

Adequate Funding for Natural Resources Conservation and Protection

THE ASK

The League of Ohio Sportsmen is considering a proposal to raise the state sales tax by one-quarter of a percent to fund the Ohio DNR, the Ohio Historical Society, and county sheriffs. What is your gut reaction to such a proposal?

FACT SHEET

Background

Ohio is blessed with incredible natural resources that impact every citizen's quality of life - from clean water, productive soils, minerals, wildlife, forests, natural areas and parks. The Ohio Department of Natural Resources is largely the caretaker of these resources with a mission "to balance the wise use and protection of the state's natural resources."

ODNR owns and manages more than 590,000 acres of land that includes 74 state parks, 20 state forests, 134 state nature preserves, and 138 wildlife areas. It also has jurisdiction over more than 120,000 acres of inland waters; 7,000 miles of streams; 481 miles of Ohio River; and 2-1/4 million acres of Lake Erie. In addition, ODNR licenses all hunting, fishing, and watercraft in the state, oversees and permits all mineral extraction, monitors dam safety, manages water resources, maps the state's major geologic structures and mineral resources, and promotes recycling and litter prevention through grant programs to local communities.

ODNR provides training and support to Ohio's 88 county soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs), which work locally to keep Ohio's soils productive and waters clean through cooperation with farmers, landowners and other partners. SWCDs provide conservation assistance on more than 20 million acres, offer conservation practices and programs to farmers, developers, and landowners, and provide watershed restoration and protection plans for Ohio's streams, aquifers, and drinking water supplies.

The Problem

Since the 1990's, ODNR and the 88 county SWCDs have experienced a steady decrease in state funding. As a result, a significant staff reduction has led to a tremendous decrease in program assistance needed by the general public and local communities, a huge backlog of needed maintenance to parks, trails, facilities, and other health/safety issues.

While the decline has impacted all ODNR divisions, here are some of the greatest needs: State Parks have lost nearly half (45%) of their staff. In addition, there exists more than \$550 million worth of needed infrastructure and facility repair in the parks. Half of all requests for conservation practices to the SWCDs go unmet each year, and 40 state-endorsed watershed action plans remain largely unimplemented, impeding achievement of water quality, flood protection, and other goals. Ohio's Nature Preserve system is facing a 100% GRF funding cut on July 1, which jeopardizes the preservation of many of Ohio's remaining prairies, old growth forests, bogs, fens, and other rare natural features and geologic formations. Forest management has experienced over a 55% staff reduction leaving only one service forester for every 16,000 woodland owners, threatening forest health and dramatically reducing landowner assistance.

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Solution

Ohio's natural resources positively impact Ohio's economy and every Ohioan's quality of living through the development of food, fiber and energy, natural resource conservation, health and recreation opportunities, job creation, travel and tourism, and so much more.

It is imperative that a sound financial solution be developed to provide a permanent, dedicated source of funding to support the ODNR's mission and Ohio's SWCDs. In recent years, the Ohio Natural Resources Stakeholders Group and the Park Study Committee have offered suggestions to address this issue. Something must be done before our natural attractions degrade, which will in turn cause further economic and environmental challenges.

The League of Ohio Sportsmen has drafted a proposal to raise the state sales tax by one-quarter of a percent (0.25%) to fund natural resource conservation and state historic preservation, as well as provide a source of funding for county sheriffs and local governments, as follows:

A one-quarter of a percent increase in the state sales tax would generate approximately \$330 million per year. The revenue would be applied, as follows:

Ohio Department of Natural Resources	\$248 million
Ohio Historical Society	\$27 million
County Sheriffs	\$27 million
Local Government Fund	\$27 million

Establishing a dedicated revenue source such as this would assure adequate and dependable funding for natural resource conservation and state historic sites and would provide a solid source of revenue for county sheriffs and local governments. It also would "free up" more than \$ 130 million each year in General Revenue Funds, which could be applied to education, Medicare, prisons, etc.

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