



# Peer Family Forestry Consulting, LLC

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Ohio Senate Finance Committee  
The Ohio Statehouse  
1 Capitol Square  
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Dear Ohio Senate Finance Committee,

I am writing to offer my support for the Ohio Division of Forestry, specifically regarding their operating appropriations for fiscal years 2024 & 2025. I reside in Senate District 22 in Richland County. Additionally, I have owned my own business for just over two years. As a Consulting Forester, I assist landowners in the management of their forests. Some of the reasons that landowners manage their forests include enhancing wildlife habitat, enjoying recreational opportunities, and the production of timber. According to the Ohio Forestry Association, the Forest Industry in Ohio directly employs more than 47,000 people and has an industrial output of \$12.8 billion each year. This industry can only be sustainable if we are educating the public about sustainable forest management. Managing forests properly is not easy and there are many challenges to overcome. The first contact that many landowners have with a forester is with a Division of Forestry Service Forester.

Service Foresters do a variety of work including advising landowners on timber management, helping administer cost-share programs, and administering the Ohio Forest Tax Law program. They visit around 1600 woodland owners annually and if they received the new funding outlined in the Governor's budget, they could reach more than 3000 woodland owners annually. Many of these landowners will have questions about how to sustainably harvest timber on their properties. The Service Foresters help advise the landowners on what management must be done prior to a harvest to be sure that the forest will remain healthy and productive after the harvest. Once the forest is mature enough for a harvest, Service Foresters provide information to the landowners about how a private Consulting Forester could and should administer their timber sale. For many landowners, they may only see one or two timber harvests during their ownership of a property and it is of the utmost importance that it is done properly. An improper harvest can harm the ecological balance and it is unlikely that the forest will recover without major intervention. Service Foresters are an essential part of the process when landowners are managing their forests. Keep in mind that approximately 85% of Ohio's forests are privately owned, making up nearly 7 million acres.

I'm going to share a personal story about how my life has been impacted by a Service Forester. When I was a teenager, I was in the Boy Scouts and on my journey to become an Eagle Scout I had the opportunity to job shadow with one of Ohio's Service Foresters. His father was one of my Scout Leaders and it seemed like a fun and fulfilling job. He recommended that I attend Ohio Forestry Camp, now known as Camp Canopy. At this camp, I learned all the basics of what a forester does and more importantly how it impacts the forest. I then attended The Ohio State University and graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Environment and Natural Resources with a focus on Forestry and Wildlife Management. That Service Forester is still someone who I consider a mentor, friend, and one of the most important influences on my life.

Earlier, I mentioned that there are many challenges to managing forests in Ohio. Chief among those challenges are non-native invasive plants. These are plants that displace our native plants while providing little benefit to wildlife and no economic benefit. Right now, the Division of Forestry treats 550 acres on state forests for invasive plants annually. This could be increased to 1200 acres if their operating appropriations were increased to the levels in the Governor's budget. The presence of non-native invasive plants on state forests is not a problem that remains on the state forests. These invasives inevitably spread to private landowners and the economic burden on them is incredibly significant.

The increase in operating appropriations could also provide the opportunity for the Division of Forestry to open the Buckeye State Tree Nursery. At present, there is not a large-scale supply of bareroot tree seedlings in Ohio. This means that our landowners are forced to purchase their seedlings from other states like Michigan and Pennsylvania. While these states are close, the growing conditions are different enough to have a negative impact when the seedlings are planted here in Ohio. Additionally, there are conservation and restoration projects planned for Ohio that will significantly increase the demand for seedlings. Meaning, that landowners might not even be able to purchase seedlings from these other nurseries. Our environment desperately needs more trees, and a nursery would enable our citizens in Ohio to plant trees that will benefit our wildlife and economy in the future.

I do not take any of this lightly, as I generally believe that less government spending is better. However, it is my belief that our Forest Industry in Ohio needs the Division of Forestry and that an increase in their operating appropriations will have an equal positive impact on the private Forest Industry. I serve as the Chair of the Ohio Society of American Foresters, Vice Chair of the Ohio Tree Farm Committee, Secretary of the East Central Ohio Loggers Chapter, and a member of the Camp Canopy Planning Committee. However, I am not providing this testimony for any of those organizations. I am providing it as a small business owner in Richland County who sees a need for the Division of Forestry to continue their mission of helping landowners, expanding their outreach, and continuing to support a Sustainable Forest Industry in Ohio.

Sincerely,



Jake Peer, ACF

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