



Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
Ohio State Capitol
1 Capitol Square
Columbus, OH 43215

May 14, 2025

RE: H2Ohio Initiative Funding Support

Chairman Schaffer and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of nearly 17,000 Ducks Unlimited members across Ohio, I respectfully request your support for funding the H2Ohio Initiative at the levels funded by the General Assembly in the last biennial budget, and that funding be made available for strategic land acquisitions and conservation easements, as well as the associated wildlife habitat restoration work. As the lead volunteer in Ohio for Ducks Unlimited, I am responsible for traveling around the state to visit with other volunteers and members who lead and support the 50 unique DU chapters across Ohio 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. Which is why I am urging the Senate to maintain strong programmatic funding for this initiative and protect the program's existing level of flexibility to utilize available funds for both strategic land acquisition and conservation easement purchase opportunities.

The program's structure of providing numerous benefits to Ohio communities, coupled with the strong leadership of the administering agencies, has made this program the most substantial water conservation effort in the country. And from a waterfowl hunter's perspective, one of the most sportsmen-friendly state conservation programs currently in existence. DU is exceptionally proud and honored to play a role in helping deliver the wetland conservation component of the program and is hopeful that with your support, we can continue to play this supporting role in our communities across the state.



Conservation investments like the ones provided by H2Ohio 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 in private philanthropy in Ohio for the mission. Through DU's public-private partnership-based business model, this private philanthropy was leveraged with state and federal grant support as well as corporate giving to deliver nearly 14,000 acres of conservation last fiscal year. That is how landscape-scale conservation is done, and H2Ohio is a critical cog in this great conservation wheel.

We must not overlook that 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 end 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 wildlife-based outdoor recreation economy.

In closing, I want to thank you all for your service to the citizens of Ohio, and I hope we can count on you to continue funding H2Ohio at robust funding levels. Please do not hesitate to contact me if we can be a resource.

Evan Erickson
Ohio State Chair
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