



Ways and Means Committee

S.B. 36

Proponent Testimony

February 28, 2017

Chairman Eklund, Vice Chair Terhar, Ranking Member Williams, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the 18,376 Ohio members of Ducks Unlimited, I write to you in support of the language in S.B. 36 that states that lands in conservation practices be assessed at the lowest CAUV rate. Ohio is a critical state for North America's waterfowl and is positioned at the crossroads of the Mississippi and Atlantic coastal flyways, providing necessary breeding and nesting habitat as well as important stopover areas for migrating birds. Recognizing Ohio's importance to waterfowl and waterfowl hunters, we have invested over \$26 million to conserve wetland acres on public and private lands statewide.

Critical to sustaining healthy waterfowl populations is the commitment of private landowners to act as good stewards of the land and engage in conservation practices that benefit wildlife. State, federal and local conservation programs like the Conservation Reserve Program, Wetlands Reserve Program, Agricultural Lands Easement Program, and the Clean Ohio Program are mechanisms for landowners to just that and produce benefits to all Ohioans through reduced soil erosion, flood control, improved water quality, and increased wildlife habitat. Landowners who enroll in these programs receive fixed payments to compensate them for the cost of planting trees and grasses, establishing riparian buffers, and restoring wetlands. When land is enrolled in these programs, owners forfeit the ability to generate income from crop production on those acres for minimum periods of 10 years, 15 years, or in some cases perpetuity.

Despite the merits of these voluntary incentive-based conservation programs, many landowners are experiencing astronomical tax assessments on their conservation lands, which is creating significant disincentives to enroll in the aforementioned programs.

Excluding conservation acreage from CAUV while assessing it at anything higher than minimum value, not only burdens current landowners, but also threatens future participation in these vital conservation programs. We are encouraged that some county auditors recognize that these conservation practices contribute to a healthy environment, populace, and economy and therefore assess them at their current minimum value, however, this is not being consistently done across the state.

Therefore, we support the language in S.B. 36 that states that lands in conservation practices be assessed at the lowest CAUV rate.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with your staff to discuss these issues in more detail.

Sincerely,

Bill Ebert, State Chairman
Ohio Ducks Unlimited