

**Ohio Senate  
Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee  
Interested Party Testimony  
Ohio House Bill 33**

*Bill Stanley, The Nature Conservancy in Ohio  
May 10, 2023*

Chairman Schaffer, Vice Chair Landis, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and Honorable Members of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, I am Bill Stanley, State Director for The Nature Conservancy in Ohio. We appreciate your consideration of our testimony for Ohio House Bill 33, Ohio's FY24-25 Main Operating Budget.

The Nature Conservancy is a global organization with chapters in all 50 states and projects in over 70 countries. We are a non-partisan, science-based organization that seeks to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. We work collaboratively with businesses, farmers, sportsmen groups, government, and local communities to develop pragmatic solutions to conservation challenges, including land conservation, water quality, and air pollution. We have been working in Ohio for over 70 years, and more than 65,000 Ohioans are Nature Conservancy supporters. We own and manage over 20,000 acres of nature preserves throughout the state. We invite any of you to visit our open preserves and enjoy the unique places that make Ohio a great place to live, work and play. We also invite you to visit our work with farmers in northwest Ohio to see first-hand how conservation and agriculture work together to address the problems in the western Lake Erie basin.

The Nature Conservancy in Ohio thanks the Governor and the House for including funding for the critical H2Ohio program to improve drinking water, water infrastructure and support the overall health of Ohio's waterways. We highly value all three legs of H2Ohio and are especially appreciative of the support for natural solutions, such as wetland restoration, which creates habitat while delivering lasting benefits for Ohio's water. As public, and private partners work towards a data-driven approach to restore and improve Ohio's rivers and river areas around the state, we applaud the investments in the H2Ohio program overall and the proposed development of the H2Ohio Rivers Initiative in particular.

The House passed version of the budget is concerning for the significant reduction in programming for the Ohio Department of Natural Resources. By flat funding the ODNR budget over the biennium, cuts to programs and staffing will become necessary due to inflation and contractual pay raises. Among others, the staff cuts would likely impact Natural Resource Officers, maintenance personnel at Lake Erie islands, staff to open new areas at Great Council, Middle and North Bass Islands, and Jesse Owens. Current vacancies at ODNR's Natural Areas and Preserves division would also be unfilled. Ohioans want to enjoy our beautiful natural resources, and to manage these resources safely and sustainably, ODNR staff funding is essential.

The Nature Conservancy urges the Senate to consider restoring funding for staffing and for several important divisions and programs from in the Governor's introduced budget. These significant programs include:

The Governor's budget would have doubled the number of service forester visits to landowners. In Ohio, 70% of forests are owned by families, and about 85% of woodland owners sell timber without the assistance of a forester. Selling timber without the assistance of a forester for long term planning is almost always bad for the forest in the long run due to high-grading and erosion concerns. The Governor's budget proposal included doubling capacity with service foresters which would make much needed progress in the health of our forested acres that provide critical habitat.

The proposed Buckeye Tree Nursery would generate around one million bare root seedlings annually after the third year of implementation, enabling the expansion of Ohio's forests, wildlife habitats, and improved air and water quality. There is a nationwide shortage of seedlings, native trees are needed to maintain healthy forests throughout the state, and a reliable supply of tree seedlings is critical to the success of H2Ohio projects and other critical restoration work.

Thank you for your consideration to restore funding to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources to ensure that Ohio's unique landscape remains a beautiful and healthy place to live, work, and raise a family.

Respectfully Submitted,

Bill Stanley  
State Director  
The Nature Conservancy in Ohio