

WRITTEN ONLY

Chairman Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for this opportunity to present testimony on House Bill 96.

My name is Ron Gorley, and I am voicing my support for ODNR Parks and Watercraft. I am a volunteer at the Little Miami State Park, a 50-mile-long, 66-foot-wide trail that runs from Cincinnati to Xenia. And while I am also a frequent camper at many of Ohio's state parks, I'd like to spend the majority of this testimony to talking about the Little Miami State Park.

Each year, we log approximately 1.5 million trail visits. During the height of the pandemic, this number grew by 50%. The park gave people a space where they could feel comfortable, even in an uncomfortable time.

Personally, I've seen not only hikers and cyclists on the trail, but also in-line skaters, horse riders and a team of huskies pulling a man on a sled with wheels. Where else can such a diverse group of activities share a common space?

Not only do people from the local community use the trail, but I've talked with people from as far away as San Diego and the State of Washington. Our trail, this state park, was featured in a Wall Street Journal article as one of three recommended rails-to-trails destinations. Influential YouTube content creators regularly highlight this state park as a must-see destination.

WRITTEN ONLY

It's well documented that trails have a positive economic impact on the community. For example, a 2018 study by the Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission showed that this trail network is responsible for an additional \$13.4 million in economic activity annually.

The Little Miami State Park has brought economic benefit to the four counties and the many municipalities along the trail. In housing development, Miami Bluffs and Peters Cartridge Factory Apartments were intentionally built with direct access to the trail.

And there are numerous restaurants adjacent to the trail, including establishments in Miamiville, Loveland, Hamilton Township, South Lebanon, Morrow, Oregonia and Corwin.

But to have a destination that the local community loves and that draws people in from around the county, investment has to be made. People need to be on staff and equipment needs to be provided to ensure that it remains a desirable and safe place to spend time. And resources need to be provided so the park can be properly maintained.

With all these benefits to the well-being and enjoyment of Ohioans and the positive economic impact on the community, I wholeheartedly ask you to fully support ODNR's Parks and Watercraft budget through House Bill 96.