

Chair Cirono, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee.

My name is Tom Butch and I am president of the Ohio Scenic Rivers Association. Thank you for this opportunity to testify regarding House Bill 96 on behalf of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources Division of Natural Areas and Preserves. I ask that you retain the funding for the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Natural Areas and Preserves, as it was presented in Governor DeWine's proposed fiscal year 2026-2027 operating budget and was recently passed by the House of Representatives.

In Columbiana County, where I live, we are blessed to have the State Designated Wild and Scenic, and Federally Designated Scenic, Little Beaver Creek. It is the defining natural asset of our beautiful county. We also have one of the most recently designated state nature preserves in the state, the Little Beaver Creek State Nature Preserve. These assets, along with others in the county, are an economic driver for the county as many folks come to our county to enjoy these natural wonders.

It is the hope of OSRA that the funding level for the Division of Natural Areas and Preserves that Governor DeWine has proposed be preserved in HB 96 in the Senate. Ohio's scenic rivers and state nature preserves are some of the rarest and most beautiful natural areas left in Ohio, and we feel very strongly that they deserve the protection provided by a properly funded Division of Natural Areas and Preserves.

Thank you.