



Hunter's Advocate of Ohio
Proponent Testimony
House Bill 96 - The 2025-2026 State Operating Budget
House Natural Resources Committee

March 5, 2025

Chair Jones, Vice Chair Robb Blasdel, Ranking Member Rogers, and members of the House Natural Resource Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Kevin Mullet, President of Hunter's Advocate of Ohio. Our mission is to bridge the gap between hunters and policymakers to improve the quality and health of Ohio's deer herd and overall wildlife, ensuring the longevity of a well-managed, quality deer herd and outdoor experience. I am here to express our support for House Bill 96, which proposes an increase in out of state deer hunting license fees in Ohio. This legislation is a critical step toward ensuring the sustainability of our state's wildlife resources and reinforcing the vital work of the Ohio Division of Wildlife (ODOW).

The Ohio Division of Wildlife is tasked with the monumental responsibility of managing our state's rich wildlife, habitats and animal populations, including the white-tailed deer—a species deeply woven into Ohio's cultural and ecological fabric. However, ODOW operates under significant financial constraints. It is 96% self-funded, relying primarily on revenue from hunting and fishing licenses, supplemented by federal matching dollars. The as introduced operating budget addresses this shortfall by providing the necessary resources to protect and manage Ohio's over 750,000 acres of land for wildlife habitats. The work the Division of Wildlife does is invaluable to the state ensuring its wildlife is protected and remains intact for many generations to come. We encourage you to support their full funding request in this budget.

Year after year we have continued to see more and more nonresident hunters come to Ohio as neighboring states have increased their own nonresident fees. According to ODNR's Final 2024-2025 Deer Harvest Report, hunters from all 50 states purchased nonresident hunting licenses for the 2024-2025 hunting season¹. Ohio is a sought-after state for deer hunting and increasing this fee will not stop nonresidents from coming.

Specifically, the bill increases the fees in the following fashion:

- an increase in the nonresident deer permit from \$74 to \$210,
- an increase in the nonresident annual fishing licenses from \$49 to \$74,
- an increase in the three-day tourist fishing licenses from \$24 to \$50, and
- an increase in the one-day fishing licenses from \$13 to \$26.

¹ Ohio Department of Natural Resources - Division of Wildlife. (February 4, 2025). *Ohio's Final 2024-2025 Deer Harvest Report*.



Non-resident fees, while seeing a larger adjustment, remain competitive with those of other top hunting states, ensuring Ohio retains its appeal to nonresident hunters. By increasing this license fee nonresident hunters are truly investing in the environment when they come to the state. We believe that nonresidents should have the right to hunt in Ohio, but not at the expense of Ohio hunters or investment into Ohio's wildlife. In 2024, Ohio issued 39,861 nonresident hunting licenses according to ODNR (including 7,898 from Pennsylvania, 5,205 from Michigan and 3,635 from West Virginia²) creating just under \$3 million dollars in revenue, by increasing the fee to \$210, this would now generate over \$8.3 million dollars.

The additional revenue will fund critical programs such as habitat restoration, wildlife research, and population monitoring. These efforts ensure the long-term health of deer populations, preserving hunting opportunities for future generations and maintaining ecological balance. With increased resources, ODOW can bolster its staff of wildlife officers to enforce hunting regulations and expand educational outreach. This ensures compliance with laws and fosters a culture of responsible hunting.

It is estimated hunting in Ohio, contributes over \$4 billion annually and supporting more than 46,800 jobs, this Ohio Division of Wildlife budget and nonresident licensing fee increase protects our wildlife, their habitats and their environments for years to come.

This operating budget is a commitment to the future of Ohio's wildlife and the legacy of its hunting heritage. The Ohio Division of Wildlife requires our support to continue its exemplary stewardship of our natural resources. By protecting this license increase you will empower ODOW to address pressing challenges, from habitat degradation to population management, while reinforcing Ohio's reputation as a premier destination for deer hunting.

I urge support of the increased licensing fee as well as the Ohio Division of Wildlife's budget requests. Thank you for your time and consideration.

² Ohio Department of Natural Resources - Division of Wildlife. (February 4, 2025). Ohio's Final 2024-2025 Deer Harvest Report.