

Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Hicks- Hudson, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify this morning my name is Frances Kern Mennone. I am the Managing Director of Frost Brown Todd's Project Finance Advisory group. My work on public private partnership involves many land use projects -including funding for trails and outdoor recreation. Through my profession, I am aware of the challenges associated with funding outdoor recreation. Like many here today, I am an active member of the Ohio Trails Partnership and the Ohio River Way representing water trail users. Prior to my public finance career, I spent twenty years using Ohio water ways as a competitive rower. Which led to role on the board of directors the United State Rowing Association and advisory work for the United States Olympic Committee. I have a lifetime of experience on our waterways and a career that supports funding for the outdoors.

I am here today to speak to this Senate Committee concerning House Bill 33 which will affect two years of funding for Ohio Department of Natural Resources. HB33 removed ODNR's thoughtfully composed budget. It included- no increase from the current fiscal years. The reductions or omissions from the requested budget – if approved – would leave ODNR in the untenable position of having an insufficient operating budget. This body needs to be aware that ODNR functions as more than just a support for its own park system.

The Ohio Trails Partnership, and the Ohio Trails Caucus, have been actively working to an increase in funding for the Ohio Department of Natural Resources for this budget cycle. The current House Bill 33 aims to go the opposite direction of an increase for ODNR. HB33 includes no increase of ODNR funding which is flatted lined on paper but in today's rocky economy is in effect a decrease. The funding programs administered through ODNR help fund the infrastructure of outdoor recreation all over Ohio -not just on ODNR properties. By hamstringing ODNR, this body is not just affecting ODNR operations but their ability to adequately administer the funds that go beyond their borders. HB33 will affect outdoor recreation investment throughout Ohio. Now is the time to INCREASE funding of the outdoors – not decrease it.

A widely celebrated outcome of the pandemic was a dramatic increase in outdoor recreation. Nationwide, our parks system supported healthy outdoor lifestyles like never before. In cities and community park systems everywhere. That increase in use created a demand on infrastructure that was already needing improvement. Studies have shown that post pandemic, use remains very high. Now is the time to invest in our recreation infrastructure- not decrease it.

With ODNR's role as the administrator of programs like the Land, Water Conservation Fund and the Recreational Trail Program, ODNR plays a key role in supporting investments well outside of their park system walls. The federal government has increased its support to the states of LWCF and RTP funds. Post pandemic demand for outdoor recreation funding is high statewide- in urban and rural Ohio. ODNR funding means making federal resources more accessible for all of Ohio. We need to support DNR's ability to distribute those funds statewide- not slow it down.

Thank you,

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