

To: Chairman Jones, Ranking Member Troy, and Members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Agriculture, Development, and Natural Resources



From: Matt Misicka, Executive Director
Ohio Conservation Federation

Date: 16 March, 2023

Re: Proponent Testimony for the Ohio Division of Forestry and Ohio Division of Wildlife Biennium Budget FY24-25 (HB 33)

Chairman Jones, Ranking Member Troy, and Members Miller, Pavliga, and Peterson, on behalf of the Ohio Conservation Federation and the thousands of Ohio sportsmen and women we represent, I am writing today to voice the strongest possible level of support for the biennium budgets proposed for the Ohio Division of Forestry and the Ohio Division of Wildlife.

Ohio's hunters, anglers, and trappers depend upon the Division of Forestry's comprehensive management of our 24 state forests for wildlife habitat, soil, air, and water quality, and sustainable, resilient, timber production. We also recognize and appreciate the relationship between public and private owned forests. With nearly 85% of Ohio's 8 million forested acres in private ownership, we depend on the Division of Forestry to provide timely expertise to private landowners, state and local agencies, and the commercial logging industry. Funds included in this budget request will ensure that the Division of Forestry is best positioned to reach more private landowners so that they can make informed, science-based decisions to meet a wide-range of objectives.

Ohio's sportsmen and women support the proposed Buckeye State Tree Nursery for the production and distribution of bare root seedlings, critical for forest regeneration, for planting on both public and private lands by ODNR, other agencies and organizations, and individuals throughout the state; and

We support training, equipment, and grant support for rural volunteer fire departments engaged in wildfire suppression; and

We support management of invasive species of plants and insects on public and private lands that threaten forest health, habitat, and productivity as well as our uniquely American outdoor heritage.

Access and opportunity are regularly cited as critical factors to the recruitment, retention, and reactivation of sportsmen and women. The Ohio Division of Wildlife, in collaboration with partners, manages as public land stewards, through ownership and easement, about 750,000 acres for wildlife habitat. Division of Wildlife issues hunting, fishing, and trapping permits, manages fisheries and operates hatcheries, and oversees special habitat environments including wetlands.



Ohio's sportsmen and women support the Governor's request for \$2.5M/yr for additional acquisition through purchase and easement of public lands open to hunting, fishing, and trapping. Recognizing that public lands are an asset not solely used by sportsmen and women, we ask the Legislature to fund the payments made in lieu of taxes to the communities of Appalachian Hills; and

We support the legislature's commitment to funding the Governor's H2Ohio program. As hunters, anglers, and trappers we see direct benefits from the wetland habitat work coordinated by the Division of Wildlife and look forward to similar results as the program expands more fully in the Ohio River basin to include stream and river riparian areas; and

We support the commitment to conservation education and opportunity from the funding of Project Wild to provisions permitting full-time, non-resident college students enrolled at Ohio's public and private colleges and universities to obtain hunting and fishing licenses at resident rates. We hope this commitment to conservation education, from elementary age through college, can be expanded across the state and across all grade levels, including high school conservation science curriculum, to the benefit of students at both public and private schools and institutions.

Thank you for the opportunity to present proponent testimony today. Ohio's sportsmen and women encourage the committee to take the recommendations of the hunting, angling, and trapping community into consideration during budget deliberations and **fully fund the Division of Forestry and Division of Wildlife at the proposed levels.**

If I can be of any further assistance or answer any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely yours,

Matt

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