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Date: November 15, 2023

To: Energy and Natural Resources Committee

From: Luke Hilgemann, Executive Director
T. Roosevelt Action
The International Order of T. Roosevelt

RE: Testimony in support of HJR 5 “the constitutional right to hunt and fish in Ohio”

Chairman Kick and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Luke Hilgemann, and I am the Executive Director of T Roosevelt Action. I am here to express our strong support for HJR 5, a resolution that seeks to enshrine the rights of Ohioans to hunt and fish into your state constitution.

I would like to take a moment to express my gratitude to Representative Nick Santucci and Representative Ron Ferguson for their leadership in bringing this important amendment forward in Ohio. Their commitment to preserving Ohio's rich hunting and fishing traditions is commendable and greatly appreciated.

Hunting and fishing are not just recreational activities in Ohio; they are deeply rooted in the Buckeye State's heritage. These activities contribute significantly to Ohio's economy, with hunting alone contributing \$1.3 billion annually and supporting 15,500 jobs.

American hunters contribute nearly \$9.4 million daily, adding more than \$3.4 billion annually for conservation. In other words, hunting and fishing fund a majority of the conservation projects in America.

Here in Ohio through the Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson Acts, hunters, anglers and gun owners' tax ourselves on every fishing hook, round of ammunition, firearm or archery equipment we buy to pay for conservation projects in the states. Just this year alone, these programs generated nearly \$32 million for conservation related projects in Ohio (Pittman-Robertson \$23.5 million and Dingell-Johnson \$8.4 million in fiscal year 2023).



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You may ask, "Why does Ohio need this amendment when hunting and fishing aren't in jeopardy here?" The answer is simple: we must be proactive in protecting these rights before they are under threat.

The future of hunting, fishing, and the crucial conservation projects they fund in Ohio is under serious threat, as evidenced by the recent statistics from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources. Over the past decade, there has been a significant decline in the sales of resident fishing and hunting licenses, with a decrease of 215,569 and 91,263 respectively.

The implications of this decline are far-reaching. The revenue generated from license sales is a primary source of funding for conservation projects in the state. Therefore, a continued decrease could jeopardize the sustainability of these initiatives. Furthermore, the decline in hunting and fishing could have a negative economic impact, as these activities contribute significantly to Ohio's economy. Lastly, the loss of hunting and fishing as popular pastimes could lead to the erosion of a long-standing tradition that has been passed down through generations in Ohio.

The threats to our outdoor traditions are immense and growing, unfortunately. As you may know, the federal Department of Education earlier this year proposed significant cuts to funding for our national archery in schools and hunter education courses. These programs not only teach our children valuable skills but also instill in them a deep appreciation for our natural resources and the importance of the North American Conservation Model. Cutting these programs would be a disservice to our children and it would directly impact the future of hunting and fishing in Ohio. While Congress recently acted in a bipartisan fashion to block these cuts, the threats to our hunting and fishing heritage remain.

The Department of the Interior also moved this year to ban the use of lead ammunition and fishing hooks on hundreds of thousands of acres of federal public lands. This ban on some of the most popular forms of hunting cartridges and fishing equipment will, at a minimum, significantly increase costs for hunters and anglers who want to hunt or fish on these public grounds. These federal policies will more than likely lead to most abandoning hunting and fishing on these lands altogether, leading to a decline in participation and a loss of the associated economic benefits.

We need only look to the west to see the potential dangers to our outdoor traditions on the horizon. In Oregon, a ballot initiative is currently collecting 10,000 signatures a month and is likely to be on the ballot next year. This initiative, if passed, would criminalize hunting, fishing, and most forms of farming. This is not a distant threat; it is a clear and present danger to our way of life. If such a measure can gain traction in Oregon, it can happen here in Ohio too.



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Think about that - making the great American traditions of catching a fish or harvesting a deer to feed yourself and your family criminal acts...that is a very real threat to the citizens of Oregon. We cannot allow these misguided policies to make their way to Ohio and that is why you should support HJR 5 and send a strong message to your state and the rest of the country that hunting and fishing will be forever protected in Ohio.

Thank you all again for the opportunity to share our support for this amendment and I look forward to your questions.

Luke Hilgemann
Executive Director
T. Roosevelt Action and IOTR