



Ohio Trails Partnership

109 North Main Street, 800 Performance Place, Dayton, Ohio 45402



May 1, 2023

Greetings Mr. Chairman, State Senator Tim Schaffer and members of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee.

I am Steve Walker, President of the Ohio Trails Partnership (OTP). I'm also the President of the Buckeye Trail Association. Over a generation ago, the Ohio Trails Partnership was founded on the premise of providing a forum whereby users of the various non-motorized trail types could resolve their differences. Once the bicyclists, horsemen, paddlers, mountain bikers and hikers who are represented by the OTP became acquainted and found that their differences were easily resolved, they began to notice that they had many similar goals. Our five Partner associations represent 10,000 members and millions of trail users in Ohio.

About six years ago, the OTP approached our friends in the Ohio General Assembly with the notion that there needed to be a presence in that body that supported our mission to provide the best possible trail experience for the citizens of Ohio and those from other areas who come here to enjoy our great state. The result was the Ohio Legislative Trails Caucus (OLTC) which was formed in February of 2017. Together, the Ohio Legislative Trails Caucus and the OTP have worked together to improve that state of non-motorized trails in this state. Throughout that time, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) has worked with us as the third leg of the stool.

Many things have been accomplished in these past six years. With support and input from the OTP, ODNR unveiled the Ohio Trails Vision in early 2019 which provided a multi-year blueprint on how to grow and improve the almost 5000 non-motorized trail miles in Ohio.

In 2020, the world was thrown into a pandemic which affected work, schooling, play and just about every activity available to Ohioans. One of the few endeavors that Ohioans could partake in was trails. Trail usage on ODNR properties grew enormously during 2020. Besides offering trail users the opportunity to get out when other activities were limited, the use of trails promoted health and wellness with the important side effects of emotional and mental wellbeing. Trail usage offers educational benefits as well. Students with access to outdoor activity statistically produce improved academic performance and generally improved societal behavior.

I am reaching out to this committee to register my concern regarding House Bill 33. This bill does not include the funding requested by ODNR and essentially keeps their funding at the same level as the FY 2022-23 Operational Budget. These real world fiscal cuts amount to over \$27.5M each in FY 2024 and FY 2025. This amounts to a silent but actual budget reduction considering the effects of inflation and contractual pay raises which will occur during this two year period. This will seriously affect ODNR's capacity to administer capital improvements on their properties and keep current amenities in a good state of repair. Law enforcement on ODNR properties could be significantly affected as well.

The Ohio Trails Partnership is urging that House Bill 33, as it's written, be rejected and to add back the funding that the Ohio Department of Natural Resources requested for this budget and include an additional \$2M spread over FY 2024-25 for Tourism Ohio to fund an economic impact study concerning Ohio's non-motorized trail usage. If Ohio is to remain a destination for trail users from around the country, ODNR needs to have this funding restored to maintain and improve their properties and provide a great trail experience. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Stephen L. Walker, President
Ohio Trails Partnership