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# OHIO LEGISLATIVE SERVICE COMMISSION

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H.B. 627  
136<sup>th</sup> General Assembly

## Bill Analysis

**Version:** As Introduced

**Primary Sponsor:** Rep. Stephens

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### SUMMARY

- Establishes a process by which a board of county commissioners may disapprove of and stop the designation of a watercourse as a scenic river.
- Establishes a process by which a board of county commissioners may terminate the designation of a watercourse that received scenic river designation status on or after November 1, 2024.

### DETAILED ANALYSIS

#### Scenic rivers

The bill authorizes a board of county commissioners to adopt a resolution to disapprove of and effectively stop the designation of a watercourse as a scenic river if the watercourse flows through some portion of the board's jurisdiction.<sup>1</sup> It also establishes a process by which a board may terminate the designation of a watercourse that the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) Director has already given scenic river status to if the designation was made on or after November 1, 2024.<sup>2</sup>

#### Current designation process

Under current law, the ODNR Director may designate a watercourse or a section of watercourse as a scenic river provided it:

1. Is free of impoundments constructed by humans for at least 75% of the length of the watercourse or section of the watercourse, or it is combined with another section of a watercourse that has been designated a wild river; and

<sup>1</sup> R.C. 1517.14.

<sup>2</sup> Section 3.

2. Has shorelines or watersheds that are largely primitive and undeveloped but is accessible in places by roads.<sup>3</sup>

The ODNR Director, in accordance with statutory authority, may propose to create a scenic river if, in the Director's judgment, a watercourse or part of a watercourse possesses water conservation, scenic, fish, wildlife, historic, or outdoor recreation values that should be preserved.<sup>4</sup> Once proposed, the Director must publish notice of the intention to designate a watercourse as scenic on ODNR's Division of Natural Areas and Preserves website and at least once in a newspaper of general circulation in each county through which the watercourse flows. Additionally, the ODNR Director must send written notice and a copy of a map and description of the watercourse to be designated to the legislative authority of each affected county, township, and municipal corporation, as well as to the Director of Transportation, the Director of Development, the Director of Administrative Services, and the Director of Environmental Protection.<sup>5</sup>

Under current law, local governments and other state agencies do not have the ability to disapprove of a scenic river designation. However, any person having an interest in the proposed declaration may file written comments to the proposal within 60 days of the last publicized notice. After the 60-day comment period, the Director may enter a declaration in the Director's journal that the watercourse is a scenic river. When so entered, the watercourse becomes a scenic river.<sup>6</sup>

### **Current termination authorization**

The ODNR Director currently has exclusive authority to terminate the designation status of a scenic river. After providing notice via newspaper publication and on the Division of Natural Areas and Preserves' website, the Director may terminate the status of a scenic river by an entry in the Director's journal 60 days after publication of the last notice.<sup>7</sup>

### **County commissioners' disapproval process**

Under the bill, a board of county commissioners may disapprove of and stop the designation of a scenic river that flows through some portion of the board's jurisdiction. To do so, the board must adopt a resolution during a regular board meeting or at a special meeting called for the purpose of discussing the resolution. The board must pass the resolution within 45 days after the date that the ODNR Director publishes the last notice or within 45 days after the board receives written notice from the Director.

At least 30 days before a meeting at which a resolution to disapprove a scenic river designation will be discussed, the board must publish notice of the meeting once in a newspaper

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<sup>3</sup> R.C. 1517.14; R.C. 1517.01(D), not in the bill.

<sup>4</sup> R.C. 1517.14(B).

<sup>5</sup> R.C. 1517.14(C)(1) and (2).

<sup>6</sup> R.C. 1517.14(C)(3) and (5).

<sup>7</sup> R.C. 1517.14(C)(5).

of general circulation within the county. If a board adopts a resolution that disapproves of the scenic river designation, the board must notify the ODNR Director in writing of the resolution within 60 days of the last date of the ODNR Director’s publication and written notice. The bill prohibits the ODNR Director from designating the watercourse as a scenic river upon receiving the board’s written notification.<sup>8</sup>

### County authority to terminate current scenic river designations

Currently, there are 17 designated scenic rivers in Ohio.<sup>9</sup> The bill establishes a process by which a board of county commissioners may terminate the designation of a watercourse that the ODNR Director has already given scenic river status to if the designation was made on or after November 1, 2024. Currently, there are only two scenic rivers that were designated after that date. Those scenic rivers are:

- Raccoon Creek, which received scenic river status on November 12, 2024. The scenic river segment runs 111.9 miles from headwaters in New Plymouth downstream to the confluence of the Ohio River south of Gallipolis.
- Scioto Brush Creek, which received scenic river status on November 19, 2025. The scenic river runs 25 miles from the Scioto-Adams county line at river mile 25.1 downstream to its confluence with the Scioto River.

To terminate a scenic river designation, within 90 days after the bill’s effective date, a board of county commissioners that has jurisdiction over any part of an eligible scenic river must adopt a resolution to disapprove of the designation at either a regular or special board meeting. At least 30 days prior to such meeting, the board must provide public notice in a newspaper of general circulation within the county.

If the board adopts a disapproval resolution, the board must notify the ODNR Director. Accordingly, the Director must terminate the status of the watercourse as a scenic river.<sup>10</sup>

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## HISTORY

Action	Date
Introduced	12-11-25

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<sup>8</sup> R.C. 1517.14(C)(4).

<sup>9</sup> [List of Ohio’s Scenic Rivers](https://ohiodnr.gov), available on ODNR’s website: [ohiodnr.gov](https://ohiodnr.gov) by conducting a keyword “list of scenic rivers” search.

<sup>10</sup> Section 3.