

## **Ohio Senate Ways & Means Committee**

Senate Bill 19

Proponent Testimony of Vince Messerly  
President, Stream + Wetland Foundation

February 2, 2021

Chairman Blessing, Vice Chair Roegner, Ranking Member Williams and members of the Senate Ways & Means Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify as a proponent of Senate Bill 19 (SB 19).

My name is Vince Messerly, I am President of the Stream + Wetlands Foundation, I am a registered professional engineer and I have more than 25 years of experience overseeing wetland and stream mitigation projects in Ohio and other states.

The Stream + Wetlands Foundation (formerly known as the Ohio Wetlands Foundation) was formed as a non-profit 501(c)(3) in 1992 in response to the need to have a compensatory mitigation alternative for impacts to aquatic resources, such as streams and wetlands. We use funds from entities required to provide compensatory mitigation to acquire land, plan, design, and complete the restoration, rehabilitation, and permanent protection of projects. Additionally, we provide funding for long-term maintenance and stewardship of completed projects.

S+W works closely with other non-governmental organizations, county and metropolitan park districts, and ODNR to identify lands suitable for habitat restoration and protection. Subsequently, nearly all of our projects end up being publicly owned and available for research, education, bird watching, hiking, and hunting.

Over the years, we have protected, enhanced, or restored over 4,000 acres of wetlands, riparian corridors, and upland buffers. In addition to providing green space and recreational opportunities, the completion of mitigation projects has helped facilitate more than 1,500 infrastructure and economic development projects resulting in an estimated \$3 billion dollars of economic development across the State of Ohio.

I support the passage of SB19 because it will clarify and codify what has been standard property tax practice in the state of Ohio since the first wetland mitigation projects were begun in 1992. I want to clarify that this is not a new property tax exemption. The lands we have owned have been tax exempt for many years. This legislation is intended to clarify a very narrow exemption, that lands owned by non-profit natural resource-based organizations established in section 501(c)(3) of the Federal tax code are tax exempt when that land is used for the purpose of the organization. This includes lands that are restored for compensatory mitigation as well as lands that are restored for other purpose, such as the H2Ohio program.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony. I want to thank Senator Tim Schafer for introducing SB19 and I urge your support as well. I would be happy to take questions from you and members of the committee.