



Dear Governor Kasich, Director Zehringer and members of the Ohio General Assembly:

As members of the Ohio Wildlife Council, we continually see the work done by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources / Division of Wildlife on behalf of Ohio's hunters, anglers, trappers, and many other non-consumptive users of our great natural resources. Ohio Revised Code 1531.03 (D) requires that the Ohio Wildlife Council, "report to the governor from time to time the results of its investigations concerning the wildlife resources of the state with recommendations of such measures as it considers necessary or suitable to conserve or develop those resources and preserve them as far as practicable."

Now is such a time for a report from this Council. We have grown increasingly concerned about the ability of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources / Division of Wildlife to fulfill its mission to the satisfaction of the citizens of Ohio.

While other government agencies are able to absorb cost increases by seeking additional revenue from the general tax payer coffers, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources / Ohio Division of Wildlife is funded by user fees that have not been adjusted since 2003, the longest stretch in the agency's history. Rising health care costs, personnel costs, and other increases in the cost of living have been offset in recent years by rising federal dollars from firearm and ammunition sales. Unfortunately, that source will decrease as sales have fallen off sharply in recent months.

In addition, those federal dollars have been more project focused in the past, but the current financial crisis has forced more of these dollars to be used for operations. Sportsmen/women and landowners are noticing counties where wildlife officers are no longer present because the agency lacks the funds to hold a cadet class to replace retiring officers. Wildlife production areas are more often unmanaged prior to key hunting seasons. Also, fish stocking programs have decreased over this same period. Other decreases in services will no doubt be looming without adequate funding.

This current trend of diminishing quality to Ohio citizens and user groups does not have to continue. Ohio sportsmen and women have long demonstrated their willingness to pay their own way. In addition, non-resident deer hunters that visit Ohio pay far less to enjoy Ohio trophy bucks than any other high quality deer hunting state in the country. In fact, the cost of a 'non-resident' deer tag is the same as a resident.

Nearly every state has experienced declines in hunting numbers. Fishing numbers have remained fairly stable. Access to quality hunting and fishing are cited time and time again as the top reason for declines. A \$3.00 increase in hunting, fishing and trapping fees; along with a substantial but fair increase in non-resident deer hunting fees would address the growing concerns, and quickly return the Ohio Department of Natural Resources / Division of Wildlife to the high quality it has previously been known.

For these reasons, the Ohio Wildlife Council is calling on you Governor Kasich and the Ohio General Assembly to support these very modest increases that would be paid entirely by those who use these resources.

Sincerely,

Dr. Paul P. Mechling
Chairman

Eric A. Hirzel
Vice Chairman

Thomas F. Vorisek
Secretary

Karen Stewart-Linkhart
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Member

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