

The Ohio Senate  
General Government and Agency Review Committee  
May 15, 2019



Good Afternoon Chairman Schuring, Vice Chair Rulli, Ranking member O'Brien, and members of the Committee.

We are here today to offer support for the Conservation Reinvestment Initiative in the Governor's budget proposal. We are also supportive of the other proposals that will provide funding for programs such as H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>H</sub>io and language that will ultimately improve water quality throughout the state.

Ohio Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever (PF/QF), have been a proud partner with several of the state agencies over the last 30 years, especially with the Ohio Division of Wildlife, who we have partnered with the most. However, we have also been successful in completing many other projects with several of the other state and Federal agencies and many of the organizations that are here today.

Our first Pheasants Forever chapters started 32 years ago, and we now have 30 local chapters with 6,000 members in Ohio (nationally we have over 700 chapters and 145,000 members). We partner on wildlife habitat projects on both public and private lands, enhancing habitat while providing hunting and access opportunities. In addition, we are actively engaged in getting the next generation of sportsmen and women introduced to the joys of being outdoors. It really began in 1995 with the Wood-Lucas PF chapter as they were the first chapter in the country to conduct a mentored youth learn to pheasant hunt event. This became a model for now hundreds of such events around the country, with 10's of thousands of kids getting their 1<sup>st</sup> opportunity to chase pheasants behind good bird dogs. Just about every chapter in Ohio has at least one outdoor youth event, whether it would be hunting, fishing or learning outdoor skills and what the outdoor lifestyle has to offer, which can become a lifetime of enjoyment. It is not just about hunting, we also host pollinator workshops geared for kids, or host events around the shooting sports where we have had over 1 million participants (717,000 youth and 289,000 adults) since 2012 nationwide. These types of events are common, and Ohio help set the bar Nationally.

From my personal experience and involvement, the Adams and Brown County QF chapter has hosted numerous youth events thanks to matching funds provided by the Ohio Division of Wildlife. In the past three years, the Division of Wildlife has awarded nearly \$6,000 in grants to match our local funds we raise from our local fundraising events. This has enabled our committee to provide hunter education courses, conservation field days, multiple shooting sports and fishing events as well as a mentored youth quail and pheasant hunts. The additional funds received by our chapter have also provided us with the financial ability to fund both Adams and Brown County 4-H youth shooting sports. Our chapter, our counties and especially our youth have benefitted greatly from the collaboration between Quail and Pheasants Forever and the DNR – Division of Wildlife.

All of these things wouldn't be possible without the assistance of our state agencies, we do more together. From the 1<sup>st</sup> habitat projects we worked on 30 years ago, buying specialized planting equipment (i.e. no-till grass drill that plants native prairie grasses and wildflowers) and cost sharing on establishing wildlife habitat. Good wildlife habitat not only provides for numerous fish and wildlife species, it also reduces soil erosion and improves water and air quality. We have seen these benefits in the Lake Erie and Scioto watersheds and throughout our great state. We are also supportive of water quality practices that are being proposed as part of the Governor's budget. You may also be aware that programs like the Lake Erie and Scioto Conservation Reserve Enhancement programs are set to expire this year, if we don't secure the state and partner match funding, we will lose some of the conservation that has been on the landscape for the last 15 -20 years. Well implemented conservation practices that improve water quality will also create habitat for pheasants, quail, or even pollinators and Monarch butterflies that as you know are in trouble.

Not only have we worked with DNR, but also Ohio EPA and Dept of Ag on farmland conservation practices throughout the state. We are actively involved in delivering conservation practices with 10 employees that work with DNR and USDA to implement Farm Bill conservation programs. As you may be aware, the 2018 Farm Bill was just passed last December, and we partner by taking local dollars that chapters raise, matching those state funds, and matching with Federal funding. There are many examples, but one of the more recent projects is working with Ohio EPA and Wright State University looking at how to reduce sediment and nutrients in the Lake Erie watershed (included brochure as part of testimony).

In order for our state agency partners to remain effective we need to make sure they have the funding they need to manage our wildlife, fish and abundant natural resources that we are blessed with in Ohio. We need agencies that can provide both financial and technical assistance for public and private lands. We are very concerned and fairly certain, that if we don't take significant action now, the issues and problems we face today, will only get worse, and of course more expensive to reverse in the future. These are problems that we DO NOT want to pass onto the next generation.

As you can see from our testimony here today, and the documents we've provided, we are not just about pheasants and quail, we are about creating wildlife habitat and opportunities for future generations of Ohio outdoor enthusiasts. We can't do this alone, we need strong agency partners and funding to make it happen. With your vote, you have the opportunity of a lifetime to positively impact the outdoor experience for those generations to come. As a wise person once said, they're not making any more land. In this case, land that many believe to already be public as with AEP. Land that has been actively managed for wildlife and recreational activity for decades. We encourage you to support the Conservation Reinvestment Initiative, H2Ohio, and the conservation provisions in the Governor's budget.

We thank you for your time today and would be happy to take any questions.

Respectfully submitted,

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