Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee
Testimony on Division Forestry Occupational Licenses
Provided by Assistant Chief of the Division of Forestry Greg Guess
April 15, 2026

Good morning Chair Manchester, Vice Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Weinstein and members of the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee. My name is Greg Guess, and I am the Assistant Chief of the Ohio Division of Forestry. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding the licensing and certification responsibilities of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources Division of Forestry.

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources ensures a balance between wise use and protection of our natural resources for the benefit of all. The mission of the Division of Forestry is to promote and apply management for the sustainable use and protection of Ohio's private and public forest lands with the vision of healthy, diverse forests valued for the life-sustaining benefits they provide to all Ohioans. Part of this goal is accomplished through the issuance of the certified prescribed fire manager certification.

The certified prescribed fire manager certification allows its recipient to manage prescribed burns in the state of Ohio. Approximately 25 certifications are issued annually, and 40 certifications are renewed annually, with over 200 active certifications for prescribed fire managers across the state. There is no cost for initial certification or renewal, but there is a $80 fee for the cost of the division's instructional course. Interested parties can obtain alternative training if it meets the requirements of OAC 1501:3-13-01. Division-offered course fee revenues amount to approximately $800 annually, which is primarily used for materials to support course delivery. Training includes 30 hours of classroom instruction. Interested parties must also have prior professional experience working at least 10 prescribed and/or wildfires.

The workload to administer the prescribed fire manager certification program is primarily performed by 5–7 employees across the state but totals less than 0.5 FTE position.

Ohio has nearly 8 million acres of forest land, covering approximately 30% of our state. These forests provide clean water, wildlife habitat, soil and water protection, and support a 30-billion-dollar timber industry. When done correctly, prescribed fires can enhance these attributes. But every prescribed burn has the potential to escape and become a wildfire. Wildfires can damage property and put human life at risk. As such, uniform standards for training and certification are necessary to prevent these outcomes.

Chair Manchester, Vice Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Weinstein and members of the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee, thank you again for giving me the opportunity to provide testimony today. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have at this time.

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