



Ohio Environmental Council
[Action Fund]

Proponent Testimony - Senate Bill 45 (Sen. Hackett)
Nathan Johnson - Public Lands Director
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Good afternoon, Chairman Hoagland, Vice Chairman Hill, Ranking Member O'Brien, and members of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee. My name is Nathan Johnson and I am the Public Lands Director for the Ohio Environmental Council (OEC) Action Fund. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on Senate Bill 45. Senator Hackett, thank you for your leadership in sponsoring this bill.

We are blessed with many wonderful native plant species. In the interest of brevity I will focus my remarks on just one: the American white oak (*Quercus alba*). This is a tree that can live for more than 600 years. At one time it dominated the forests of southeast Ohio and much of the Midwest.

This tree stands tall in our heritage as Ohioans and Americans. Its strong, liquid-tight wood built the naval fleet that helped secure our nation's independence. And, it built the ships that defeated the British at the battle of Put-in-Bay – right here in Ohio.

Today, the wood of this tree is the most important ingredient in bourbon, a uniquely American spirit. About 60% of bourbon's flavor and 100% of its color comes from aging in charred American white oak barrels.

And, this tree is vital for wildlife. So much so that white oak has been called the "tree of life." Many wildlife species depend on white oak acorns, including turkey, deer, bear, and grouse. And, white oak probably hosts more caterpillar species than any other tree in America. That means it may well support more songbirds than any other tree, too.

But, white oak is in serious decline in Ohio. We have taken it for granted, and now it needs our attention and our stewardship. This is a tree that should be better known. And, like so many other native plants, it should more widely enjoy our favor. The designation of April as Ohio Native Plant Month will help make that possible. This bill will give Ohioans a platform for learning about, celebrating, and planting Ohio natives.

Senator Hackett, thank you for sponsoring this bill. Chairman Hoagland, I thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 45. I am happy to answer any questions at this time.