

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the Natural Resources Committee for the opportunity to provide testimony.

My name is Ron Gorley, and I volunteer on the 50-mile-long, 66-foot-wide trail known as the Little Miami State Park that runs from Cincinnati to Xenia. I'd like to spend the majority of my time here today talking about the Little Miami State Park as an example of the wonderful array of state parks across Ohio.

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 trails to trails destinations. Influential YouTube content creators regularly highlight this state park as a must-see destination.

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 Parks and Watercraft budget through House Bill 96.