

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

From: Cristie Collins

Date: 4 March 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, on behalf of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources' Division of Natural Areas and Preserves, 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 teacher at Logan High School and I am fortunate enough to live and work in the Hocking Hills region. I have traveled to all 50 states and to over half of the US National Parks and I am still amazed and in awe when I return home to the natural wonders that can be found in Ohio. From sandstone caves and waterfalls to old growth forests and beautiful coastlines, our state is home to some extraordinary parks and preserves.

Sheick Hollow is a 151 acre preserve in Hocking County that is managed by the Division of Natural Areas and Preserves (DNAP). I have partnered with staff from DNAP to host a field trip to Sheick Hollow the last several years. The students enrolled in the geology and environmental sciences courses at Logan High School come to the preserve in the winter months to survey the hemlock trees and look for signs of Hemlock Woolly Adelgid (HWA), an invasive insect that can kill hemlock trees.

This trip is always a highlight of the entire year for my students. Even though we are out in the woods for hours, hiking in cold, snowy, or muddy conditions in January or February, all of the students greatly enjoy the day. They get to work alongside professional foresters and other staff from DNAP to complete actual forestry work. Doing this real, hands-on work is something that cannot be replicated in the classroom. When I hear complaints about education, most of the grievances center around the fact that we are not teaching enough real-world skills in schools today. However, through the partnership with DNAP, I am able to give my students a chance to get outdoors and practice some of these real-life skills that are used by naturalists all around our state.

Even though all of my students live within a half hour's drive of the Hocking Hills State Parks, many of them have never been to the parks and most have never stepped foot onto a nature preserve before our trip to Sheick Hollow. However, after this trip, I always have students tell me about hikes they went on over the weekend or new parks they have found. Inspiring teenagers to spend more time outside and off of their phones is priceless.

Through the opportunity to work alongside the preserve staff, my students gain a better understanding of the effort needed to preserve the delicate ecology of these areas. A greater appreciation is instilled in these future caretakers of Ohio's natural resources - far beyond what is possible by reading a textbook or viewing a slideshow.

The work that I have done with DNAP is just a small snippet of the work that they complete. This work is invaluable to our state. As we all know, it is cheaper to prevent problems from happening in the first place than to attempt to fix problems after they happen. In our disposable society, we sometimes forget that nature is not replaceable. Once a species or ecosystem is lost, it may well be gone forever.

It is my hope that funding for the Division of Natural Areas and Preserves remains sufficient so that we can continue to benefit from the knowledge the preserve staff possess and eagerly share with our students. It is my understanding that the division has recently added additional interpretive "naturalist" staff across the entire state that are charged with increasing public programming, including programs to specifically engage school children. I urge you to ensure that funding for these activities be included in the state budget. The benefit to our students is tremendous and the return on the investment invaluable.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Cristie Collins", written in a cursive style.

Cristie Collins