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**Proponent Testimony, Am.HB 33  
Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee  
Captain Peg VanVleet  
Vice President of Environmental Affairs for Lake Erie  
Lake Erie Charter Boat Association (LECBA)**

**May 10, 2023**

Chairman Schaffer, members of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify.

My name is Captain Peg VanVleet, and I am the Vice President for Environmental Affairs for Lake Erie for the Lake Erie Charter Boat Association.

We are the Voice of Lake Erie and strong advocates for the Great Lakes.

I'm here to testify that our resources must not be lowered in our efforts to protect this great resource: Lake Erie.

On behalf of LECBA and all Charter Captains within Lake Erie's Western Basin, we ask that you restore the \$55 million GRF dollars to the DNR budget. . This money goes for parks, wildlife, forestry, and some other smaller divisions. All of which are critical for the ecological and economic health of this important region.

And here's why:

[Let's begin with H2Ohio.](#)

As a charter captain for many years, I can testify that algae blooms negatively impact our businesses greatly. Customers are simply not interested in fishing in yucky green water and are afraid of it. Not to mention they have long memories of the days of the heavily-polluted Cuyahoga River being on fire and from when it wasn't safe to eat Lake Erie Fish.

Although Lake Erie is improving, it still has a long way to go in reversing the reality and the stigma of the health of the lake. To this day, I have people tell me they think it's not safe to eat Lake Erie fish!

H2Ohio funding is vital to the health of Lake Erie. This funding is helping farmers improve and manage practices to help curb the runoff of nutrients. The control of the nutrients that make their



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way into the watershed of Lake Erie helps to reduce the nutrients that feed the Algae Blooms each year.

By reconstructing wetlands, we can filter the nutrients of the runoff before the nutrients make their way into water ways that ultimately lead into Lake Erie.

Next, let's look at Project WILD.

Project WILD is a wildlife-based conservation and environmental education program for youth. This program teaches youth how to think about wildlife and the environment.

As a culture, Ohio must spend money on developing the youth of our state. We can spend money proactively or reactively.

We believe if we **proactively** provide funding to expose our youth to the beauty and wonder of wildlife, we may save ourselves from the pain and expense of **reactively** providing funding for rehab and incarceration.

Project WILD is one way to proactively introduce youth to the thrill of the outdoors and provide a brotherhood that a young person craves but may not otherwise have.

On a personal note, my goal every fishing season on Lake Erie is to hook at least one kid on fishing. If I meet this goal, then I have kept one more kid off the streets. Over my years of mentoring youth, I have many personal testimonies from parents and kids that it works.

And finally ... our parks

Parks provide access to recreational opportunities, increase property values, spur local economies, combat crime, and protect cities from environmental impact. They provide a much-needed respite from day-to-day life.

When we talk about exposing youth to the outdoors, what better way than to have nearby safe parks readily available for exploration, education, and relaxation? Therefore, we need to continue to invest in the repairs and infrastructure of our State Parks to keep them pristine, safe, and welcoming.

As Charter Captains, we are also tour guides and ambassadors of our geographic locations. What an advantage we have when we can reel off all the beautiful and unique public spaces along our



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North shore. Our customers are always amazed at how much Ohio has to offer, and we repeatedly hear, “We had no idea such a fabulous place existed in Ohio!”

Personally, our favorite State Park on the shores of Lake Erie is Catawba State Park. No place else on our great lake can you sit by the water’s edge and watch the most beautiful sunsets in Ohio. It’s the first place to take visitors, and it’s the last place we spend each evening.

[In conclusion ...](#)

The State would be remiss in even considering going backwards or slowing down funding for the health of Lake Erie, the funding of Project Wild, or the funding of our Parks.

In the last decade, Lake Erie fisheries contributed nearly 1 billion dollars per year in economic impact to Ohio. We all have to push, push, push to keep people going outside and getting involved in outdoor activities in order for people to experience first-hand why it is so important to funnel tax dollars to outdoor resources. Therefore, we ask that restore the \$55 million GRF dollars to the DNR budget.

[Thank you ...](#)

Mr. Chairman, thank you for your time. I would be happy to entertain questions from the committee.