

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson and members of the Senate Finance Committee, my name is Paul E. Knoop, Jr. and I have served almost 70 years as an environmental educator and naturalist. 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.

It should be noted that Ohio is a heavily populated state, agriculture is a major use of much of the Ohio landscape and roads fragment the Ohio landscape to an exceptional degree. These three factors mean that natural land (the original Ohio landscape) is in short supply.

Fortunately, we have more than 147 State Nature Preserves that serve the people of Ohio. These natural lands preserve rare and endangered plants and animals that may not occur in other parts of Ohio. In today's world invasive plants and animals are found over all of Ohio and much effort by Natural Areas staff help to eradicate these foreign pests. This effort also benefits agricultural land and farmers. Entering a State Nature Preserve creates a sense of wonder, as people see and experience a pristine environment. Let's make sure that children and adults in the future are able to experience a bit of original Ohio.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide this testimony.