This article appeared in The Ohio Woodland Journal, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Summer 2011), the official publication of the Ohio Tree Farm System. Call 888. 388. 7337 for subscriptions.

Perspective

by Robert Boyles, Chief, ODNR Division of Forestry

The "Budget" is the word of the times, or maybe it is better put – the lack of! As July 1 rapidly approaches, we all are sitting on pins and needles awaiting our piece of the pie. The Governor's proposed budget left the Division of Forestry 7.6% less in General Revenue Funds (GRF). At the time of this writing while the proposed budget is still in the legislative process, the House removed an additional $130,000 from our GRF account. This appears to reflect the downward trend most GRF-dependent agencies are experiencing.

On top of these reductions, there is almost an equal amount that will be lost in timber revenue. In the past two years, the division charged an average of 47% of our timber revenue in costs. Starting this year we will be charging a maximum of 15% to the cost.

What this adds up to is about a one million dollar reduction for the coming year. However, nothing is final until the Governor signs the budget bill into law.

Just like other organizations in tough financial times, the Division of Forestry is adjusting plans and strategies, but our direction and mission remain the same – we will continue to manage and protect Ohio's state forests in a sustainable manner, and will promote proper management techniques for Ohio's private and urban forest lands.

One of the division's goals over the next few years is to phase-in an increase in the amount of timber that will be harvested on state forests. As always, these harvests will be based on good science that helps us to accomplish land management goals, including improving the health and vigor of the forests while ensuring that the rate of harvest remains well below the rate of growth. Each sale has to fit our mission and long-range desired future condition, and we must have adequate human resources to perform the work. All sales will be placed in the forest work plans and will be presented to the public for input. If our sales do not meet these criteria we will not sell the timber.

Our plan is to increase our harvest to no more than 40% of our annual growth. Our current ten-year average is roughly 17% of what we grow or around 7.5 million board feet per year on the 165,000 acres that we have available for management. We currently are growing 39,988,754 board feet per year.

In addition to accomplishing land management goals, sustainable harvesting has economic benefits as well. When the state sells timber, the county and township in the area where the state forest exists each receives 16.25% and the local school system receives 32.5% of the revenue. During times when local governments are receiving GRF cuts, this money will be important to these entities. The state does not pay property taxes, so this is a very important revenue stream for the local schools and governments. There are also many beneficial spin-offs. For instance, sustainable harvesting supports logging company jobs. The logging companies purchase equipment, fuel, parts and supplies locally. Logs will be trucked to the mill using trucking companies. The logs will support mill jobs to produce the lumber. Most lumber will be exported, supporting the trucking and shipping businesses. Some of the lumber will be used to support domestic secondary manufacturing jobs. The shipping industry will benefit from the transport of products back to the consumer, who will eventfully enjoy the end product. All this is just a small aspect of what we can do to keep Ohio's economy rebounding.

As we move forward with this goal, it will not be without opposition from some, but there will be support by others. However, the Division of Forestry feels this is the right thing to do for the resource and the economy.