

## Proponent Testimony for Increased Funding for Ohio Division of Forestry in the 2024-2025 Budget Bill

Good morning!

My name is Cassie Ridenour. I am here today to support the increased funding in the 2024-2025 Budget Bill for the Ohio Department of Natural Resources Division of Forestry. This proposed increase in funding is essential for the Ohio Division of Forestry to help fulfill its mission of promoting and applying management for the sustainable use and protection of Ohio's private and public forest lands. I propose to explain why the ODNR Division of Forestry is a lynchpin of Ohio's Economy, and why I believe that funding for forestry pays off in jobs, goods, and tax dollars in the long run.

My background: A lifelong Ohioan, I am a small business owner, have owned my management consulting and auditing business, *CRidenour.com*, since 2000. I am also a tree farmer with 265 acres of woodlands, in Muskingum and Monroe Counties. I am the past chair of the Ohio Tree Farm Committee and a past board member of the Ohio Forestry Association. I currently serve as one of Governor DeWine's appointments to the reclamation commission representing modern forestry.

### Ohio's Forests –Economic Value

#### Background

Ohio has approximately 7.8 million acres of forestland, of which 6.8 million is held by family forest owners<sup>(1)</sup>. Ohio's forests doubled in area between 1942 and 2011, and losses of forest due to fragmentation and urbanization have been more than offset by gains in reforestation or afforestation of idle farmland. The typical family forest owner is not wealthy, and there have been several cases where family forests are being sold to developers, in part due to unwillingness to pay high tax rates. Ohio forest owners tend to be older, with 29% 65 or older, and only 14% younger than 45<sup>(2)</sup>.

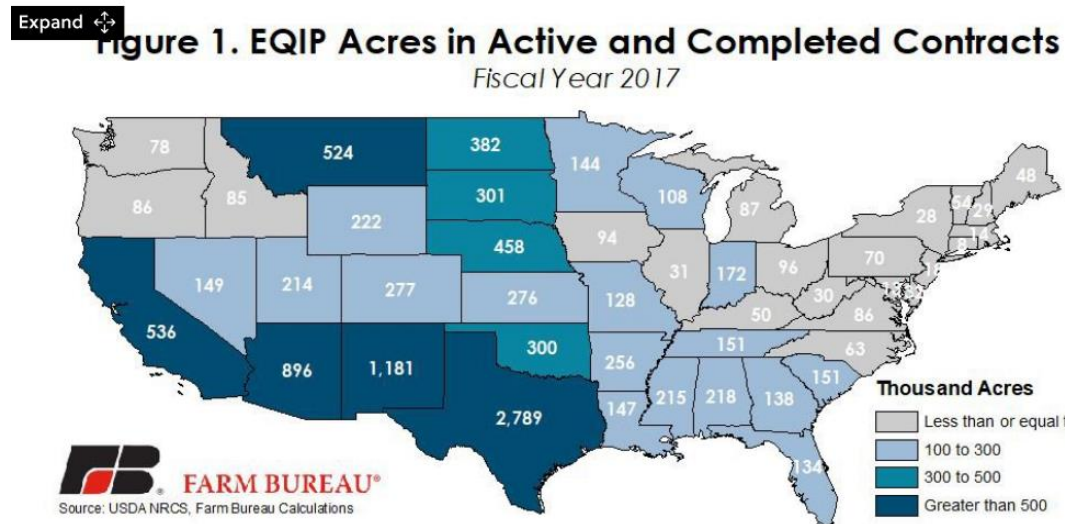
#### Proposed DNR Funding

I request that \$2.5 million per year of additional GRF be restored to the Governor's budget for private lands forestry in Ohio, for hiring additional service foresters, so they can reach and assist more private woodland owners.

Private lands foresters are critical for the ability of Ohioans to get monies from the federal government's EQIP – Environmental Quality Incentives Program which is part of the Farm Bill. I will give an economic example for my own land below.

- 1) In Monroe County I have been awarded 26,000\$ of EQIP monies for 2024-2027 to perform practices to improve the value of my lands through brush management and forest stand improvement. I will hire professional state approved vendors to do this – and could not afford to do this in the absence of the federal dollars. Chemicals for brush management will also be bought locally.
- 2) In Muskingum County I have been awarded 12,710\$ for brush management and tree planting – I will be buying the trees and planting them here. If we had a nursery in Ohio, I would be buying them locally, which is better for reasons of resiliency, but I will have to buy them from an out of state nursery. Chemicals for brush management will be bought locally.

I cannot apply for or get these monies myself without a service forester’s recommendation – that is the federal law. After the practice they must also inspect the outcome for payment. There are many landowners like me, and the more service forester help that is available the more federal dollars that can come to Ohio. As you can see below – in 2017 Indiana for example got a lot more contracts than Ohio did – while causality is difficult to prove here – I have no doubt that capacity to apply is a huge factor.



I am also requesting \$3 million in GRF for the Buckeye State Tree Nursery to be restored to the Governor’s budget so that Ohio can establish the infrastructure needed to grow tree seedlings in Ohio. This will help meet increasing demand for seedlings for conservation plantings in Ohio and reduce the need to buy tree seedlings from nurseries in other states. This helps establish more forest land in our state – and helps keep the tree sales dollars in the state. Additionally, no one can grow better seedlings for Ohio soils than ODNR – it is critical to establish seedlings for our environment. And I know from experience you do not increase the odds of a seedling’s survival by interstate shipping.

## Benefits of Ohio Forests

### Ohio’s Forest Products Industry

Ohio’s forest products industry includes four groups, resource (logging and timber production), solid wood products, pulp and paper and wood furniture. The forest industry generates 28.8 billion in total economic activity.

Forest industries significantly contribute to the tax base of local economies throughout Ohio. Total federal, state, and local tax impacts include (NOTE: 2017 data) <sup>(1)</sup>.

- \$369.3 million in Northwestern Region

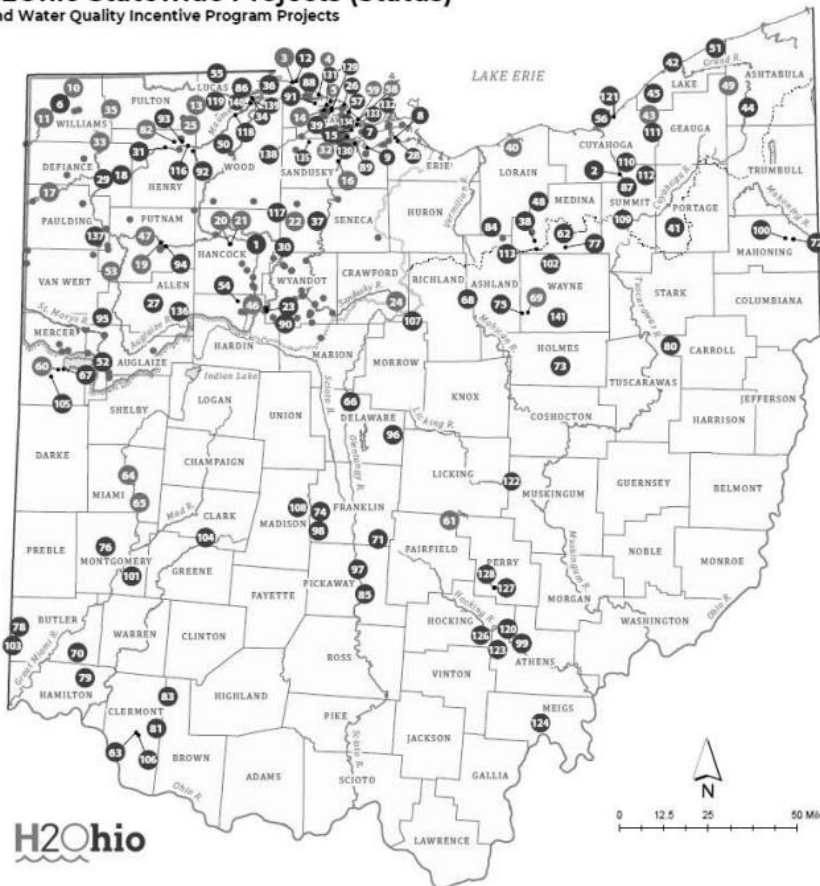
- \$625.9 million in Southwestern Region
- \$150.3 million in South-central Region
- \$ 22.6 million in Southeastern Region
- \$176.1 million in East-central Region
- \$761 million in Northeastern Region

This level of success is not sustainable unless we continue to invest in our private woodlands.

### Water Quality

The state of Ohio has serious toxic algae levels, in Lake Erie, along 400 miles of the Ohio River, and intermittently in other smaller bodies of water. The state has spent over 1.5 billion dollars on trying to treat the problem at the municipal water treatment level, but former Ohio EPA director Craig Butler acknowledged that phosphorus runoff from farmland is the source of the problem. H2Ohio programs include the development of riparian buffers to mitigate the cause of the toxic blooms by using forest buffer strips to absorb nutrients rather than letting them pass to the water table.

### H2Ohio Statewide Projects (Status) and Water Quality Incentive Program Projects



|    |  |     |        |
|----|--|-----|--------|
| 1  | Right Conservation Area Wetland Restoration Initiative         | 72  | Forest |
| 2  | 200 Station Road   | 73  | Woods  |
| 3  | Marion State Park Wetland Restoration                          | 74  | Woods  |
| 4  | Olden's Mill on the Ridge Wetland Restoration Project          | 75  | Woods  |
| 5  | Major Marsh on the Green Bay Wetland Restoration               | 76  | Woods  |
| 6  | Chickadee Creek Wetland  | 77  | Woods  |
| 7  | Wagon Creek Nature-Based Storage Wetland                       | 78  | Woods  |
| 8  | Major Wetland on the Green Bay Wetland Restoration Project     | 79  | Woods  |
| 9  | Palmer Creek Wetland Restoration                               | 80  | Woods  |
| 10 | St. Joseph's Cemetery Wetland Restoration                      | 81  | Woods  |
| 11 | St. Joseph's River Wetland Restoration Project                 | 82  | Woods  |
| 12 | Major Wetland on the Green Bay Wetland Restoration Project     | 83  | Woods  |
| 13 | Old Cemetery Wetland Restoration                               | 84  | Woods  |
| 14 | North Ridge Wetland Wetland Restoration                        | 85  | Woods  |
| 15 | Little Forge Wetland Restoration & Control Wetland Restoration | 86  | Woods  |
| 16 | Wetland on the Green Bay Wetland Restoration                   | 87  | Woods  |
| 17 | Traylor Brook Wetland Restoration                              | 88  | Woods  |
| 18 | Indian Lake Dam Local Restoration & Wetland Creation           | 89  | Woods  |
| 19 | Wetland on the Green Bay Wetland Restoration                   | 90  | Woods  |
| 20 | Greenwood National Wetland Restoration Project, West           | 91  | Woods  |
| 21 | Greenwood National Wetland Restoration Project, East           | 92  | Woods  |
| 22 | Wetland on the Green Bay Wetland Restoration                   | 93  | Woods  |
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| 71 | Wetland on the Green Bay Wetland Restoration                   | 142 | Woods  |

- Completed Projects
- Projects In Progress
- Water Quality Incentive Program Projects

## Value to the Soul

Aldo Leopold wrote, 'There can be no doubt that a society rooted in the soil is much more stable than one rooted in pavements.'<sup>(3)</sup> I live high atop a hill overlooking a state park – and share my land with deer, turkeys, foxes, squirrels, turtles and buzzards, to name a few. The value of Ohio's forests to the soul? Priceless.

## References

- 1) Ohio State University Extension; Ohio's Forest Economy 2019.
- 2) Widmann et al. Ohio's Forests 2011, Resource Bulletin NRS-90, US Forest Service
- 3) Aldo Leopold. The Sand County Almanac, 1941
- 4) Figure 1 – EQIP Acres in current and completed contracts – Farm Bureau Website 2017 data
- 5) Figure 2- H2Ohio Website -pulled 5/5/2023.