

I appreciate this opportunity to provide a few points of perspective as you consider allocations for the next State of Ohio budget.

In 1990 I purchased 150 acres of forested land in Harrison County but knew nothing about forestry except that “I liked trees”. Not knowing where to turn for advice, I called my local Ohio State University Extension office and was directed to a number of resources including OSU Extension staff, Soil and Water Conservation District programs, ODNR Division of Wildlife and Division of Forestry staff and others. I found them to be a wealth of knowledge. Within months, a state Service Forester had walked my property with me, helped me put my goals for the property into words and wrote a management plan which made it possible for me to enroll in a number of federal cost-share programs that enabled me to make significant improvements to the health of my woods. Over the past 33 years I’ve continued to implement good forestry practices and have risen to leadership positions in many Ohio-based forestry organizations. In 2015 I was honored to be the Ohio Tree Farmer of the Year -- that is pretty good for someone who originally just “liked trees” but didn’t know much more!

I absolutely would not have been able to accomplish what I have without the on-farm visits and educational seminars from the various state agencies mentioned above. I was very fortunate to have purchased my Tree Farm when I did because within months of contacting the various agencies, there were boots on the ground to help me. Not too long after that, though, there was a bleak period when state budgets had contracted so much and staffing was so thin that it was nearly impossible to get any one-on-one advice. Recently the trends have been much better with the ODNR Division of Forestry and SWCD staff having been beefed up again to the point where it’s possible once again to make appointments with relatively short lead times. I feel that it’s important to maintain that level of service.

Ohio’s budget has significant ramifications on the availability of federal dollars. Without state service foresters to sign-off that various NRCS-program practices have been properly implemented, the federal money will not flow into our state. Without active management of our forests, degradation from non-native invasive species will accelerate and the quality of our woodlands will plummet – resulting in decreased timber availability for papermaking, furniture making and scores of other industries that pump hundreds of millions of dollars into our economy.

The final budget item that I specifically wish to address is funding the reopening of a state tree seedling nursery. When I first started improving my property in the 1990’s I took advantage of many tree seedling sales through the state nurseries either through direct purchases or indirectly through SWCD tree sales. Once the last nursery closed, though, I had to buy tree seedlings from either Michigan or Pennsylvania. My last two purchases totaled \$3500 so that was \$3500 that could have been added to Ohio’s coffers that instead enriched other states. Over the next decade there is going to be a huge increase in federal cost-share money directed to reforestation and tree planting as part of carbon sequestration initiatives and it would be a shame if Ohio lets that opportunity slip by.

Thank you for your legislative service to Ohio. I realize that you have to balance the competing needs and wants of millions of citizens while being fiscally responsible. I hope that my recounting of how funding of ODNR, OSU Extension and SWCD programs has benefitted me adds a valuable perspective to your decision-making.

Sincerely,

R. Alan Walter