



Sunset Review Committee
Testimony on the Wild, Scenic, & Recreational Rivers Advisory Councils
Provided by ODNR Chief of the Division of Parks and Recreation Gary Obermiller
December 14, 2015

Good afternoon Chairman Brown and members of the Sunset Review Committee. My name is Gary Obermiller and I am the Chief of the Division of Parks and Recreation within the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR). Thank you for giving me the opportunity to present testimony on the Wild, Scenic, & Recreational Rivers Advisory Councils for your consideration.

Purpose of the Wild, Scenic, & Recreational Rivers Advisory Councils

In 1968, the Ohio General Assembly enacted the nation's first Scenic Rivers Act. The legislation created a state program to protect Ohio's remaining high quality streams for future generations. Scenic rivers retain most of their natural characteristics at a time when many rivers reflect the impacts of human activities. The Scenic Rivers Act provides three categories for river classification: wild, scenic and recreational.

Ohio law requires that a citizens' advisory council, representing local officials, landowners and conservation organizations, be appointed for each designated river. The council provides advice about local river protection and preservation concerns. To date, there are a total of fourteen wild, scenic or recreational river area advisory councils established within ODNR:

Rivers with "Scenic" Designation:

1. Ashtabula
2. Chagrin
3. Big & Little Darby
4. Kokosing
5. Little Miami
6. Mohican
7. Olentangy
8. Sandusky
9. Upper Cuyahoga

Rivers with "Wild & Scenic" Designation:

10. Conneaut
11. Grand
12. Little Beaver

Rivers with "Scenic & Recreational" Designation:

13. Maumee
14. Stillwater/Greenville

Composition of the Wild, Scenic, & Recreational Rivers Advisory Councils

Each council is composed of up to ten members who are representative of local government and local organizations and interests in the vicinity of the wild, scenic, or recreational river area. The chief of ODNR's Division of Watercraft or the chief's representative shall serve as an ex officio member of each council. Members are appointed by the Director of ODNR for a term no longer than three years and shall serve without compensation.

Wild, Scenic, & Recreational Rivers Advisory Councils Summary and Recommendation

Six of the fourteen advisory councils are inactive due to lack of membership, including:

- Big & Little Darby
- Chagrin
- Kokosing
- Mohican
- Olentangy
- Stillwater/Greenville

For example, it has been very difficult for ODNR to maintain the Chagrin River Advisory Council because there are so many other organizations active in the Chagrin River Watershed.

Due to the difficulty of maintaining the memberships of a number of these advisory councils and the time spent by four regional managers administering the meetings, ODNR recommends that the Sunset Review Committee reconfigure the councils so that instead of maintaining fourteen separate councils, there should be only one Scenic Rivers Advisory Council comprised of fourteen total members - one representing each of the designated wild, scenic and recreational rivers. The Chief of the Division of Watercraft can continue serving as an ex-officio member.

ODNR values the work of these councils, but rather than continually working to find members to fill up to 140 membership positions, the Division of Watercraft can use that time to focus on their day-to-day responsibilities and overall mission to protect and manage Ohio's Scenic Rivers and work with their stakeholders in doing so.

Members of the Committee, thank you again for giving me the opportunity to testify today. I would be happy to take any questions that you may have at this time.