

Chairman Dolan and members of the Finance Committee, my name is Katryn Renard and I represent Columbus Audubon and its Service in the Preserves program. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources' Division of Natural Areas and Preserves (commonly called DNAP). Specifically, I ask that you please restore the General Revenue Funding for the Natural Areas Program that was submitted in Governor DeWine's proposed operating budget but removed in the house version of HB33.

When Americans think of the most beautiful places in the United States, Ohio is generally not near the top of the list. I used to agree with that. But now I am familiar with our network of State Nature Preserves. It has changed my perspective. I am proud to live in Ohio and I boast of its beauty to both out-of-staters and to my fellow Ohioans.

Let me back up a moment and explain my association with DNAP. As I mentioned, I am representing Columbus Audubon today. Columbus Audubon is one of the largest chapters of the National Audubon Society and has over 3000 members. It is one of the most active chapters in the country with a variety of activities that are well attended by members and non-members alike. One of these activities, called Service in the Preserves, is a partnership between Columbus Audubon and DNAP. It is dedicated to the physical management of our Preserves. Remarkably, this partnership has existed for over four decades.

At first, the projects were mainly construction or trail building and could be done when time and budget permitted. Now, however, we must work tirelessly to prevent invasive species from encroaching and destroying our unique habitats. Invasive species multiply on their own time, not waiting for budget considerations. It is important that we fund proper care for our Preserves today.

Over the course of forty years, I have come to realize how wonderfully beautiful Ohio is. On the micro level we have stunning flowers. Consider the daisies at Lakeside Daisy Preserve or the trillium at Fowler Woods. Even the casual observer is brightened by them. On the macro level we have beautiful landscapes such as Daughmer Prairie Savannah and Old Woman Creek. We have all seen stunning photographs of our preserves that make us long to see such places in person.

Over the years, I have come to appreciate the importance of our State Nature Preserves. They are wild places that contain rare plants and habitats. We must study them to know how to protect them. They need to be around for future generations to study, to benefit from, and simply to admire.

But beyond their value as protectors of sensitive areas, they also have a direct impact on their visitors. People, myself included, go there to relax. It has been documented that simply being around nature contributes to mental and physical well-being. This is extremely important in today's world. A simple walk in a State Nature Preserve is restorative for me, for you, and for all Ohioans.

We have 143 State Nature Preserves in Ohio. Each of them is an Ohio gem. Let's take care of our State Nature Preserves. Please restore the General Revenue Funding for the Natural Areas Program.