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To: Sunset Review Committee,
Ohio Senate

I learned today that you are reviewing various committees and councils that may no longer be needed. While I understand that some of these may no longer be useful, and it is wise to review them, I wish to make a case for retaining at least one of these, the Ohio Natural Areas Council.

First a little background. In 1970, Senator Clara Weisenborn, Republican from Dayton, presented a report on Preservation of Natural Areas. A year later, she sponsored Senate Bill 113 on the same subject. This led to the formation of our wonderful system of Ohio Natural Areas and Preserves (ONAP). I was appointed by Governor Rhodes as a member of the first Ohio Natural Areas Council. I was later reappointed by Governor Celeste. Enabled by SB 113, we were charged to advise ODNR in setting up ONAP and running it in an efficient and sustainable way as an important investment in our future.

The members of ONAC were volunteers. It was a non-partisan group of concerned citizens with considerable expertise in complementary areas. The members pooled their knowledge and tried for balance in their discussions and recommendations. It was clearly a cost-effective group of consultants. We worked hard to set up what was then the best State system of natural areas and preserves in the U.S. Experts in other states contacted the devoted leaders and staff of the Division of Natural Areas and Preserves for advise on how they could set up similar systems in their own states.

Now, with funding constraints and loss of Division status, one could make the case that an advisory group such as ONAC is needed even more today than it was many years ago. The Council should be rejuvenated, not killed. I hope you agree.

Sincerely,

David A. Rigney

Relevant background information on David A. Rigney:

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1. First Conservation Chair of the Central Ohio Group of the Sierra Club.
2. Member, one of organizers, and chair of first task force of the Ohio Environmental Council (OEC), a coalition of (initially) 40 Ohio environmental groups including the League of Women Voters, United Auto Workers, Sierra Club, Audubon, etc. The first task force led to creation of one of Central Ohio's largest Metropolitan Parks (Clear Creek).
3. Member, Governor's Council on Natural Areas, Ohio, 1970-75; Chairman, 1972-74; Vice-Chairman, 1974-75. Appointed by Gov. Rhodes; reappointed by Gov. Celeste. This group helped to set up the State's system of Nature Preserves, which began in 1970. There are now more than 128 nature preserves and more than 20 scenic rivers in the program.