

Good Morning Chairman Dolan and Members of the Finance Committee,

My name is Chris Duckworth, and I greatly appreciate being able to share some of my experiences and observations acquired during a half century of association with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources Division of Forestry.

My education and profession are as a historian. I worked three decades for the Ohio Historical Society, one for the Columbus Museum of Art, and along the way I also have owned two companies. Still, the older I have become, the more I consider my overriding mission to be the care of our family farm. My great great great grandfather Samuel, a veteran of the American Revolution, his wife, Elizabeth, and their first son John settled on this land in 1808 — they are still there.

The farm is in what today is Perry Township, Fayette County, along the banks of Paint Creek. When my ancestors arrived, the area was covered with forest. A popular anecdote claimed that prior to the arrival of Europeans in North America, the forest was so thick that a squirrel could travel from the Atlantic coast to the Mississippi River without ever touching the ground. While this account is fanciful, trees to pioneers were obstacles that prevented them from tilling the rich soil or pasturing livestock. They first needed to clear the land make their new lives in this amazing land. While this may appear rash today, it was then necessary. And the forests appeared endless. Over time, all of that changed.

At our farm, my grandfather moved to nearby Greenfield in 1915 when he married my grandmother whose family had originally settled the farm and moved to Fayette County. Grandpa, the son of a Civil War veteran, had been raised on a Washington County farm where he acquired a deep love of the land and all that it meant. He graduated from Ohio Northern University, where he met Grandma, and professionally he went on to become a high school teacher, principal, and superintendent of schools. Almost as soon as he arrived, he began working on the family farm by adopting the latest agricultural developments. He began various improvement in the farm's 100 acres of woodland.

As Grandpa worked to accomplish this, he consulted various resources to obtain the latest scientific information. I honestly do not know when Grandpa first began to work with the Division, but I do know that when he undertook a timber stand/erosion program in 1935, he sought out those who could advise him. I also know that in 1966 Service Forester Byron Kent greatly assisted him with a decade-long woodland improvement project. Later, in 1980, ninety-year-old Grandpa transformed a 17-acre island in Paint Creek into a fine stand of oak and walnut — again with the Division of Forestry solidly alongside him.

When Grandpa died at 105 in 1996, he bequeathed (Grandma had died previously) his beloved land to his sons. When they died, my cousins and I assumed responsibility.

My purpose in providing this family history is to note that our woodlands — like 85 percent of those in Ohio — are on private land. For me and most woodland owners who I know, their woods are not profit centers; a woodland provides far more exercise than money. As I discovered when I was honored to be named 2016 Ohio Tree Farmer of the Year, the state's carefully maintained and nurtured woodlands are largely the result of private landowners recognizing their importance and the Division of Forestry's sage advice.

The crucial support provided by the Ohio Division of Forestry makes this possible. The Service Foresters, District Managers, State Forest Managers, Urban Foresters, and others make true the Division motto, “How Can We Help?”

The Division, of course, derives funding from the State of Ohio. From forest management plans to invasive species control, to wildfire management, to the defunct Buckeye State Tree Nursery, the Division’s programs center around close personal contact with landowners. Although seminars, workshops, and publications are very helpful, in my experiences one-on-one interchanges have been the most helpful. I have had the pleasure to work with several Service Foresters, and I have gained so much. Just to walk the woods with these knowledgeable foresters is an education — one that I never miss. They also understand and guide the landowner through a sometimes-confusing world of, for instance, Federal invasive species control, which is no small feat.

I most strongly urge that you restore Governor DeWine’s additional general revenue funding of \$4.8 million to Division of Forestry’s budget. I also encourage restoration of Buckeye State Tree Nursery funding of \$3 million for the biennium. These are prudent investments in Ohio’s future. The unique partnership between private landowners and Ohio Division of Forestry experts results in the whole being more than the sum of the individual parts.

I would like to conclude with a statement from Warren Buffett, “Someone’s sitting in the shade today because someone planted a tree a long time ago” ...wise words.

Thank you so much for allowing me to address you today. I’m happy to answer any questions you may have.

Christopher S. Duckworth
Columbus, Ohio
May 16, 2023