

April 26, 2023

**ODNR OPERATING BUDGET HOUSE BILL 33  
TESTIMONY**

I am submitting this testimony on the importance of the ODNR Operating Budget House Bill 33, and the economic impact it will have on my community and Southeastern Ohio. In 2022 ODNR purchased the remaining property of what was once AEP ReCreation Land and is now Jesse Owens State Park & Wildlife Area and Appalachian Hills Wildlife Area for an approximate total of 58,000 + acres, making it the largest contiguous public land area in the State of Ohio.

Since the beginning of the land acquisition, Morgan County has been working closely with ODNR in support of the Jesse Owens State Park & Wildlife Area and Appalachian Hills Wildlife Area improvement project to take place over the next 5+ years. This project is to include 10 cabins, 50+ full-service campsites, a retail camp store, and a new state-of-the-art visitor center. In order to provide utilities to this project a county waterline will be placed, as currently water is not available for public use on the property. A sewage plant, check-in station, and linen service facility will also be constructed. The funds to create these upgrades have been secured, but to protect the investment, an operating budget to effectively operate, maintain, and staff the park needs to be secured. In addition to operating staff, additional law enforcement will be needed to keep our community and guests safe, provide education, and protect our natural resources.

Currently there is only 1 park officer per 200+/- miles per shift. If a problem arises, it could take that officer 1+ hours to respond. This could be detrimental depending on the call (lost child, accident, injury). The property is so vast that adequate security is a must. Each county should have a wildlife officer, but this isn't always the case, and should also be taken into consideration.

Since 2019, the beginning of Covid, we have seen an increase in tourism to our county for outdoor recreation. In a time when most people were locked-in, away from people, or quarantined, visiting our parks, enjoying nature, and reconnecting with the outdoors became a way of escaping the reality of the pandemic. People were reintroduced to the outdoors, our natural resources, and outdoor activities such as hunting, fishing, camping, boating, and hiking. In order to keep up with the demand of the increase in visitors to our parks, it is extremely important to take into account the increased need for operations, maintenance, and staffing of these areas.

This project will have a positive economic impact on our local community as well as surrounding communities. In 2020 and 2021 the total economic impact of Jesse Owens State Park was \$6,528,397. This does not account for Appalachian Hills Wildlife Area's impact on our economy, which would be an increase to this amount. Each year Jesse Owens State Park on average

contributes nearly 3.3 million dollars to the regional economy. This number will also increase as improvements are made and tourism to the area increases. For every 4 employees at Jesse Owens State Park, 1 additional full-time job is supported in the regional economy through supply chain effects and the spending income. This will also increase as the tourism increases due to the park's improvements.

Morgan County is home to 5 ODNR properties. The Division of Natural Resources has an extreme impact on our local economy. In 2021 Ohio Travel Association completed a Strategic Plan for the Morgan County Convention and Visitors Bureau which found that the visitors to Morgan County primarily consisted of the person looking to experience the outdoors. Hunters, anglers, and those wanting an outdoor experience are the main source of tourism dollars to Morgan County.

According to The Ohio State University College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences, It is estimated that there are 171 million outdoor recreational trips in Ohio, and that these trips are worth \$3.6 billion per year to the people who take them. We also estimate that in the course of taking these trips, outdoor recreationalists spend \$5.9 billion per year in Ohio's economy, which amounts to about \$34 per trip. The contribution of this expenditure to Ohio's overall economic activity is estimated to be \$8.1 billion per year, which amounts to 1.3% of Ohio's economy. The outdoor recreational sector is estimated to employ 132,790 workers in Ohio, or 1.9% of Ohio's workforce.

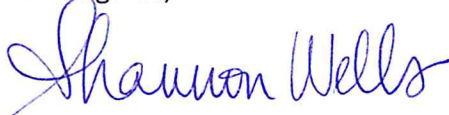
To not support this bill for the ODNR Operating Budget House Bill 33 could be detrimental to the project planned for Jesse Owens State Park and Appalachian Hills Wildlife Area, therefore having a negative impact on the tourism in Morgan County, which in turn would negatively impact our local economy.

In voting for support of this bill, you will not only be supporting and protecting our natural resources, but also supporting our small community which includes small businesses and industries and the economy that keeps them thriving.

As a life-long resident of Morgan County, I urge you to vote in support of funding the operations, maintenance, and increase of law enforcement on Jesse Owens State Park and Appalachian Hills Wildlife Area.

Thank you for supporting our natural resources and communities.

Best regards,



Shannon Wells  
Director