



**Proponent Testimony of National Wildlife Federation
HB 7 - H2Ohio Endowment Trust Fund
Presented to the House Finance Committee**

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Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Scherer, Ranking Member Cera, and Members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before this committee today on HB 7. My name is Gail Hesse and I am the Great Lakes Water Program Director for the National Wildlife Federation (NWF), America's largest conservation organization. Prior to joining NWF, I spent a career with the State of Ohio working towards clean water. During my tenure with Ohio EPA and as director of the Ohio Lake Erie Commission, I chaired the Ohio Lake Erie Phosphorus Task Force, served on the binational work group that developed the phosphorus reduction targets for Lake Erie and administered programs that sought strategic solutions to our complex water quality issues in Ohio. I've continued this work with NWF and served as a coauthor on the science paper "Achieving Phosphorus Targets for Lake Erie" that identifies the obstacles we are facing in making progress as well as solutions for moving forward. A copy of this paper was provided to this committee at a previous hearing.

I am well familiar with the issues we have and the heavy lifting it will take to deliver solutions at a scale that will have lasting impact. Restoration and protection of our water resources is not a "one and done" enterprise. Rather, we need to make significant, ongoing investments and I believe HB 7 is a critical step towards that end. I believe its singular focus on water quality is an acknowledgement that our streams, rivers and lakes are in trouble. We must be prepared to address not only the challenges of today, but also new and emerging issues into the future.

I understand there are details of funding sources and limits yet to be addressed in HB 7 and I look forward to engaging in future deliberations as this moves forward. Today, I am primarily interested in addressing how funding will be directed. Our primary water quality problems are from land run-off, also known as nonpoint source pollution which means we need to invest in land management practices at a scale significant enough to improve water quality. We also need to ensure we have measurable results for any funds spent. We all need to be accountable for the steps we are taking by linking public investments to measureable water quality outcomes. I believe HB 7 can do this if funding is directed in the following ways:

- Target funding to watersheds with critical water quality needs. Funding programs to date have been too modest to make any kind of change at a landscape scale. Interest in providing equitable access to program funds has led to a scatter-shot approach that may

have funded good projects, but have not left us with any demonstrable water quality improvement. Let's focus on one or more critical areas and demonstrate how it can be done.

- Invest in a watershed. Let's identify a target watershed, work with the agricultural community and others and provide the funding to bring that entire watershed into attainment of our water quality goals. That means ensuring **confidentiality** for individual landowners for information about their land management practices. I believe we can do that and at the same time aggregate that data so we can learn the scope and scale of implementation that's needed to bring about change. To date, we have not linked land management changes to water quality outcomes downstream. With a target watershed approach we can make those linkages and create an accountability framework that protects landowners, provides crucial information about implementation, delivers clean water and provides a road map for other watersheds in Ohio. By demonstrating and piloting this approach, we can build the tools we need to deliver effective, measureable results to other watersheds in the state.

Chairman Oelslager and Members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before this committee today on HB 7. I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.