



**House Finance Subcommittee on Agriculture, Development and Natural Resources
HB 33 Interested Party Testimony
Jenna Reese, Executive Director
March 16, 2023**

Chair Jones, Ranking Member Troy, and members of the Agriculture, Development, and Natural Resources Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony supporting specific provisions in HB 33. Since my focus is Ohio's forest products industry, I will restrict my remarks to the portions of the main operating budget that impact it.

The Ohio Forestry Association has over 600 members that include the entire forest products industry: tree farmers, foresters, loggers, paper, sawmills, concentration yards, manufacturers, equipment dealers and service firms. In terms of resources, there are 7.8 million acres of forest land in Ohio, which account for 31% of total land use in the state. The vast majority of those acres are privately owned family farms. Of those forest lands, 96% are hardwood due to the native species that thrive here. The industry has an annual economic impact of \$29 billion to the State of Ohio.

At the state level, our industry bisects the Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA) and the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR). It is intuitive that OFA would partner with ODNR where the Division of Forestry is housed, but we also work with the Division of Soil and Water Conservation and the Division of Plant Health at ODA. Therefore, I will speak to both Department's budgets and how they assist Ohio's only naturally growing agricultural commodity.

Ohio Department of Natural Resources

OFA supports the management of Ohio's forests; forest management is proven to increase the health of forests, and healthy forests sequester and store more carbon than forests that are unhealthy. Healthy forests are better habitats for wildlife and are safer for public recreation. ODNR's Division of Forestry employs service foresters throughout the state that provide forest management services to Ohio landowners. Forest land enrolled in Ohio Forestry Tax Law is required by law to have a forest management plan and most County Auditors require them for enrollment in CAUV; ODNR's service foresters write many of these plans. The \$2.5 million in additional funding to the Division of Forestry will allow more private landowners to take advantage of the crucial assistance service foresters provide, resulting in more acres of managed forests.

The increase in funding will also improve the health of our state forests. Invasives are the largest threat to our forests because they out-compete our native species, taking up vital space and

Ohio Forestry Association, Inc.
507 Main Street, Suite 200., Zanesville, OH 43701
Phone Toll Free: (888) 388-7337: Fax: 740-297-4153
E-mail: info@ohioforest.org
www.ohioforest.org

resources in the forest canopy and increasing pressure on our most important native: White oak. The funding contained in this bill will more than double the number of acres the Division of Forestry is able to treat each year.

HB 33 also contains funding to establish Buckeye State Tree Nursery in Zanesville, Ohio. There is already a high demand for seedlings and projects around the state through H2Ohio and many other conservation programs will increase that demand. Currently, Ohio's forest products industry is renewable and sustainable; supplying more seedlings will help meet private and public demand and ensure continued sustainability.

Ohio Department of Agriculture

The Division of Soil and Water Conservation oversees forestry pollution abatement through local Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs). Landowners and operators are together responsible for preventing wind and water erosion as a result of harvesting timber; this is accomplished by installing best management practices (BMPs) as outlined in, "BMPs for Erosion Control for Logging Practices in Ohio." SWCDs are the first line of enforcement for BMPs; they work with the Division of Forestry to process and investigate complaints against silvicultural operations. They also review timber management plans for approval or denial; if a silvicultural operation files a timber harvest plan with the local SWCD and it is accepted, that operation is considered to be in compliance with Ohio's forestry pollution abatement program.

When a silvicultural operation is out of compliance, the local SWCD is critical to getting that site back into compliance. They can provide technical assistance, cost-sharing opportunities, and timber harvest plans, or—in the absence of cooperation—refer the complaint to the Division of Forestry. The work they do is essential to helping landowners and operators voluntarily cooperate with the program and cannot be sustained without proper funding.

OFA also supports continued funding for the Division of Plant Health. Pests pose a serious threat to our industry. They can negatively impact the health of a forest and substantially decrease the value of timber. ODA's Division of Plant Health is on the front lines of controlling pests like Spotted lanternfly and sets quarantine measures and other guidelines to prevent their spread.

Other Provisions

Logging is the deadliest profession in the country. It is reckless to harvest timber without proper safety and technical training, which is why OFA's Ohio Master Logger Program is essential. Even with proper training, however, accidents can happen. Most of Ohio's timber is located in eastern Appalachia Ohio where topography and economic distress limit emergency services. Time is precious when a logging accident occurs, so OFA supports funding for Next Generation 9-1-1 services to help loggers connect with emergency services as quickly as possible.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify regarding HB 33's impact on Ohio's forest products industry, and I will answer any questions you have to the best of my ability.