

## Sam Wharram Nature Club

5/9/25

Chair Shaffer, Vice Chair Koehler, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the committee—thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Marc Hanneman, and I am the president of the Sam Wharram Nature Club and a landowner.

The Sam Wharram Nature Club is a local conservation organization, based in Ashtabula County, focused on educating the community about the natural world around them. The club owns nearly 62 acres along the Wild & Scenic Conneaut Creek. Throughout the past 70 plus years since the club was renamed (formerly the Jefferson Bird Club), the organization has seen membership rise and fall; but as our ageing membership is now declining, we are concerned about its' legacy and the property we call the Reserve.

We have always cherished the 36-acre Reserve with its scenic vistas from high above Conneaut Creek. The perimeter trail along the steep escarpment weaves through old growth eastern hemlock (overlooking the creek) and mature mixed deciduous forest throughout. In addition, the seeps along the slope to the sheer cliff, and the vernal pools all help make this sensitive site valuable to wildlife and the quality of Conneaut Creek. In 2014 the club was able to purchase an additional 25 acres of floodplain and steep bluff on the other side of the creek to protect and enjoy. But, a recent steep decline in membership left us concerned about our ability to hold and steward the property. Our members have always felt strongly that the property deserves permanent protection, but we have not had the means to do so.

Well, thanks to Governor DeWine and the legislature, that changed with H2Ohio. This program provided us an opportunity to enter into an agreement whereby the property and Conneaut Creek were permanently protected via conservation easement, without having to sell or donate the property immediately. This initiative under the leadership of Governor DeWine has been monumental in protecting our water quality by not just promoting best management practices for our agricultural community, but by also preserving some of our most sensitive, high-quality forests and wetlands. This offers some of the best means to protect our state's water quality. As you well know and have heard throughout this administration and perhaps most of your lives; wetlands are vital for storm water retention, filtering sediment and potential pollutants, and biodiversity. Likewise, riparian forests are vital as buffers for our streams and rivers, as they too help in much the same way, plus help prevent higher water temperatures by shading sunlight. We urge you to keep this program as is, by continuing to purchase riparian corridors via conservation easements or fee simple.

If I may shift gears and address you as a landowner (stakeholder). My siblings and I inherited a 63.5-acre parcel in which flows through both branches of Griggs Creek (a tributary to the Wild & Scenic Grand River). In fact, the confluence of the branches are contained on the property. As

much as we would like to think about spending time there and enjoying the property, we simply have not done so in nearly 5 years. We have agreed that a better tribute to my father would be to sell the parcel to an entity that would permanently protect the land. The Division of Natural Areas and Preserves has been the most logical entity for us to consider as new owners. And, yes, we must again thank Governor DeWine for restoring this Division to the great purpose it was serving before the last reorganization. I implore you to consider restoring H2Ohio to its prior funding level and restoring its ability to purchase appropriate lands (conservation easements and fee simple) to help preserve and improve our state's water quality. Owning land (fee simple) or conservation easements is the ultimate means for protecting our state's water quality. Other efforts are worthy but perhaps not as long lasting.

Sincerely,

Marc Hanneman