

House State and Local Government Committee
Stephen L. Walker
Wednesday, February 14, 2018
Proponent Testimony – Senate Concurrent Resolution 15

Greetings Chair Anielski, Vice Chair Hambley, Ranking Member Holmes, and members of the House State and Local Government Committee,

Thank you for allowing us to present proponent testimony today on SCR 15, legislation that would designate 2018 as ‘Ohio’s Year of the Trails.

I’m a relative newcomer to the trail user community. I met my wife in 2011 and found out pretty quickly that she was a hiker. Since that time, I’ve not only embraced hiking and the outdoor experience, but I’ve become an advocate for the benefits that trails can provide to society. I’m currently president of the Buckeye Trail Association and a member of the Ohio Trails Partnership.

It’s appropriate that we make the effort to celebrate Ohio’s trails this year. This year is the fiftieth anniversary of passage of the National Trails System Act of 1968 and several things have happened in the last year to make it possible for Ohio to be in a special position to celebrate this. Ohio does have a few things going for it over the rest of the United States as far as trails are concerned. The Ohio Legislative Trails Caucus, inaugurated in March of 2017, is the first of its kind in the nation and is supporting and promoting the use of non-motorized trails in Ohio. In addition, the Buckeye Trail, at 1420 miles in length, is the longest loop trail in the country. Several long distance trails also traverse Ohio including the North Country National Scenic Trail and the American Discovery Trail.

The values that trails can provide to a community are varied. The obvious benefits derive from the health aspects of outdoor exercise. Local trails and greenways do provide a safe, inexpensive avenue for regular exercise for people living in rural, urban and suburban areas. Just 2.5 hours of walking on a trail each week can make for a significant improvement in overall health.

It doesn’t stop there. Trail development typically involves the preservation of green space, quite often in an urban setting. Trail corridors can also assist in providing natural buffer zones and preserving natural habitat for plants and wildlife. The natural buffer zones created by these trails often play a role in the improvement of water quality.

Trails are often a destination for their users and that can translate to economic benefits for the merchants in the proximity of that trail. Restaurants and hotels can benefit from the trail users that come to the trail and outfitters can benefit from the sale of trail related items.

Urban trails are often regarded by real estate agents as an amenity that helps to attract buyers and to sell property. This amenity can often translate to higher property values as well. Trails are now considered lifestyle enhancements and are usually included in the sales package for a property.

I’d like to quote the report, “Trails for All Americans” published by American Trails way back in 1990. It’s just as true today as it was then.

Trails have multiple values and their benefits reach far beyond recreation. Trails can enrich the quality of life for individuals, make communities more livable, and protect, nurture, and showcase America’s grandeur by traversing areas of natural beauty, distinctive geography, historic significance, and ecological diversity. Trails are important for the nation’s health, economy, resource protection and education.

Chair Anielski and members of the House State and Local Government Committee, thank you again for allowing me to provide proponent testimony today on SCR 15. I urge your favorable consideration of it, and would be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.