

Chairman Schaffer, Vice Chair Koehler, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and Members of the Committee, I am testifying on behalf of Ashland County, and all sportsmen and women who hunt, fish, trap, and recreate in this great state. These entities support funding for our wildlife areas, state parks, state forests, scenic rivers, and natural areas. They also advocate for the wise use of Ohio's natural resources.

I have devoted much of my life to the outdoors. I and other outdoor enthusiasts worked to establish Funk Bottoms Wildlife Area in Ashland County. We did this to provide space for hunting, fishing, trapping, and recreating in perpetuity. I consider myself a conservationist, and as such I'm asking for your assistance to improve the following areas in HB 96.

- Restore H2Ohio funding to the levels proposed by Governor DeWine. H2Ohio is the nation's premier water conservation program. Clean water, abundant wetlands, and riparian areas provides critical habitat for wildlife, vital areas for canoeing, kayaking and outdoor recreation. Providing land and clean water for recreation in turn bolsters our rural economies and small businesses to the benefit of all Ohioans. As a Park Commissioner of the Ashland County Park District with miles of property along the Mohican River drainage, the H2Ohio program is critical to the work we are doing by protecting streambanks and reducing sedimentation and harmful runoff. The Mohican River is a designated state scenic river vital to our local economy. Presently the river is in danger of losing its status as a state scenic river due to degrading water quality. The continuation of the H2Ohio program would help to combat the issues facing an important economic and recreational river to our state. A major wetland restoration project at one of our premier Ashland County parks in this watershed that was to be funded by the H2Ohio program was just halted by the reduction of these funds. The beneficial impact to the watershed will be lost. In short, clean water equals healthy communities and economic growth.
- Remove the prohibition against using H2Ohio funds for the acquisition of public lands and easements. These incentives are paid to willing sellers and help protect the state's long-term investment in conservation for future generations. H2Ohio's public-private partnerships leverage state, federal, and corporate dollars, magnifying the benefit to Ohioans.
- Release the oil and gas bonus payments to Ohio State Parks, as directed by state law. Ohio's hunters and anglers rely upon our state parks' boat ramps, marinas, campgrounds, and cabins to pursue our American outdoor heritage. Daily, Ohio's State Parks are enjoyed by hunters, anglers, bird watchers, backpackers, hikers, horseback riders, bikers, boaters, shooters, swimmers, disc golfers, and dog walkers. Providing space for these activities is crucial to their continued enjoyment.

I thank you for the time to present my testimony today. Ohio's conservation community, and future generations of Ohioans, thank you as well.

Robert P. DeSanto
Chairman of the Board of the
Ashland County Park District