

To: Chair Jones, Vice Chair Blasdel, Ranking Member Rogers, and Members of the House Natural Resources Committee

From: Joe Faber, Ohio University

Date: March 4, 2025

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

Chair Jones, Vice Chair Blasdel, Ranking Member Rogers, and Members of the House Natural Resources Committee, my name is Joe Faber and 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 am a life-long resident of Ohio, having lived in Cleveland, Marietta, and points in-between. My outdoor experiences in Ohio have played a large part in shaping my personal values and continue to play a pivotal role in my professional life as a biologist.

I am especially connected to our rivers and streams, and the animals and plants that rely on them. In thirty-five years of ecology research on native fishes, I have had the opportunity to collect and study a large number of species, some of which are found nearly exclusively in our waters. As a professional educator I have also used these streams and rivers to provide students with a glimpse of native resources in their finest condition. It is such a pleasure to see students make connections between classroom lessons and real-world examples in the field, including up-close interactions with wild animals.

My research and teaching would not be possible without the protection of the habitats in which aquatic species live. Scientists know that the most effective means to conserve species is to identify and protect habitat, thereby protecting all of the interactions that sustain the ecosystem. Ohio faces the task of identifying and preserving natural areas in a state that ranks 10th in our Union by human density, per 2023 Census data. Our population density places a higher value on remaining natural areas. The Ohio Division of Natural Areas and Preserves Scenic Rivers Program has played an integral role in the process of identifying and maintaining rivers that are so important for my research and teaching.

I would be remiss if I did not also mention the role of personnel from the Division of Natural Areas and Preserves in my classroom. Each year a volunteer provides a guest lecture to my Conservation Biology class about the history and role of the Division in maintaining Ohio's natural heritage. Students enjoy hearing a different perspective and learning about the positive role that the Ohio government plays in their natural world.

In conclusion, funding for the Division of Natural Areas and Preserves is especially important to my livelihood and helps build an appreciation for nature in my students and their families. I am happy to see projected budget allotments that continue the important work of the Division.

Sincerely,
Joseph E. Faber, Ph.D.