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Ohio Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
Interested Party Testimony
Senate Bill 2

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Good afternoon Chairman Hoagland, Vice Chair Schaffer, Ranking Member O'Brien and members of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee. I am Tracy Freeman, Director of Government Relations for The Nature Conservancy in Ohio. I am very pleased to have this opportunity to provide proponent testimony for Senate Bill 2 which creates a statewide watershed planning and management program under the administration of the Director of Agriculture.

The Nature Conservancy is a global organization with chapters in all 50 states and projects in over 70 countries. We are a non-partisan, science-based organization that seeks to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. We work collaboratively with businesses, farmers, sportsmen groups, government and local communities to develop pragmatic solutions to conservation challenges, including land conservation, water quality, and air pollution. More than 65,000 Ohioans are Nature Conservancy supporters and we own and manage over 20,000 acres of nature preserves throughout the state. We invite any of you to visit our open preserves and enjoy the unique places that make Ohio a great place to live, work and play. We also would like to invite you to view our edge-of-field demonstration projects in northwest Ohio and see first-hand how conservation and agriculture are working together to address the problems in the western Lake Erie basin.

We thank Senators' Peterson and Dolan for their interest and commitment to addressing water quality issues in Ohio and for drafting Senate Bill 2. While there are watershed planning efforts underway now throughout the state, Senate Bill 2 sets the groundwork for a consistent and coordinated approach to these efforts. The bill proposes to assist soil and water conservation districts in identifying areas facing water quality challenges related to phosphorus and nitrogen nutrient discharges and to help develop 9-element plans. These plans are called 9-element because they have 9 components which are kind of the "soup to nuts" for identifying and addressing non-point source water quality challenges. Besides the obvious benefits of undertaking this effort, having well-developed element plans will assist partners in obtaining state and federal funding to implement nutrient reduction strategies across the state and is a mechanism recognized and approved by both our state and federal EPA. The 9-element process compiles existing data and reports from watersheds, assembles stakeholders, and identifies specific implementable projects that can address impairments identified in those reports. Undertaking this planning process will be beneficial to direct funding that is available through Clean Lake 2020, H2Ohio and any other sources of dollars and will help track outcomes toward our state water quality goals.

We recognize Senate Bill 2 is but one component of a complex solution for the problems facing our waters. It is a tool in the tool box to achieving statewide consistency in watershed planning. We have additional suggestions that provide more flexibility in the program design and utilize public/private partnerships to complete watershed planning, and ideas for larger tools that would build on SB 2's

framework. We have provided those to the sponsors and to other stakeholders and look forward to future discussions on those ideas, whether in this legislation or as part of future efforts.

Addressing the water quality challenges in Ohio is a complex multi-faceted, multi-agency, multi-stakeholder issue - but one we must not be afraid to take on. Our citizens, and our lakes, rivers and streams are counting on us to find the proper way to construct this solution. The commitment of the Senate, the House of Representatives and the Governor to facing our challenges and proposing tangible, outcome-driven solutions is very much needed and appreciated by our organization. We share that commitment and are ready to do the hard work it will take to get us there. Thank you for your time and I will be glad to answer any questions the committee may have.