

**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 Finance Committee on HB33  
Chandler Grooms, Tourism Development Director  
May 18, 2023**

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Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes, 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.

Now even more than ever, our state parks play a key role in building our quality of life... showcasing Ohio not only as a place 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 from outdoor recreation, the majority of which is generated directly and indirectly through our state parks. Outdoor recreation is important to Ohioans, as well as to visitors experiencing our state. It is also repeatedly identified as a top quality of life factor for relocation.

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. Since 2020, the growth in new and returning participants in outdoor recreation activities has increased by 26%.

With this rise, ODNR has worked tirelessly to keep up with demand, but are now facing a reduction or elimination of 13 out of 15 operational line items for FY24 & FY25. The greatest of these cuts are directed to Ohio State Parks and Watercraft. Budget cuts would cause a

decrease in safety, security, and accessibility through potential decreases in officers, staff, and equipment necessary to maintain our parks and natural resources.

The impact of these budget cuts would be felt even beyond our state parks and nature areas. Thousands of local businesses benefit from visitation to ODNR properties. Announced just last Wednesday by the Department of Development, Ohio saw a \$53 Billion economic impact from tourism in 2022, with \$41 Billion of that being direct spending at our restaurants, hotels, retail shops, museums, and more. State parks, natural areas, and ODNR properties were a large factor in that success. A lack of investment in ODNR is a lack of investment in our many small businesses across Ohio that rely on the travel economy.

ODNR has invested in our state parks for the betterment of our communities. Locally, we recognize that our state parks can be a catalyst for growth and development, and they are an important piece to the long-term success of Pike County, and many others around the state. For a state that hopes to see a rise in population and continuing growth in manufacturing, technology, and workforce, now is the time to make the critical investments in the quality of life pieces that will bring in visitors and new residents alike.

I urge the committee to recognize the impact that state parks and our natural areas bring to Ohio, and to make the critical investment in the long term success of ODNR and our communities. Thank you again Chairman Dolan and members of the committee for the opportunity to speak with you this morning.

Sincerely,

Chandler Grooms

Tourism Development Director

Pike County Chamber of Commerce & Tourism Bureau