



May 9, 2023

Dear Chair Schaffer, Vice Chair Landis, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson and Senate Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee Members,

I strongly urge you to support the original FY2024-25 operating budget request for Ohio's Department of Natural Resources, which will greatly contribute to creating and sustaining healthy, thriving communities. As a local elected official as well as Vice President of the Ohio Trails Partnership, I have seen the transformative nature of the Clean Ohio Recreational Trails, Green Space Conservation and Farmland Preservation programs for all Ohioans. And, providing more capacity for ODNR to effectively administer these and other programs will provide significant health, economic, environmental and other quality of life benefits for communities in all 88 counties across the Buckeye State. I have experienced this firsthand in our Village, with grants that are improving the walking and biking infrastructure of our community, supporting safe resident mobility and attracting visitors, and connecting us to the region and the rest of the state. Importantly, outdoor spaces such as John Bryan State Park have been protected and expanded, and the integrity of vital agricultural assets is being maintained.

OBM Director Murnieks has emphasized that the Clean Ohio Fund is able to inject \$50 million annually to generate major economic activity and many other benefits at a cost of only 1.7% to service the bonds. Additionally, communities are leveraging federal and local dollars with Clean Ohio funds and other ODNR support. Yellow Springs, for example, has established a Green Space Fund, which has allowed our local land trust to secure \$5 million for conservation and preservation. Our small municipality of 3,800 residents has many other examples of how state support has benefited our town – imagine what the impacts will be for all Ohioans with additional capacity for ODNR to deliver these programs and execute capital appropriations approved by the legislature, making our state more attractive and competitive.

While there are currently many competing budget priorities, strategic investments in our state's future to support community health, quality of life and economic recovery are crucial for Ohio. Parks and trails infrastructure as well as safe outdoor spaces are smart investments, which generate nearly \$500 million in direct spending and more than \$60 million in tax dollars. We know these projects spur economic development and increase property values, and they can also facilitate other critical infrastructure improvements involving broadband, electric, stormwater and other municipal services. Currently, many communities across the state have economic revitalization plans ready to implement that include trails projects as catalytic investments. The return on investment is incredible, and your constituents demand these amenities.

Safe places to recreate sustain mental & physical health and well-being; all Ohioans deserve economic and other quality of life opportunities. Significant maintenance needs to be addressed given inadequate past budgets, causing a loss of almost half of our natural resources officers.

Your constituents appreciate your leadership in supporting trails and ODNR's other transformative programs and activities,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brian K. Housh".

Brian K. Housh  
Vice President, Ohio Trails Partnership  
Midwest Policy Manager, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy  
Council President, Village of Yellow Springs