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TESTIMONY IN FAVOR OF A DNAP division that includes the Scenic Rivers  
program, the Natural Areas program and H2Ohio initiative.  
Submitted by Hope Taft on April 9, 2019.

Dear Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I wish I were there to testify in person, but commitments to the Little Miami Scenic River keep me away.

I am very much in favor of combining the Scenic Rivers program, the Natural Areas and Preserves program and the Governor's new and much needed H2Ohio initiative into one stand-alone division.

As you know as First Lady, I spearheaded the effort to create the Heritage Garden that focuses on the botanical heritage of Ohio. It has over 600 native species of which about 60 are state or federally listed as threatened or endangered. Some people say that in the not too distant future, the Heritage Garden might be the only place to see some of these plants.

I sincerely hope this is never a reality, and want to do whatever I can to encourage the protection and preservation of the current ODNR natural areas and preserves and even expand those holdings.

Since leaving Columbus, Bob and I have lived on the banks of the Little Miami River and as I watch our property dissolve into the high water and is wash away as sediment, I understand full well the power of water and the effect of development on it. I also watch as this river becomes the flyway and byway of wildlife and is itself a long narrow natural area and preserve. More rivers in Ohio should have this designation so these special places can be preserved to help protect the areas flora and fauna need to survive.

Water and the land that surrounds it, is the most valuable resource Ohio has for its future. We need to take care of both. We have come to the point that we need to take seriously our responsibility to protect our water's quantity and quality. Both are dependent on how well we take care of the land that drains or seeps into our surface and ground water.

We can only live 3 days without water so we need to do all that is possible to keep it clean and drinkable. We also need to find ways to protect our aquifers so their waters are not polluted nor shipped away.

This quote by Thomas Lovejoy, ‘the Godfather of Biodiversity’, explains why rivers and natural areas should be in one division as proposed in the Governor’s Budget better than I.

“Because the geographical ranges of plant and animal species will shift, we will need to find ways to increase natural connectivity within landscapes.... Riparian vegetation [along rivers] also can help restore natural connectivity. For many species, it can provide natural cover and serve as corridors between habitats that can no longer support them and locations that will be favorable under a new climatic regime. We should take advantage of every opportunity to restore these sorts of natural connections.”

It is time we focused our efforts on our natural environments and worked with nature instead of trying to subdue it. This Budget gives you the perfect opportunity to begin to align the state’s priorities with the best interests of its future in mind. .. not only the environment’s future, but people of Ohio’s future, since both are intertwined in more ways than we care to admit.

The present is important, but what you do now will have a lasting impact on the place all generations to come will call home.

“The future of our natural parks [areas] will be the future of us. The two are bound intrinsically, and not because our survival as a society depends on our most beloved natural spaces, but because our survival as a species is contingent on the circumstances that enable those places to thrive.” Rahawa Haile, writer and Appalachian Trail thru-hiker 2016.

Thank you for considering your responsibility to leave Ohio in better condition than it is now so our great grandchildren will be able to derive benefits from nature in its real form – benefits for their economy, their health, and their enjoyment.

Please include this new arrangement to preserve natural areas and rivers and protection of our waters in the Budget.

Thank you for letting me shares a few thoughts with you today.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Hugu Toft". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.