



Sustaining and Advancing Ohio's Forest Products Industry

**House Finance Committee
HB 96 Interested Party Testimony
Jenna Reese, Executive Director
March 12, 2025**

Chair Jones, Vice-Chair Robb Blasdel, Ranking Member Rogers, and members of the House Natural Resources Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony supporting specific provisions in HB 96. Since my focus is Ohio's forest products industry, I will restrict my remarks to the portions of the main operating budget that impact it.

There are nearly 8 million acres of forests in Ohio, which account for 30% of total land use in the state. That means standing timber covers more of the state than corn and soybeans combined. The majority of those 8 million acres, 85%, are privately owned family farms. Drilling down a little further, 116,000 landowners in Ohio own more than 10 acres of woodland, but a shocking 234,000 Ohio landowners have 10 acres or less, according to The Ohio State University Extension. These 350,000 forestland owners supply Ohio's forest products industry, which has an annual economic impact of \$30 billion to the State of Ohio.

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The Ohio Forestry Association (OFA) represents 680 members within the supply chain of the forest products industry.

With so many small parcels of woodlands throughout the state, landowners rely heavily on the forest management services provided by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) and the plant health services provided by the Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA). My comments today will focus on both Department's budgets and how they impact Ohio's only naturally growing agricultural commodity, timber.

Ohio Department of Natural Resources

OFA supports the management of Ohio's forests; forest management is proven to increase the health of forests, and healthy forests sequester and store more carbon than forests that are unhealthy. Managed forests are better habitats for wildlife, are safer for public recreation, and produce higher quality timber stands.

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ODNR's Division of Forestry employs service foresters throughout the state that provide technical assistance about forest management, watershed protection, insect and disease control, forest recreation, tree planting, and wildlife habitat development. The Governor's proposed funding for the Division of Forestry will allow private landowners to take advantage of the crucial assistance service foresters provide, resulting in more acres of managed forests.

This funding will also improve the health of our state forests. Invasives are the largest threat to our forests because they out-compete our native species, taking up vital space and resources in the forest canopy and increasing pressure on Ohio's white oak population. The funding contained in this bill will ensure the Division of Forestry is able to increase the number of acres managed and harvested each year. Harvesting timber is an essential forest management practice that supports OFA's Master Logger Voluntary Certification program and local governments. According to LSC, 65% of revenue from timber sales on state lands must be distributed to local governments in the county where the sale occurred;

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of that 65%, half goes to the school district, one quarter to the county, and one quarter to the township.

HB 96 also contains funding to further develop the Buckeye State Tree Nursery in Zanesville, Ohio. There is already a high demand for seedlings around the state due to a lack of seedling options in Ohio. Through H2Ohio and many other conservation programs, this demand has continued to increase over the last few years, forcing landowners to look to other states to provide their tree planting needs. Currently, Ohio's forest products industry is renewable and sustainable; supplying more seedlings locally will help meet private and public demand and ensure continued sustainability.

Ohio Department of Agriculture

The Division of Soil and Water Conservation oversees forestry pollution abatement through local Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs).

Landowners and operators are together responsible for preventing wind and water erosion as a result of harvesting timber; this is accomplished by installing best management practices (BMPs) as outlined in, "BMPs for Erosion Control for

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Logging Practices in Ohio.” SWCDs are the first line of enforcement for BMPs; they work with the Division of Forestry to process and investigate complaints against silvicultural operations. They also review forest pollution prevention plans (FP3s) for approval or denial; if a logging operation files an FP3 with the local SWCD and it is accepted, that operation is considered to be in compliance with Ohio’s forestry pollution abatement program.

When a logging operation is out of compliance, the local SWCD is critical to getting that site back into compliance. They can provide technical assistance, cost-sharing opportunities, and FP3s, or—in the absence of cooperation—refer the complaint to the Division of Forestry. The work they do is essential to helping landowners and operators voluntarily cooperate with the program and cannot be sustained without proper funding.

OFA also supports continued funding for the Division of Plant Health. Pests pose a serious threat to our industry. They can negatively impact the health of a forest and substantially decrease the value of timber. ODA’s Division of Plant Health is on

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the front lines of controlling pests like Spotted lanternfly and sets quarantine measures and other guidelines to prevent their spread.

Other Provisions

Logging is the deadliest profession in the country. It is reckless to harvest timber without proper safety and technical training, which is why OFA's Ohio Master Logger Program is essential. Even with proper training, however, accidents can happen. Most of Ohio's timber is located in eastern Appalachia Ohio where topography and economic distress limit emergency services. Time is precious when a logging accident occurs, so OFA supports addressing the significant shortfall in funding for Next Generation 9-1-1 services to help loggers connect with emergency services as quickly as possible.

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Thank you again for the opportunity to testify regarding HB 96's impact on Ohio's forest products industry. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out.

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