

# DIAMOND HILL

INVESTED IN THE LONG RUN

## Short Duration Securitized Bond Fund

As of 31 March 2022

### Market Commentary

Just when it felt as though the world was starting to get back to some semblance of normalcy with regards to the battle against COVID, the world took a spin for the surreal. The Federal Reserve had an eventful Q1 with the end of tapering, the first interest rate hike since late 2018, which marks the beginning of a new tightening cycle, and the potential augmentation of tightening through more aggressive balance sheet reduction on the near horizon.

Tragically, we have been witnesses to the first land war in central Europe since World War II as Russian forces invaded Ukraine. While the human toll on both sides cannot be ignored, the implications for the global financial markets and economy need to be considered as well. Ukraine has long been considered the breadbasket of Europe, and the potential delay or complete omission of the spring planting season will have far reaching ramifications on the rest of the world.

While most of the world is slowly opening up, rising COVID cases and a zero-tolerance policy in China will have significant ramifications on a fragile and slowly recovering global supply chain. Inflation, one of the victims of that supply chain congestion, continues to rear its ugly head as it has shed the mantle of transitory and appears to be here for a while.

In Q1, the Fed met on two occasions, with the second meeting more relevant than the first. While the acceleration of tapering was announced at the January meeting, setting up a completion date in March, which is well ahead of the previous end target month of June, the Fed meeting in March was key. It was at the March 16 meeting that the Fed took the first step in the next tightening cycle, increasing the fed funds rate by 25 basis points (bps) to a range of 0.25% to 0.50%. This somewhat standard rate hike did not

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come without drama as members of the Fed referenced the potential for a 50 bps rate hike at the March meeting, citing the significant and ongoing rise of inflation. To paraphrase Jim Nance's classic reference to the upcoming Masters Tournament, this could be a tightening cycle "unlike any other."

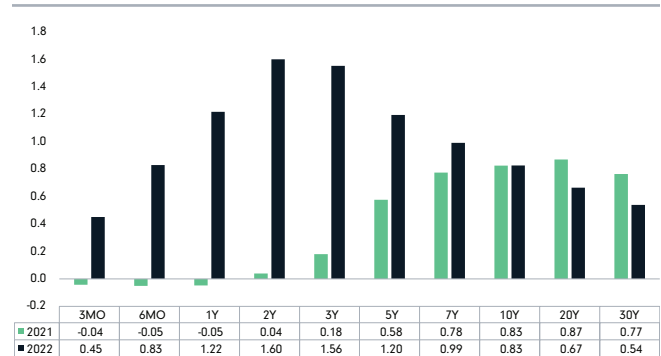
There has been a tightening cycle during which the Fed was passively reducing its balance sheet, but there has not been a cycle where the Fed was aggressively reducing its balance sheet. Recall that during the tightening cycle that ran from 2015-2018, when the Fed raised the fed funds rate nine times (25 bps each time), the Fed began balance sheet normalization in October 2017, allowing \$6 billion in Treasuries and \$4 billion in mortgage-backed securities (MBS) to mature each month and not be replaced. The caps would increase each quarter until they reached \$30 billion in Treasuries and \$20 billion in MBS, per month. Quantitative tightening, as the process came to be called, continued until March 2019 when the Fed announced that the monthly cap for Treasuries would be reduced from \$30 billion per month to \$15 billion per month, thus slowing the reduction of the Fed's balance sheet.

As we embark on the latest tightening cycle, various members of the Fed are pushing for more aggressive front end rate movements as well as an active approach to balance sheet normalization. Though the past two cycles have focused on 25 bps increases per meeting (2015-2018 had nine 25 bps hikes, 2004-2006 had 17 hikes of 25 bps each), one only needs to look at the 1994-1995 cycle for precedent on hikes above and beyond 25 bps. During that cycle, which saw the fed funds rate climb from 3.00% to 6.00%, the Fed used three 25 bps rate hikes in the beginning, followed by two 50 bps moves, a 75 bps increase in November 1994 and a final increase of 50 bps. So, with a potentially more aggressive Fed on the rates side and the balance sheet side, could we see something that is a mix between the 1994 cycle and the 2004 cycle? Truly, a cycle unlike any other.

Between the geopolitical uncertainty and the outlook for the Fed’s potential actions, Treasury yields were on a consistent path higher throughout the quarter. Whereas the movement in Q1 2021 was focused on the longer end of the curve as the mix of accelerated vaccine distribution, expectations for an end to quarantines, two stimulus packages and a re-opening of the national economy caused markets to rotate in anticipation of a juggernaut economy. That is evidenced by the strong move higher in yields on the longer end of the curve in Q1 2021, as illustrated in Exhibit 1. The shorter end of the curve remained anchored as the Fed remained steadfast in its goal of maintaining lower rates on the short end of the curve. All of that began to change in Q4 2021 and carried over into Q1 2022.

During Q1 2022, the longer end of the curve moved in a similar fashion to Q1 2021, with the 10-year Treasury matching the increase almost exactly. The major shift was on the shorter end of the curve as the Fed stepped up rhetoric around rate hikes and the market began to anticipate the impending tightening cycle. The 160 bps move higher in the 2-year Treasury represents the third largest quarterly move since Q2 1984 (167 bps) and Q3 1981 (203 bps). The 160 bps represents an increase of 219% during the quarter, by far the highest quarterly percentage increase ever. The meteoric rise of the yield on the 2-year Treasury reflects the market expectations for an additional 2.25% in FOMC rate hikes by year end, delivered potentially through some combination of 25 bps and 50 bps hikes (or maybe something else?).

**Exhibit 1—Yield Change During First Three Months of the Year (%)**



Source: Bloomberg.

For the first time since World War II, central Europe has been engulfed in conflict as Russian forces invaded Ukraine in late February. The reactions were nearly instant – condemnations from across the globe, a slew of economic sanctions levied upon the Russian economy and various oligarchs, and energy prices soaring on supply uncertainty. Treasury yields jumped lower with a traditional flight to quality reaction from the market, but it was short lived as the markets and the world quickly adjusted to an ongoing conflict in Europe.

Not only was the impact felt in the energy markets with soaring oil prices, commodities such as corn, soybeans, wheat, barley and vegetable oils moved sharply higher. Ukraine accounts for roughly 10% of global wheat exports, 15% of global corn exports, 15% of global barley exports and 50% of global sunflower oil exports—and there is a near certainty that the spring planting season may not end up taking place. Continuing increases in these key inputs to food prices will add to the angst of higher energy prices and could result in inflation pushing even higher than the year-over-year 7.9% reported in February. Add in a surging spread of bird flu, resulting in the destruction of nearly 15 million egg producing chickens, and the usual trip to the grocery store could become more and more expensive.

## Portfolio Performance & Positioning

It is important to note our portfolio works to provide yield for investors while focusing on the shorter end of fixed income markets. We believe there are opportunities to add incremental yield over the benchmark by investing in structured products across the quality spectrum. The portfolio strives to maintain an average credit quality rating of A/BBB while taking advantage of mispriced opportunities in unrated securities and an allocation to below investment grade securities.

As of 31 March, the portfolio had a yield-to-worst (YTW) of 4.37% with an effective duration of 1.48 years, compared to a YTW of 2.78% and effective duration of 1.49 years at the end of 2021. The increase in yield can be attributed to the increase in yields along the shorter end of the yield curve as well as the increased allocation to both Treasury and corporate debt. While increasing yields along the short end of the curve, as well as spread widening, provides additional opportunities for increased yield, the impact of rising rates for any product with duration will result in negative performance. The securitized sector remains the largest allocation in the portfolio and was the strongest contributor to performance of the portfolio over the benchmark. While the overall securitized sector was negative for the first quarter, the carry from the sector helped mitigate some of the impact from rising rates.

Within the securitized sector, non-agency commercial mortgages and small business asset-backed securities (ABS) delivered the strongest performance followed by credit card ABS. Also, within ABS, auto loans and unsecured consumer deals held up relatively well during Q1.

We continue to search for opportunities in the marketplace while maintaining an attractive yield relative to the benchmark.

Period and Annualized Total Returns (%)	Since Inception (5 Jul 2016)	5Y	3Y	1Y	YTD	1Q22	Expense Ratio (%)
Class I (DHEIX)	3.00	2.95	2.32	-0.95	-2.12	-2.12	0.54
Bloomberg US 1-3 Yr. Gov./Credit Index	1.09	1.26	1.02	-2.91	-2.49	-2.49	—

Must be preceded or accompanied by a [prospectus](#). The 30-day Yield represents net investment income earned by the fund over the previous 30-day period, expressed as an annual percentage rate based on the Fund's share price at the end of the 30-day period. The 30-day SEC Yield for the Short Duration Securitized Bond Fund (CI I) is 3.08%.

**Risk disclosure:** In general, when interest rates rise, fixed income values fall. Lower quality/high yield securities involve greater default risk or price changes than bonds with higher credit ratings. Mortgage- and asset-backed securities are influenced by factors affecting the housing market and the assets underlying such securities. The securities may decline in value, face valuation difficulties and become more volatile and/or illiquid. They are also subject to prepayment risk, which occurs when mortgage holders refinance or repay loans sooner than expected, creating an early return of principal to loan holders.

The views expressed are those of the author as of 31 Mar 2022 and are subject to change without notice. These opinions are not intended to be a forecast of future events, a guarantee of future results or investment advice. Investing involves risk, including the possible loss of principal.

**Past performance is not indicative of future results. Investment returns and principal values will fluctuate so that an investor's shares, when redeemed, may be worth more or less than their original cost. The Fund's current performance may be lower or higher than the performance quoted. For current to most recent month-end performance, visit [diamond-hill.com](#).**

Performance assumes reinvestment of all distributions. Returns for periods less than one year are not annualized.

Fund holdings subject to change without notice.

The Bloomberg US 1-3 Year Government/Credit Index measures the performance of investment grade government and corporate bonds with maturities of one to three years. The index is unmanaged, includes net reinvested dividends, does not reflect fees or expenses (which would lower the return) and is not available for direct investment.

Index data source: Bloomberg Index Services Limited. See [diamond-hill.com/disclosures](#) for a full copy of the disclaimer.

Analytics provided by The Yield Book® Software.

**Carefully consider the Fund's investment objectives, risks and expenses. This and other important information are contained in the Fund's prospectus and summary prospectus, which are available at [diamond-hill.com](#) or calling 888.226.5595. Read carefully before investing. The Diamond Hill Funds are distributed by Foreside Financial Services, LLC (Member FINRA). Diamond Hill Capital Management, Inc., a registered investment adviser, serves as Investment Adviser to the Diamond Hill Funds and is paid a fee for its services. Not FDIC insured | No bank guarantee | May lose value**

The Bloomberg Treasury Bond Index measures US dollar-denominated, fixed-rate, nominal debt issued by the US Treasury.