

Ohio Senate Ways & Means Committee
Senate Bill 285
February 10, 2026
Proponent Testimony of Vince Messerly, President
Stream + Wetland Foundation

Chairman Blessing, Vice Chair Roegner, Ranking Member DeMora and members of the Senate Ways & Means Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify as a proponent of Senate Bill 285.

My name is Vince Messerly, and I am speaking today on behalf of the Stream & Wetlands Foundation. I started working for the organization in 1998 and have served as its president since 2002. The Stream & Wetlands Foundation, established in 1992, is a non-profit 501(c)(3) based in Lancaster that restores and protects wetlands and streams and supports the research, education and recreational use of wetland and stream habitats.

S+W works closely with county and metropolitan park districts, and various state and federal agencies to identify lands suitable for habitat restoration and protection. Nearly all of our projects end up being publicly owned and available for park land, research, education, bird watching, hiking, and hunting. Over the years, we have protected, enhanced, or restored more than 5,000 acres of wetlands, riparian corridors, and upland buffers. In addition to providing green space and recreational opportunities.

I support the passage of SB285 because it will clarify and codify what has been standard property tax practice in the state of Ohio since our first projects were begun in 1992. This bill represents a small technical clarification. If it sounds familiar to you, it may be because it was a small part of House Bill 175 enacted in 2022. Those of you who were in the Senate at the time voted in favor of that bill. Since the implementation of that legislation, we have experienced consistent determinations of tax exemption on real estate that we have acquired and have been permanently protected by conservation easement or environmental covenant. However, the application of state statutes regarding CAUV recoupment have been applied inconsistently with most counties not seeking any recoupment, some counties requiring recoupment, and other counties putting off making a determination. We are seeking passage of SB 285 in order to affirm that CAUV recoupment does not apply to conservation land that meets exemption under ORC 5707.09.

Senator Schaffer said it best in his sponsor testimony," The goal of this legislation is to make clear that these property tax exempt conservation organizations are not required to pay CAUV recoupment fees. However, if the property is later converted for non-conservation use, then the CAUV recoupment fees will be applied."

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony. I want to thank Senator Tim Schafer for introducing SB285 and I urge your support as well. I would be happy to address any questions from you and members of the committee regarding my testimony about this legislation.