

May 18, 2023

Senate Finance Committee Testimony of Dr. Rebecca Swab and Jessica Miller, Holden Forest & Gardens Interested Parties for **Sub. H. B. No. 33**

-- -- --

I am Dr. Rebecca Swab, Director of Conservation and Community at Holden Forest and Gardens. As a native Ohioan and an ecologist, I am deeply committed to ensuring the health of Ohio's forests. And so, to protect Ohio's forests, forestry jobs and forest resources, I would like to ask that the \$4.8 million in funding to support ODNRs forestry efforts be restored to the budget.

Holden Forests & Gardens is made up 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, but this is a drop in the bucket compared to Ohio's total forest. 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. However, a majority (85%) of the state's forest are privately owned. Therefore landowner education, primarily by ODNR's Division of Forestry, is vital to ensure responsible use of Ohio's forests and protect its resources and related jobs.

To leverage our forests as examples to improve forests in the region, in 2018 we developed some of our forested land into a demonstration site for private landowners to see good forest practices. Holden partnered with ODNR to develop this site, called Working Woods Learning Forest. This 67-acre, nationally recognized, publicly accessible demonstration site at the Holden Arboretum seeks to model and improve environmental stewardship of woodlands for replication in private lands in the region.

The vision of Working wood's is to empower people to manage, protect, and create resilient forests in Ohio. With the help of Division foresters, we encourage stewardship practices which keep forests as forests and maintain ecological integrity in woodland ecosystems.

Without education, woodlands in our state are misunderstood and undervalued. These attitudes are reflected in alarming management trends across Ohio: extractive logging practices and un-managed, degraded forests. These trends lead to reduced resilience, biodiversity, and ecosystem services, as well as a loss in the economic and inherent value of forests. This can negatively impact Ohio's economy through declines in agriculture, timber, forest products such as maple syrup, and recreation. Ohio's forests provide many economic opportunities for Ohioans.

The efforts of the Division of Forestry are key to increase forest management and protect Ohio's forest related economic interests. Forest resilience is inextricably tied to the well-being of all communities in Ohio. Now, I'm going to turn over to my colleague who will give some specific examples of how ODNR's foresters have helped Ohio's forests.

-- -- --

I'm Jessica Miller, Woodland Community Forester at Holden Forest's & Gardens and I have been working closely with the Division of Forestry for four years.

The Division and State Service Foresters have been invaluable to us. They guided us through our first timber sale and development of forestry programming. Our programs have been at capacity from the beginning: many private landowners do not feel equipped to manage their land.

I'll be honest—I was skeptical of the work of the Division of Forestry at first. However, after witnessing success stories firsthand from private landowners assisted by ODNR foresters, I am convinced that their work results in not only healthier forests but better lives and livelihoods for Ohioans.

For example, last year a landowner who recently inherited 130 acres of woods in Geauga County attended one of our partner-hosted programs. Upon learning that the Division of Forestry was a resource, they contacted a Service Forester who helped write a plan matching the family's goals.

In another program, I witnessed a mother and daughter who had been approached by a logger receive advice from a Division of Forestry representative. Because of this advice they avoided signing a contract which would have resulted in them being undercompensated and their forest destroyed.

ODNR Service Foresters are a necessary link for people who want benefit from their woods but need help navigating their options.

As a forest ecologist and Ohio native, I have the benefit and challenge of thinking on the timescale of generations-- not only of my family, but of the forest. 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. This is NOT the time to reduce the capacity of the Division of Forestry to address landowner needs. With 85% of this invaluable resource in private hands, empowering private landowners for responsible use is CRITICAL to protect the resource, the economy and jobs connected to it, and quality of life for communities.

---