

Chairman Schaffer, and members of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, My name is Hope Taft and I volunteer for the Heritage Garden, the Ohio Scenic Rivers Association and the Little Miami Watershed Network and sit on the Little Miami Advisory Council but I am mainly here to represent myself, a taxpayer.

Thank you for letting me testify regarding HB 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 in Governor DeWine's proposed FY 2026-2027 budget that was recently sent to the Senate by the House of Representatives.

The scenic river program housed in the DNAP is the program that I am most familiar with. The Southwest region needs a new Stream Quality Monitor/education person and that is only one for the many open positions the division is waiting to fill depending on the results of this budget process. If funding is not available to hire new staff, the ability of DNAP to fulfill its core mission will be impaired.

It reads: "To Preserve Ohio's unique natural heritage by protecting and restoring our finest land and water resources for future generations. "

The state has many rare plants and land being overrun by non-native invasive species. Its streams, rivers, wetlands and floodplains are endangered by human caused conditions. We need to nurture the best of what we have left and DNAP can do that. The biggest bang for the taxpayer's buck is to have trees or native grasses generously line our streams and rivers. Research shows this will protect the quantity and quality of the State's water. Money is needed to do this.

As you can see from my tee shirt, I have just come from my volunteer job at the Heritage Garden at the Governor's Residence, a place I took the lead in creating as Ohio's First Lady. People get the essence of Ohio's natural beauty by going around its yard. They are amazed by the breadth and depth of what they see that represent all corners and ecosystems of the State.

We encourage visitors to go see these real sites to learn more about Ohio's geologic, botanic, and economic history, but they can only do that if DNAP remains strong and is allowed to acquire and take care of land and water that protects its citizens' health. The taxpayer expects the state to protect their health as well as the health of future generations, which depends on good stewardship of land and water and not letting others harm them for personal gain.

ODNR/DNAP needs the Governor's funding levels to keep and attract the talent and the expertise to do so.

Thank you for letting me provide testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.