

Statement from Don Clowes: ODNR Parks and Watercraft re HB 96

Thank you for allowing me to speak on this subject that I care deeply about on a number of levels. The ODNR Parks are a place that have brought great enjoyment to me and my family over the years. Getting outdoors was always my thing, but my access to that has always been public spaces. I was able to expose my children to the world of their OH State Parks in their formative years. In addition to its being an affordable and healthy form of fun, I would like to think it sowed some seeds and helped contribute to my daughter becoming a fisheries biologist as an adult. I'm very proud of that. I would also like to think that the parks offer opportunity, and an alternative to screen focused activities that seem all too prominent for today's kids. The parks provide spaces that contribute to making Ohio great for all. These are spaces that are precious, and unfortunately rare among much of the developed acreage of our state. I've been fortunate to live in an area where I, and a large swath of the population in my area, can reach these special places easily. I enjoy fishing and hunting, and the park lands provide access to those places for all to enjoy in Ohio

For me, Lake Milton and West Branch State Parks have a special place as they are part of the ODNR Division of Wildlife Musky Program. I am a member of the Cleveland Chapter of Muskies Incorporated (MI). We are a part of a national conservation organization with a focus on the musky, but we have a concern for all the waters where fish can swim. These lakes provide for not only our membership, but the greater angling community. I serve as the Environmental Director. Our Chapter has a long-standing relationship with these parks in aiding with cleanup activities. We have a particular large bay at West Branch that has been our "Adopt-a-shore" area for many years. I'm proud to say our reach to aid the parks has grown well beyond that bay, not just at West Branch, but Lake Milton also. The park staffs do good work, and we are happy to help out with what we can do. Our Chapter just last year celebrated our 30th year of hosting an annual youth fishing derby at Lake Milton to introduce kids to fishing. The State Park has made for a great partner in making that happen. We've been able to expose hundreds of kids and their families to fishing and the Park.

On another personal note, my good friend Chris DePaola and I produce a podcast titled 120 Outdoors. We celebrate the outdoor activities that one can enjoy close to home (within 120 miles). For us in the Mahoning Valley, that reaches from Lake Erie to the Ohio River. The presence of the ODNR Parks give us plenty to talk about with the spaces in-between, giving us ample opportunity to celebrate, and steer our listeners to enjoy these great resources. A look at a 120-mile circle in Ohio will reveal just how much opportunity to recreate is out there.

The park lands aren't just for people, they serve as stop overs for migrating birds and waterfowl. They serve an important role in growing native plants that aid all manner of native fauna. They may seem like separated oases, but in the wild sense, they connect Ohio together, and connect Ohio with the greater world.

I should also mention that I am a member of the Friends of the Mahoning River. We cling to the hope the Mahoning River downstream can continue to improve from its industrial past, but we can know that Mahoning River outflows from the park waters upstream are safe, cared for, and watched over. We're connected by those waters, and the ODNR Parks have connection to many waters of the state.

For me, water is an important ingredient. I like to get on those waters as often as I can. In the world of watercraft, I have 4 registered. 1 fishing boat, 2 kayaks, and a canoe. I'm grateful for the services of the OH Watercraft officers on many levels. In a kayak, you sometimes feel small. And the waters are just like the roads, some rules help keep order out there. It's helpful to have that extra, watchful eye on the waters. There are many ways that some users can corrupt the waters with pollution or litter. Again, that watchful eye helps protect the water for the fish, and I know helps minimize the litter we may otherwise have to round up with clean-up work. Prevention is always better.

In conclusion, I would just like to say that these are some of the special places in Ohio that make life better. Some things that are extremely worthwhile are difficult to measure. A park would surely be on that list. I am confident that our State Parks make life better for Ohioans. They have made life better for me and my family, and countless boaters, fishermen, hunters, and those just wanting to get out to experience something they just may not find anywhere else.