

Chairman Schaffer, Vice Chair Koehler, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson and members of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, my name is Barbara Andreas, Ph.D., and I am a professor emeritus from Kent State University, and an inductee into the Department of Natural Resources Hall of Fame. Early in my career, I worked as a temporary employee of the Division of Natural Areas and Preserves, and continue to volunteer at specific natural areas in southeast Ohio. From 1983 to 1992, I was Governor-appointed to the Natural Areas Council.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify regarding House Bill 96 on behalf of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources' Division of Natural Areas and Preserves. Specifically, I ask that you retain the funding for the division as it was presented in Governor DeWine's proposed fiscal year 2026-2027 operating budget and was recently passed by the House of Representative.

Unlike any other division of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, the Division of Natural Areas and Preserves (DNAP) protects and manages plant communities that have existed since the Wisconsin glacial advance, approximately 20,000 to 15,000 years ago. These properties (nature preserves) owned by the State of Ohio and managed by the Division of Natural Areas and Preserves are unique and irreplaceable. It is only through the care, knowledge, and management by ONAPA staff that these areas remain on the Ohio landscape.

DNAP's preserve managers are constantly removing invasive species that have never been part of the natural process in these natural areas. These natural areas offer an opportunity for education of examples of Ohio's natural heritage. The Preserves will not continue to exist without the manpower, equipment, and management that require funding. It is important that the 2026-2027 operating budget be maintained as proposed.

The citizens of Ohio are fortunate to have a system of natural areas that are protected by a staff of dedicated employees. I cannot stress enough that the staffing and operational needs of the Division of Natural Areas and Preserves be funded as proposed in order to sustain DNAP's current operational standards. To not fund DNAP's proposed budget hurts Ohio's citizens who frequent these preserves. It hurts the biological significance of these areas. Ohio represents the southernmost extent of the Pleistocene glaciation and whatever happens to many of DNAP's natural areas sets the example of what will happen to similar areas to the north of Ohio.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide this testimony and I would be willing to answer any questions you may have.