

**To:** Chair Brian Stewart, Vice Chair Michael D. Dovilla, Ranking Member Bride Rose Sweeney, and Members of the House Finance Committee

**From:** Martin H. McAllister  
Friends of Scioto Brush Creek, Inc.

**Date:** March 11, 2025

**Re:** Proposed budget allotment for the Division of Natural Areas and Preserves General Revenue Fund (HB 96)

Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and Members of the House Finance Committee, on behalf of the Friends of Scioto Brush Creek, Inc., I am writing today to express my support for the proposed budget for the Division of Natural Areas and Preserves as presented in House Bill 96.

I have served the people of Ohio for over 42 years in the field of conservation, through public service as well as through non-profit land trusts. I have been retired from public service for over a decade, after having served the Department of Natural Resources for 27 years. In 1998 I helped found a non-profit watershed organization in Scioto County called The Friends of Scioto Brush Creek, Inc. The mission of this watershed group is to *maintain and improve the water quality of Scioto Brush Creek through education, awareness and involvement of local residents*. In many ways, the mission of our organization meshes very well with that of the Department of Natural Resources and the Division of Natural Areas and Preserves. By encouraging the wise use of our land and water resources, we can ensure their sustainability so that they continue to benefit us all.

Over the course of my career, I have had the privilege of visiting most, and managing many, of Ohio's finest parks and nature preserves. I have interacted with thousands of visitors on these public lands and one thing has always impressed me: the degree to which these nature preserves and scenic rivers are used by Ohioans in their pursuit of physical and mental health. The benefits of hiking to physical health are well established. But increasingly, medical professionals are noting that outdoor exercise also plays an important role in mental health by reducing anxiety and depression. In addition, hiking has been shown to help boost creative problem solving and may help slow the onset of cognitive impairment.

Ohio's State Scenic Rivers not only protect habitat for a wide variety of aquatic life, but also allow Ohioans to access these streams for paddling, fishing and general recreation. Speaking from experience, I can confidently say that quietly paddling a canoe along a scenic river or other quiet waterway can help reduce stress, lower blood pressure and increase upper body strength. In addition, our state scenic rivers help provide quality drinking water for many communities and, through attentive management, can help reduce problems downstream such as sedimentation and harmful algal blooms.

A dollar of GRF spent managing our nature preserves and scenic rivers brings far greater returns in habitat for Ohio's rarest species, public health, spectacular scenery, superb hiking trails and top-notch visitor services and programs. The women and men of this Division take great pride in their work and their dedication is clear. Whether it's building a wheelchair accessible boardwalk in a challenging wetland, or clearing public trails after a storm, they always have the visitor and the tax-payer in mind. This budget allows for continuation of current staffing levels and that is critically important.

I appreciate the hard work it takes to craft a balanced, workable budget for a large, diverse Department such as ODNR. I am sure this committee is used to hearing from constituents upset about cuts to one line item or another. However, the current budget with its small increases to cover mandatory pay raises, is very pragmatic and workable. Your thoughtful and balanced approach to this budget is to be commended and will allow the good work of the Division of Natural Areas and Preserves to continue at a level the public has come to expect and appreciate.

Thank you for your time, your service and for allowing me to submit this testimony in support of HB96.

Martin H. McAllister

The Friends of Scioto Brush Creek, Inc.