



Franklin Soil and Water Conservation District

Creating Conservation Solutions for Over 70 Years

Senate Agriculture and Nature Resources Committee
Opponent testimony – HB 175
Franklin County Soil and Water Conservation District
Jennifer Fish, Director
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Chair Shaffer, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Fedor, and Members of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee—thank you for allowing me to provide testimony in opposition to HB 175. On behalf of our Board of Supervisors, I have concerns with HB 175 currently under consideration. This bill excludes ephemeral streams from water pollution control programs with Ohio EPA and further degrades conservation and natural resources in Franklin County, and beyond.

In Franklin County, we spend significant time and resources supporting local government efforts to protect and improve water quality resources in the face of anticipated population growth and climate change. The most sustainable action we can take to reduce flooding and protect water quality is to increase opportunities for stormwater to be retained and soaked into the soil on both urban and agricultural land. Soil can be a great opportunity to treat everyday stormwater runoff pollution.

Ephemeral Streams are part of the stream system to do just that. As rainwater falls, ephemeral streams are where water is collected. Water soaks into the dry stream bed and filters through vegetation within the channel, reducing the amount and the velocity of the water that flows downstream. This interaction between soil and plants also provides some pollution treatment. Ephemeral streams can also contribute to ground water and stream base flow during drier months. Ephemeral streams are an important resource in our first line of defense from water pollution, stream bank erosion and flooding; and drought, all of which have their own environmental and economic impacts.

Eliminating regulation of these streams means that development or other land uses will be allowed to fill in ephemeral streams without any requirements to mitigate the impacts to our natural infrastructure. If the oversight is eliminated, Franklin Soil and Water will be less able to work with local governments and developers on solutions to ensure that natural systems are replaced to provide better stormwater treatment. Removing them from protection may provide cost savings to business in Ohio in the short term but long-term businesses, government, and residents will pay the price of increased drinking water costs and loss in recreation revenue from nutrient runoff and algae blooms, increased property loss due to flooding as well as ongoing impacts to fish and other wildlife.

Ohio EPA's oversight of all our stream resources is critical if our communities are going to be sustainable in the future. With climate change and increasing populations we are only going to see even more threats to our natural resources including flooding and toxic algae blooms if we do not protect our resources wisely. Our ecological services are as complex as our economic system. Everything is interdependent and our community sustainability is linked to carefully balancing the needs of both.

If we want to have sustainable drinking water, swimmable and fishable waters, and the survival of wildlife and plant communities we all need to be coming together to find solutions that ensure development is completed as sustainably as possible. While improvements have been made to the bill, removing ephemeral streams from regulation is still moving in the wrong direction.

Supporting OEPA and developers in coming together to discuss their differences however is important to future buy in. I thank the committee for your time and effort in this regard, while asking you to seriously consider how we are going to manage a future with heavier rains, more pollution, and greater stress on agriculture as well as native plant and wildlife populations.

Thank you for your consideration, and I would be happy to answer any questions.