



House Finance Committee, Room 313  
Ohio State Capitol  
1 Capitol Square  
Columbus, OH 43215

March 11, 2025

**RE:** Ohio Department of Natural Resources Operating Budget, FY26-27

Chairman Stewart and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of nearly 17,000 Ducks Unlimited members across Ohio, I respectfully request your support for the Ohio Department of Natural Resources' FY26-27 budget proposal and all proposed funding allocations for the H2Ohio Initiative. As the lead volunteer in Ohio for Ducks Unlimited, I am responsible for traveling around the state to visit with volunteer leadership at many of our 50 unique chapters that collectively plan and execute nearly 170 conservation fundraising events a year. The message I hear unequivocally is how popular the H2Ohio Program is amongst our members. The program's structure of providing numerous benefits to Ohio communities, coupled with the strong administering agency leadership, has made this program the most substantial water conservation effort in the country. DU is exceptionally proud and honored to play a small role in helping deliver the wetland conservation component of the program and is hopeful that with your support, we can continue to play this role in our communities across the state.

Conservation investments like the ones proposed in HB96 entice private investment and set the stage for the kind of public-private partnerships that yield substantial returns on investment for the Ohio taxpayer. DU is exceptionally proud of our partnership with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, whereby we bring privately raised funds and federal grant funds to conservation projects as matching contributions to H2Ohio investments being made throughout the state. Last year alone, DU volunteers like me helped raise over \$2 million of private philanthropy for the mission. That was turned into nearly 14,000 acres of conservation led by DU thanks to the smattering of state, federal, and corporate support that gets layered into projects under the public-private partnership model we operate under.



Conservation work also helps support rural economies, small businesses, and the overall quality of life we enjoy here in Ohio, which keeps our state competitive. For every \$1 million spent on DU wetland conservation projects, 17 jobs are supported, many of these being heavy equipment operators, trades, and other support services necessary for moving dirt and restoring a site's historical hydrology effectively and responsibly. The result is a thriving wetland that supports abundant wildlife, filters and stores our water, and provides excellent recreational value, contributing to Ohio's \$12.5 billion outdoor recreation economy.

Thank you all for your service to the citizens of Ohio and for the opportunity to submit testimony on HB96. Please do not hesitate to contact me if Ducks Unlimited or I can be a resource.

Evan Erickson  
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