

House Energy and Natural Resources

Written Proponent Testimony: Senate Bill 156 Designation of Wild, Scenic, and Recreational Rivers

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this written testimony as a proponent of SB 156, which will improve the process of designating Ohio's waterways as wild, scenic, and recreational rivers.

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, governments, and local communities to develop pragmatic solutions to conservation challenges, including land conservation, water quality, and climate change. More than 65,000 Ohioans are Nature Conservancy supporters, and we own and manage over 20,000 acres of nature preserves throughout the state.

The Nature Conservancy supports the passage of SB 156 as it would facilitate the appropriate and necessary designation of protected waters in Ohio and clarify existing language about scenic river designation and management. As a conservation organization, The Nature Conservancy's core mission is to protect the lands and waters on which all life depends. We collaborate with federal, state, and private partners to maximize conserving land for people and nature and improving water quality. The wild, scenic, and recreational water designations play a crucial role in the current and future protection efforts surrounding water quality, recreation, and freshwater biodiversity in Ohio.

By addressing issues that have hampered efforts to designate new rivers, SB 156 helps recognize and maintain critical waterways that The Nature Conservancy agrees are instrumental to necessary conservation efforts in this state. The changes in SB 156 do not impact the community's ability to voice their support or opposition to river designation. Indeed, the bill clarifies that private property owners surrounding these protected rivers do not lose any control over their property with designation, easing concerns of neighbors.

Currently, The Nature Conservancy works with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources on a number of these designated waterways, including the Grand, Maumee, Sandusky, Upper Cuyahoga, and Olentangy Rivers and the Big and

Little Darby Creeks. Scenic Rivers in Ohio represent the highest quality tributaries to Lake Erie and the Ohio River. Scientists at The Nature Conservancy's Center for Resilient Conservation Science have also identified many of Ohio's Scenic Rivers as a highly resilient, connected, and biologically diverse areas that will allow terrestrial and freshwater species to move in our changing climate. TNC continues to work with various partners across state boundaries to protect, restore and connect these ecosystems to create a large-scale climate resilient network of public and private conservation lands that provide high quality connected habitat and recreational opportunities. Ohio's scenic rivers are a critical component of this network.

In addition to their regulatory role, scenic rivers also provide valuable educational opportunities to community members regarding water quality and stream biota. A designation as wild, scenic, or recreational acknowledges and elevates the appreciation of and importance to the communities it flows through. This educational aspect is crucial in raising awareness and fostering a sense of responsibility towards our natural resources among the public.

The Nature Conservancy urges you to pass SB 156 to support the designation and protection of scenic, wild, and recreational rivers. This bill will ensure continued protection and conservation of our valuable natural resources for the benefit of current and future generations.

Thank you for your consideration of this legislation. Please reach out if you have any questions.

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The Nature Conservancy