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Press Statement

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Reaction of Ohio Environmental Council Deputy Director Jack Shaner to possible budget scenarios released today by the Strickland Administration to plug a projected \$7.3 billion deficit with a 25% across-the-board, agency-by-agency state budget cut:

“The public wants to enjoy our state lands and water resources, not see them closed or degraded.

“This is a wake up call for anyone who depends on soil and water and outdoor recreation--and that’s everyone.

“If a coal mine operator fouls the land, but there is no state inspector there to catch him, will the violation get recorded and prosecuted? That may no longer be a rhetorical question, in Ohio.

“The environment and natural resources accounts for less than 1% of state budget dollars, but a 25% budget cut could have profound impacts on natural resource protection.

Comment on how the budget scenarios could affect the \$1.6 million unfunded mandate included in the Coal Bill (Ohio Senate Bill 386), passed yesterday by the Ohio Senate:

“Today’s budget scenarios should be the death knell for the clinker that coal lobbyists are peddling in the lame duck legislature.

“The coal bill includes a \$1.6 million unfunded mandate to move Ohio EPA’s water permitting program for coal mining to the Ohio DNR, according to the legislature’s own fiscal analysis. Meanwhile, the Strickland Administration identifies this possible scenario for coal mining oversight: ‘Coal regulatory program would be effected (slower permit issues) and less environmental controls.’ (See below)

“Now is not the time to fold the tent on regulating the mining industry. The Ohio EPA--which is independent of the General Revenue Fund--is all caught up on water permits for mining. Meanwhile, the ODNR admits that it is struggling to keep up with mining permits. How can it be efficient to put ODNR in charge of water permits, as the coal lobbyists claim?

“A vote for the coal bill is a vote to raise taxes-period.”

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Source: LSC Fiscal Note for Senate Bill 386, which states: “The Division of Mineral Resources Management is likely to incur increased administrative costs of up to \$1.6 million from (1) GRF line item 744321, Division of Mineral Resources Management, and (2) the Coal Mining Administration and Reclamation Reserve Fund to administer the three permit programs being transferred under the bill for coal mining and reclamation activities.” <http://www.lbo.state.oh.us/fiscal/fiscalnotes/127ga/SBo386SR.htm>

The Strickland Administration today released a document that projected what a 25% across-the-board, agency-by-agency budget cut would look like for Ohio for the next two-year state operating budget. Excerpted below is the section regarding the Ohio DNR.

Ohio Department of Natural Resources

The following would represent a 75% reduction request:

A. Parks GRF would drop to levels where there would need to be mothballing or closure of strategic chosen facilities.

B. State Forests (smaller) would be transferred to DOW for operation and upkeep.

C. Division of Water would not be able to provide match for federal grant for Flood Plain Management Program.

D. Soil and Water would not be able to provide match for first 6 months of the biennium.

E. Oil and Gas and Coal regulatory would not have enough operating budget for first 3 months of biennium

F. Soil and Water would have no match for districts. CREP program would be eliminated.

G. Oil and Gas will not have funds to meet regulatory obligation. Life health and safety.

H. Coal regulatory program would be effected (slower permit issues) and less environmental controls.

I. Dam Safety minimum inspections would be able to be done. Move to 10 year inspection cycle.

J. Parks would possibly need to merged with a dedicated funded division.

K. DNAP would be merged to another dedicated funded division.

Source: http://www.dispatch.com/wwwexportcontent/sites/dispatch/local_news/stories/2008/12/11/cut_by_25_percent.pdf