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**Proponent Testimony of National Wildlife Federation**

**SB 2 - H2Ohio Endowment Trust Fund**

**Presented to the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee**

Gail Hesse, National Wildlife Federation

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Chairman Hoagland, Vice Chair Schaffer, Ranking Member O’Brien, and Members of the Agriculture 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. 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 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 clear 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 hydrologic framework of the major river basins in the *Nutrient Mass Balance Study for Ohio’s Major Rivers* (this study iscompleted every two years by Ohio EPA as required by statute)*.*I believe the focus of SB 2 on watersheds is an acknowledgement that our streams, rivers and lakes are in trouble.

I understand there are details of funding sources and limits yet to be addressed in SB 2 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. Funding programs to date have been too modest to make any kind of change at a landscape scale. We also need to ensure we have measurable results for any funds spent. We all need to be accountable for linking public investments to measureable water quality outcomes. I believe SB 2 can do this if funding is directed in the following ways:

* Target funding to watersheds with critical water quality needs. While 7 hydrologic regions are identified in the bill, I recommend funding be directed towards those watersheds with the greatest degree of documented nutrient impacts. 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 watershed and provide the funding 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. The National Wildlife Federation and the Lake Erie Foundation are in agreement that we should invest in a **demonstration pilot program** for that very purpose. Working with SWCD, 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 yet and collect field level georeferenced data and develop a secure, confidential database for the following purpose:
  + Aggregation of land management practice data and link that information with water quality monitoring downstream.

With a demonstration pilot watershed 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. 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. A key premise will be to ensure **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. By demonstrating and piloting this approach, we can build the tools and the road map we need to deliver effective, measureable results to other watersheds in the state.

Chairman Hoagland and Members of the Agriculture 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.