

To: Chair Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of The Ohio Senate Finance Committee

RE: House Bill 33, 135th General Assembly

Written testimony of Adam Conway

May 18, 2023

Good morning, Chair Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee. My name is Adam Conway, and I am the President of Superior Hardwoods of Ohio, Inc. I also serve as Vice Chair of the Forestry Advisory Council and am past president of the Ohio Forestry Association. Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on HB33 and provide testimony in support of ODNR's budget, specifically regarding the Division of Forestry.

I am here today to ask that the Senate restore the requested \$2.5 million increase per year in additional GRF to the biennium budget for the Division of Forestry. The primary use of the additional GRF allocation is for forestry programs, including service forestry, forest health and wildfire prevention. Ohio now has twenty-four state forests covering more than 200,000 acres. In addition to being managed for multiple uses including sustainable timber production, wildlife habitat, soil and water protection, and recreation, they provide opportunity for critical research.

The ODNR budget includes provisions for environmental education programs, outreach initiatives, and partnerships with schools and communities. These efforts will help instill a sense of appreciation and responsibility among Ohioans, fostering a culture of sustainable forest management. Division of Forestry's GRF allocation steadily saw reductions from \$10.2 million during the Taft administration in 2000 to \$2.5 million in 2018 during Governor Kasich's administration. Under Governor DeWine's leadership, the GRF allocation for DOF has been slowly restored to 2009 levels of \$6.9 million (approximately \$4.9 million when adjusted for inflation).

For more than one hundred years, the Division of Forestry has been responsible for helping restore Ohio's timber base. Throughout the 19th century, Ohio was reduced from an estimated 95% forest coverage to less than 10%. Today, an estimated 35% of Ohio (almost 8 million acres) is restored to productive forestland. This accomplishment is the result of generations of dedicated Ohio foresters. Foresters like my grandfather who served at the newly established Zaleski State Forest from 1939 through 1949. In 1949, when the ODNR was formed, he began work to inventory Ohio's existing state forests. To this day, his work and recommendations are referenced as baseline and provide historical context when considering timber harvests and forest health. He later went on to manage more than seventy-five thousand acres for private landowners in Ohio and dedicated his life to education, conservation, and preservation of Ohio's forest resources. He was always concerned about forest fragmentation. Not that more people would own the forest, but that the next generation of landowners would not care individually enough about their collective responsibility. The challenge today is that 85% of Ohio's forestland is owned by private citizens. 58% of those own 10 acres or less and another 35% own 10-50 acres. Effectively, 93% of privately held forestland in Ohio is less than 50 acres. Educating landowners through Extension and the Division of Forestry is more important than ever.

Ohio's forests face numerous challenges, including invasive pests, diseases, and climate change impacts. The increased budget will bolster efforts in monitoring and addressing forest health issues. Investing in

early detection, research, and pest management programs will enable the Division of Forestry to mitigate the threats posed by pests and diseases, protecting the integrity and diversity of Ohio's forest ecosystems.

Timber sales from state forests return financial resources back to local schools, counties, and townships. Southeastern Ohio does not have a large industrial tax base from companies like Intel or Google. What we do have are our renewable natural resources. In 2022, ODNR and the Division of Forestry returned \$1,578,500 to local school districts, counties, and townships through their Trees to Textbooks program. Since the program began in 1999, more than \$34 million has been shared with Ohio school districts and local governments.

Trees sequester carbon from the atmosphere. More interestingly, trees also store carbon. Approximately 50% of the dry weight of the rift and quarter sawn white oak used by craftsmen to create the impressive chairs and benches and doors, wall panels and molding and furniture in this magnificent Ohio Statehouse over the last two centuries is stored carbon. The sequestered carbon in the solid wood will remain for the life of the product. In the forest, a new tree grows in its place for the next generation.

Ohio's timber industry plays a vital role in the state's economy. In Ohio, more than 120,000 people work in the hardwood sector, creating more than \$28 Billion in economic activity each year. The Division of Forestry's budget includes measures to support the sustainable growth of the timber industry, such as technical assistance to landowners, forest certification programs, and market development initiatives. These investments will stimulate economic activity, create jobs, and foster sustainable forestry practices that balance economic and environmental interests.

I strongly urge the members of the Ohio Senate Finance Committee to allocate the necessary resources to fulfill the current ODNR budget request. By doing so, you will enable the Division of Forestry to continue its crucial work, protecting and enhancing Ohio's forest resources for the benefit of current and future generations.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and for your dedicated service to the state of Ohio.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Adam Conway". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end of the last name.

Adam Conway