

**Ohio House of Representatives
Finance Committee
Interested Party Testimony
Ohio House Bill 33**

*Rebecca Mellino, The Nature Conservancy in Ohio
April 20, 2023*

Chairman Edwards, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney, and Honorable Members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony for the substitute House Bill 33.

The Nature Conservancy in Ohio works across the state in a nonpartisan manner to protect the land and water in which all life depends. We have been working in Ohio for over 70 years and manage over 20,000 acres of nature preserves throughout the state.

The Nature Conservancy in Ohio had previously provided support for many of the critical programs that were presented in the Governor's budget for the Ohio Department of Natural Resources. The substitute version removes funding for all of the new programs proposed and hinders the ability for the Ohio Department of Natural Resources to make critical investments to protect Ohio's natural assets and resources.

Of particular concern is the proposed shift of royalties from oil and gas leasing agreements on state lands to the All Ohio Future Fund. In previous versions, leasing revenues would have gone to the State Land Royalty Fund, 30% of which would stay in the park or land where the drilling would take place. Not only does this change take funds away from impacted parks, but it also completely removes funds from ODNR. Any royalties from oil and gas leasing on state lands should stay at the park and within ODNR to ensure that our public lands are not further harmed by the drilling. Ohio ranks low in total public lands, and we must ensure that these limited and beloved public resources are maintained.

Not only were new royalties removed, but any increases in funding have also been removed. Without accounting for inflation, this will mean that even current staffing may need to be reassessed. Staffing for previously funded projects like the new Jesse Owens State Park visitor center, for example, will not have funding to be staffed. In order to maintain state lands and to keep them places that Ohioans want to visit, we need to at least restore funding increases to account for inflation.

We would also like to see the new Buckeye State Tree Nursery initiative have its funding restored. Native trees are needed to maintain healthy forests throughout the state, and a reliable supply of tree seedlings is critical to the success of H2Ohio projects and other critical restoration work.

Thank you for your consideration to restore funding to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources to ensure that Ohio's unique landscape remains a beautiful and healthy place to live, work, and raise a family.

Respectfully Submitted,

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The Nature Conservancy in Ohio