

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

The Ohio House of Representatives recently inserted an amendment into the Budget Bill that fast-tracks oil and gas development on public lands, reneges on processes agreed upon in HB133 in 2011, and puts the state park natural legacy at risk (see pages 320 - 333).

Specifically, Sections 155.30 through 155.36 (Lines 9851 - 10252) seek to significantly alter the Oil and Gas Leasing Commission and public lands leasing process established in 2011 (HB 133; R.C. 1509.70 - 1509.77). The leasing commission process established nearly ten years ago is not perfect, but at the very least it established some mechanisms for transparency, objectivity, public oversight, and public involvement. This egregious bill language eliminates those checks and balances and, in so doing, breaks promises made to the public that have stood for nearly ten years.

Furthermore, the leasing system found in current law at least reinvests state leasing revenues into the acquisition of new public lands and the capital improvement of existing state parks and forests. This bill language perversely eliminates even these public benefits, and cuts the public completely out of any wealth that might flow from the exploitation of the lands they own. Per the House version, all leasing revenues are to be reinvested into the state lands leasing program and the promotion of further state lands leasing.

We urge the Ohio Senate to remove these provisions and maintain current law.

Thank you,
Marty Mason