



**Proponent Testimony of National Wildlife Federation
SB 2 - H2Ohio Endowment Trust Fund
Presented to the House Energy and Natural Resources Committee**

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Chairman Vitale, Vice Chair Kick, Ranking Member Denson, and Members of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today on SB 2. 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.

SB 2 is one in a constellation of new efforts, both in place and proposed, to address water quality issues in Ohio. That list includes H2Ohio, HB 7 and the Ohio Ag Conservation Initiative. I stop short of calling these stars as we have yet to see how brightly they will shine into the future. But collectively, these efforts represent critical steps forward in unique ways that hold significant promise. We know that piecemeal efforts are not all that effective, but SB 2 can help to bring these efforts together to work in tandem to achieve our water quality goals.

I am well familiar with the importance of watershed planning in delivering solutions at a scale that will have lasting impact. While at Ohio EPA I managed watershed management staff and we wrote *A Guide to Watershed Planning in Ohio* to assist watershed coordinators and participated in the review of these plans for joint endorsement by Ohio EPA and ODNR. Watershed plans at that time were designed to meet Ohio's water quality standards and namely, the biological criteria for Ohio streams. Ohio does not however, have nutrient standards or targets for streams in the way that we have definitive targets for Lake Erie. I believe SB 2 could be strengthened by directing the development of nutrient targets for the hydrologic regions proposed in the bill. Ideally, development of nutrient targets would be aligned with the major river basins in the *Nutrient Mass Balance Study for Ohio's Major Rivers*. This study is completed every two years by Ohio EPA as required by statute. However, the geographic areas of that study are defined, and limited, by available water quality stations capable of providing nutrient loading data. Optimally, the framework for watershed management as defined in SB 2

should drive the hydrologic areas for the Nutrient Mass Balance report. Let's make these pieces work together.

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. Funding programs to date have been too modest to make any kind of change at a landscape scale. We need to ensure we have measurable results for any funds spent and be accountable for linking public investments to measureable water quality outcomes. I believe SB 2 can play a role by directing the following:

- Ensure **confidentiality** for data collected about farm conservation practices. We have been working with the sponsors of the bill about an amendment to SB 2 to ensure that information collected about individual farm conservation practices not be considered a public record. We need to remove any potential obstacles for farmer participation in programs seeking to aggregate information about baselines and trends of the adoption of conservation practices, information that is critical to understanding our progress towards water quality improvements.
- Target watersheds with critical, documented water quality needs. Historically, 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.
- Once the key watersheds have been selected for watershed planning, let's focus further and make a concerted investment in a *single* pilot watershed and provide the resources necessary to bring that entire watershed into attainment with water quality goals. To date, we have not linked land management changes to water quality outcomes downstream. Working with SWCDs, Crop Consultants, and Nutrient Service Providers, let's provide the diagnostic tools, technical assistance and cost share funding for agricultural practices for each field within the geographic focus area.
- And then, take it a step further and link it with the farmer certification program that is in development as a joint partnership with H2Ohio and the Ohio Ag Conservation Initiative. The Ohio Ag Conservation Initiative is also undertaking a data assessment project to assess scale of conservation projects on the ground. SB 2 can play a role by directing ongoing assessments so that we can evaluate trends over time with water quality results downstream.

With a pilot watershed we can make those linkages and create an accountability framework that protects farmers, provides crucial information about implementation, delivers clean water and provides a road map for other watersheds in Ohio. The value of this approach will be to learn the scale of implementation of key practices across the watershed needed to improve water quality. We can utilize the results to identify the most effective tools and approaches that can be applied to other watersheds in Ohio. SB 2 can build the tools and the road map we need to deliver effective, measureable results to other watersheds in the state. And perhaps, with SB 2, H2Ohio, HB 7 and the Ohio Ag Conservation Initiative all working in tandem, we can have a constellation of stars.

Chairman Vitale and Members of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before this committee today on SB 2. I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.