



Proponent Testimony - Ohio House Bill 59 (Rep. Wiggam)
Nathan Johnson - Public Lands Director
March 6, 2018

Good afternoon, Chairman Wiggam, Vice Chairman Ginter, Ranking Member Kelly and members of the House State and Local Government Committee. My name is Nathan Johnson and I am the Public Lands Director for the Ohio Environmental Council (OEC) Action Fund. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on Ohio House Bill 59.

Chairman Wiggam, I thank you for your leadership in sponsoring and shepherding the effort to designate April as Ohio Native Plant Month. Recognition of our native plants is important for so many reasons.

Our native plants are at the very core of our heritage as Americans and Ohioans. The American white oak (*Quercus alba*) is a great example. At one time, nearly half of all trees standing in southeast Ohio were white oaks. This magnificent tree built the American naval fleet that helped secure our nation's independence. Some years later our oaken ships defeated the British right here in Ohio at the battle of Put-in-Bay. And, today, American white oak is the most important ingredient in bourbon – a uniquely American spirit.

The acorns of this mighty tree support many wildlife species – turkey, deer, bear, and grouse, to name a few. White oak also hosts more insect species than any other tree. Because of that, it probably supports more songbirds than any other tree, too.

The white oak is not alone. Blueberries, American hazelnuts, blue vervain, wild bergamot – these are just a few of our many natives. They are great for wildlife, great for people, and all are part of the original fabric of Ohio.

And, many native plants need our help. This includes the white oak, which is experiencing sharp declines in Ohio. To plant a native species – whether flower, shrub, or tree – is to provide for the future. The designation of April as Ohio Native Plant Month will honor our common natural heritage. May it also inspire the betterment of our state by and for many generations to come.

Chairman Wiggam, I thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 59. I am happy to answer any questions at this time.