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Agriculture & Natural Resources
Primary & Secondary Education
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Sponsor Testimony – Senate Joint Resolution 3
Senate Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee
Senator Sandra O'Brien
October 26, 2021

Chair Schaffer, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Senate Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee, thank you for the opportunity today to deliver sponsor testimony on Senate Joint Resolution 3. This resolution would propose an amendment before the voters of our state during the 2022 general election to enact Section 22 of Article I of our state constitution enshrining the right to hunt, fish, and harvest wildlife.

Hunting, fishing, and harvesting wildlife have been ingrained in American culture and the Ohio Valley region for centuries. These activities have been around since well before our nation's founding, as they were practiced by Native Americans as well as settlers and immigrants from overseas alike. They are still enjoyed by numerous Ohioans in the present day, with there being nearly 350,000 hunting license and 900,000 fishing license holders.¹ Because they have been so ubiquitous, it is quite easy to take these practices for granted and think that they will forever be protected. That hasn't stopped some states from being proactive anyway.

The first state to protect these activities in its constitution was Vermont in 1777, and they still remain protected to this day. Over the last few decades, twenty-two additional states (AL, AR, GA, ID, IN, KS, KY, LA, MN, MS, MT, NE, NC, ND, OK, SC, TN, TX, UT, VA, WI & WY) have successfully enacted constitutional amendments protecting the right of individuals to hunt, fish, and harvest wildlife.² States red, blue, and purple have found it in themselves to

¹ <https://ohiodnr.gov/static/documents/wildlife/historic-licenses/Pub+5063.pdf>

² <https://congressionalsportsmen.org/policies/state/right-to-hunt-fish>

protect this right; it only makes perfect sense that Ohio should join them.

It is undeniable that countless Ohioans use these practices not only for personal survival or even just for sport, but as a way life. They are part of our culture, our DNA. What's more, the benefits of these activities go beyond mere personal satisfaction. Ohio's systems of hunting and fishing are designed to ensure our goal of conservation. Our Division of Wildlife has done great work in maintaining our fish and wildlife resources at sustainable levels so that they can be enjoyed by the public. It is important to strike the crucial balance between endangerment and overpopulation, as extinction obviously eliminates entire species and resources while overpopulation can lead to ecosystem damaging and wandering, the latter of which in turn can result in financial and insurance problems in the event of auto accidents.³ Similarly, wildlife does an insurmountable amount of damage to crops, which takes its toll on our farmers who rely on that produce for a living. The ability to hunt, fish, and harvest wildlife plays a crucial role in conservation.

Many of our students are beginning to learn about these very things as part of their own curriculum in science classes. Ohio's youth are becoming familiar with what's known as the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation, the framework by which the harvesting of fish and wildlife is appropriately regulated and, importantly, preserved.⁴

This joint resolution will ensure that hunting, fishing, and harvesting wildlife, which have long been utilized and beneficial to our state and country, will be enshrined as a right in our state constitution for generations to come, subject only to the laws prescribed by the General Assembly and the rules prescribed by virtue of the authority of the General Assembly to (1) promote wildlife conservation and management and (2) preserve the future of hunting and fishing. The language of this constitutional amendment also explicitly clarifies that it would not limit the application of any provision of law or the Ohio Constitution concerning trespass or property rights.

Thank you again Mr. Chair for allowing me to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions from the Committee.

³ <https://sciencing.com/effects-animal-overpopulation-8249633.html>

⁴ <https://www.fws.gov/hunting/north-american-model-of-wildlife-conservation.html>