



To: Chairman Dolan, Vice Chairman Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes, and Members of the Senate Finance Committee

From: Jennifer L. Windus, Ohio Invasive Plants Council President

Date: 16th May 2023

**Re: Testimony re: Changes to Division of Natural Areas and Preserves
General Revenue Fund Budget (HB 33)**

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chairman Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes, and Members of the Senate Finance Committee, on behalf of the Ohio Invasive Plants Council, I am writing today to state my concerns about the reduction in the General Revenue Fund allotment found in the substitute budget bill for the Ohio Division of Natural Areas and Preserves, within the Ohio Department of Natural Resources.

The Division of Natural Areas and Preserves oversees 143 State Nature Preserves and 15 State Scenic Rivers. Many of these sites represent Ohio's very best examples of regionally and globally rare habitats, homes of state and federally threatened and endangered species, and regionally significant geologic formations and ecological systems.

These sites not only protect the best of the best of Ohio's ecology, they also serve as living classrooms perfectly suited for teaching students of all ages about ecology, botany, geology and natural history, as well providing a laboratory for research about Ohio's amazing ecological past and present, and a glimpse at our future.

These preserves and the diversity of native plants and animals they harbor are under attack, however, by an ever increasing array of non-native invasive species. As President of the Ohio Invasive Plants Council, I am acutely aware of the harmful impacts from invasive plants which is now considered the most detrimental impact on native plant diversity. If invasive plant species are not managed properly, native plants and their faunal associates are at risk of serious degradation and potential extirpation.

Within the Governor's proposed budget were funds that would be used to increase invasive species management efforts across the state, as well as providing for increases in educational programming and rare species research and monitoring. If funding levels are kept at the current FY2023 level of \$3,800,000 as proposed in the HB33 as passed by the House, the Division will experience a budget shortfall of approximately \$400,000.

This shortfall will mean that several vacant positions will be left unfilled. This will result in impacts to the core mission of the division by decreasing efforts on rare plant protection, scenic river protection, non-native invasive species management, and enhanced recreational opportunities on scenic rivers and nature preserves.



The Division will also eliminate plans to hire new nature education staff. These staff were expected to assist with rare plant monitoring and scientific research regarding the efficacy of invasive species management, as well as work with local communities and school districts to provide science-based educational opportunities. Schools in underserved communities would be prioritized to promote the protection of natural resources in Ohio and generate enthusiasm and interest in careers in natural resources.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today to the Senate Finance Committee. The Ohio Invasive Plants Council works with many partners all over the state to improve awareness of the threats of invasive plants on our natural areas. We support the critical work that this Division conducts to manage the best natural areas in the state, primarily to control invasive plants which are seriously threatening native plant diversity. We ask that you consider the impacts that reducing the funding for this division will have on the health of these unique ecological systems during your deliberations.

If I can be of any further assistance or answer any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at jlwindus@embarqmail.com or 419.565.8283.

Sincerely yours,

Jennifer L. Windus
OIPC President
www.oipc.info