

RE: Testimony on Senate Budget Bill

Dear Committee Chairman Dolan, Ranking Member Sykes, and Senate Committee Members:

My name is Brian Blair and I am a long-time resident of Hocking County, amid many glorious State Parks, Forests, and Wildlife Areas. I am writing today to oppose the state public lands oil and gas leasing budget amendment found in Sub. HB 110 (Sections 155.30 through 155.36).

About 10 years ago, I traveled to Columbus to testify against a similar bill, and to paraphrase President Reagan, "there we go again"!

Although there are some public lands in which oil and gas leasing may be appropriate, it should certainly not be a priority, especially not in our Parks, Natural Areas, Wildlife Areas, and most State Forests. Of course, we should respect existing leases, since those constitute prior obligations.

As I recall the efforts several years ago, at least the leasing revenues would have been used to purchase more public land, which is not the case in the current proposal.

Here in Hocking County, we have seen visitation in our Parks, Preserves, and Forests skyrocket in recent years as Ohioans enjoy the out of doors. Hiking, hunting, fishing, and just enjoying the woods and scenery are especially popular as folks seek safe outdoor experiences during the Pandemic.

Please delete this section from the budget bill- it is not the time or place to make oil and gas production a priority over other uses of our State lands, let alone use the funds simply to promote more production. The current system of evaluation and prioritization for competing uses will remain, with leasing being considered on a case-by-case basis by our State Agencies. I believe that the vast majority of the 4 million plus visitors to Hocking Hills each year will agree with this position. Thanks for the opportunity to comment.

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