



Ohio Environmental Council

[Action Fund]

May 1, 2024

Proponent Testimony - SB 156 House Energy and Natural Resources Committee

Chair Kick, Vice-Chair Lear, Ranking Member Rogers and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 156 (SB 156). My name is Emily Kelly, I serve as the Agriculture and Water Coordinator for the Ohio Environmental Council Action Fund (OEC AF). SB 156 provides updates to Ohio law governing the designation of wild, scenic, and recreational rivers.

The OEC AF supports the passage of this legislation to clarify the Scenic Rivers Program in Ohio law and to transfer the authority to administer the program to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) Division of Natural Areas and Preserves (DNAP). DNAP has a history of running this program, as well as the expertise and staff resources to administer the program.

SB156 will support the success of Ohio's wild and scenic rivers program by clarifying DNAP's authority over the program and by addressing the concerns of some property owners with land adjacent to these protected waterways. The legislation's new definition for "Scenic River Lands" clarifies that the program's activities are conducted on property owned and managed by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources.

The legislation will also expand the types of waterways that are subject to designation as a wild, scenic or recreational river to include headwaters. Headwaters are the source of streams or rivers and are some of the most critical waterways in need of protection due to their role and ability to trap floodwaters, recharge groundwater supplies, remove pollution, provide fish and wildlife habitat, and sustain the health of downstream rivers, lakes and bays.

The Scenic Rivers Program currently has 15 designated Wild, Scenic and/or Recreational rivers. Three of these are also designated as National Scenic Rivers. These 830 miles of protected river are valuable to protect for their ecological and recreational benefits and they attract visitors that provide economic benefits to Ohio. \$10.1 million per year of recreational value can be attributed to the Little Miami River designation alone.

The OEC Action Fund is a longtime supporter of the state's Scenic Rivers Program. In recent years, we have supported a summer Scenic Rivers Intern to foster the development of professionals into river protection and restoration work. **The OEC Action Fund urges you to pass SB 156 to support the designation and protection of scenic, wild, and recreational rivers.** This bill will provide valuable guidance for the Scenic Rivers Program that guarantees our natural resources will be protected for the use of future generations. Thank you again for the time to testify in support of SB 156 today. I'd be happy to answer any questions that you might have.

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