funds (including bonus payments, royalties, and interest) derived from lands that were purchased or managed with PR dollars must be returned to the Division with the direct management control where the extraction took place. HB 96 removes language that requires the funds be transferred to the Division where the extraction took place and strips the requirement that the transfer be made in a timely 30 days. Both threaten Ohio's ongoing compliance and jeopardizes sportsmen's access to as much as \$20M in conservation funding annually.

We understand an amendment may be forthcoming that will restore the 30-day language and return Section 131.50 to its original promise to the sportsmen and women that depend on Ohio's public lands to pursue our uniquely American hunting heritage. We will likely support this amendment.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony today. Ohio's sportsmen encourage you to take the recommendations of the hunting, angling, and trapping community into consideration during budget deliberations and fully fund the Ohio Department of Natural Resources and clear the barriers to land royalty transfers. If I can be of any further assistance or answer any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

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