



June 6, 2025

Senate Finance Committee

Testimony of Dr. Beck Swab, Holden Forest & Gardens

Interested Parties for **HB 96**.

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Chair Cirino, Vice-chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 96.

I am Dr. Beck Swab, Director of Conservation and Community at Holden Forest & Gardens. As a native Ohioan and an ecologist, I am committed to ensuring the health of both Ohio's forests and its people. Because of the benefits forests provide to people- cleaning air and water, providing recreation opportunities, beauty, timber, and jobs, the well-being of forests and people are inextricably linked. And so, to improve the lives of Ohio's people through protecting our forests, forestry jobs, and forest resources, I support the restoring the budget allocation for the ODNR state forest fund, the Buckeye state tree nursery, and request restoring the H2Ohio budget to the governor's requested level.

Holden Forests & Gardens consists of two Northeast Ohio environmental and cultural institutions — [the Holden Arboretum and Cleveland Botanical Garden](#). As the 12th largest public garden in the country, Holden Forests & Gardens has an annual attendance of over 350,000. Holden's vision is that all communities are transformed into vibrant places where trees, plants, and people thrive, and we feel this budget request is essential to achieve this goal.

Holden protects over 3,500 acres of forest in northeast Ohio, so we understand the importance of and challenges in maintaining healthy forests. Ohio forests occupy 30% of our terrestrial land area and support a ~\$27 billion per-annum industry which includes thousands of livelihoods. Ohio's forests are important regionally, nationally, and globally, providing crucial resources and processes that support a vast, biodiverse community of life—including human communities. ODNRs efforts are essential in keeping our forests healthy statewide- through their direct forest protection and management in the states many beautiful parks and preserves, through the state nursery which provides young trees to plant so we can grow new forests, and through their educational resources helping private forest owners manage their forests. 85% of the state's forests are privately owned.



Therefore, landowner education is vital to ensure responsible use of Ohio's forests and protect its resources and related jobs.

With our 67-acre nationally acclaimed Working Woods Learning Forest at Holden Arboretum, developed with the support of ODNR foresters, we have been working with landowners to improve forest education and management in northeast Ohio. Through this program, we have seen first-hand the need for forest education and the value of ODNRs foresters- our programs have connected landowners directly with service foresters, empowered people to actively manage their forests and knowledgeably select management practices and vendors, as well as prevented them from signing contracts with unqualified logging companies that would have resulted in deforestation.

ODNRs urban forestry efforts are essential to maintain our urban tree canopy. Holden works with partners to plant and maintain trees in the city of Cleveland to boost housing values, clean air, improve living conditions, and provide flood protection. ODNR urban foresters support our efforts through education and funding.

As a forest ecologist and Ohio native, I find it important to think on a generational time scale—both for people and for our ecosystems. We are at a crucial point in our state's history: we have the most forests since the 1800s, but wooded land is starting to decline in amount and health as the resource is misunderstood and mismanaged. Our urban tree canopy, on the other hand, is at an all-time low and decreasing every year. It is vital that support for ODNR remain strong at the state level, to protect Ohio's forests, which are inextricably tied to the well-being of all communities in Ohio.

Finally, ODNRs H2Ohio budget is essential for clean water in the state and especially Lake Erie. A vast majority of Ohio used to be wetlands, which acted as a filter cleaning our water for drinking and swimming. With the removal of these wetlands, our states waters, especially those in Lake Erie, are suffering from pollution and algae. Lake Erie was so bad that the 1971 version of the Lorax by Dr. Seuss used the Lake as an example of bad water.

*"You're glumping the pond where the Humming-Fish Hummed!
No more can they hum, for their gill are all gummed.
So I'm sending them off. Oh, their future is dreary.
They'll walk on their fins and get woefully weary
in search of some water that isn't so smeary.
I hear things are just as bad up in Lake Erie."*



With a lot of work, we fixed this issue, and Lake Erie was cleaner for decades- to the point that Dr. Seuss even changed the words of The Lorax. However, with the recent algal blooms, that is an issue again today, especially in the Western Basin of Lake Erie. The H2OH program is set to fix that- but to do so, it needs to be fully funded.

I ask the Finance committee to invest in the future of our natural resources in Ohio, by funding ODNR, the state forest fund, and H2OH. The division of forestry and the H2OH program have a proven track record of their ability to protect our forests, wetlands, and the resources they provide to benefit all Ohioans and ensure our clean air, water, recreation, and economic opportunities in perpetuity.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 96.
