

**Pike County
Chamber of Commerce & Tourism Bureau
P.O. Box 107 • 12455 State Route 104
Waverly, Ohio 45690
740-947-7715 • Fax 740-947-7716
www.pikechamber.org • www.visitpike.com**

**Testimony to the Senate Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee on HB33
Chandler Grooms, Tourism Development Director
April 26, 2023**

Chairman Shaffer, Vice Chair Landis, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the committee, good morning and thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I am Chandler Grooms, Tourism Development Director for the Pike County Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Bureau. I am here today to speak in support of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, and to note my concerns over potentially significant reductions to the ODNR operating budget under House Bill 33.

Like many others in Pike County and across Ohio, our state parks have been a key piece in my life. They have provided a safe and beautiful place to connect with nature, learn valuable life skills, and to create memories with family and friends. Even outside of nature and outdoor recreation, our state parks have been places for our community to come together, celebrate, and enjoy local and cultural heritage.

Now even more than ever, our state parks play a vital role for Ohioans, and a key role in building our quality of life... showcasing our state as a place not only to travel, but also to live, work, raise a family, and retire. According to the latest data from the Bureau of Economic Analysis, Ohio is 8th in the nation for total economic activity generated by outdoor recreation, the majority of which is generated directly and indirectly through our state parks.

ODNR saw a massive increase in visitation and outdoor activity during the pandemic, and that increase has not dramatically subsided in the following years. Outdoor participation trends, as tracked by the Outdoor Foundation, continue to be on a steady incline and have seen numbers increase by tens of millions in the last decade.

With this rise, ODNR has worked tirelessly to keep up with demand. Budget cuts would further hinder that already tough challenge, and in many cases, cause a decrease in safety, security, and accessibility through potential decreases in officers, staff, and equipment necessary to maintain our parks and natural resources.

Locally in Pike County, the impact of budget cuts would be felt even beyond our two state parks. Dozens of local businesses benefit from visitation to Pike Lake State Park and Lake White State Park. Area restaurants, gas stations, grocery stores, hotels, bait shops, and more all suffer when our state parks suffer. In 2021, Pike County saw a total economic impact of over \$32M through tourism. Our parks, natural areas, and ODNR properties were a large factor in that success.

ODNR has invested in our state parks for the betterment of our communities. Residents around Lake White State Park were excited to see a new boater education center opened in 2022. Visitors to Pike Lake State Park have taken advantage of new inclusive amenities for the handicapped, such as accessible kayak launches. We look forward to partnering with ODNR in future years to continue creating safe, accessible, and beautiful places for many generations to enjoy and create memories of their own. We recognize that our state parks can be a catalyst for growth and development in other areas, and they are an important piece to the long-term success of Pike County, and many others around the state.

I urge the committee to continue to recognize the impact that supporting ODNR and our natural areas brings to Ohio. Thank you again Chairman Shaffer and members of the committee for the opportunity to speak with you this morning. I will gladly take any questions you may have, and be happy to continue a conversation following our time here today.

Sincerely,

Chandler Grooms

Tourism Development Director

Pike County Chamber of Commerce & Tourism Bureau