

Testimony on SB 219

March 18 2026

Chair Blasdel, Vice Chair Fischer, Ranking Member Rogers, and Members of the House Natural Resources Committee. My name is Roxanne Groff and I live in Athens County. As a former Athens County Commissioner and Bern Township trustee, I have had the opportunity to testify to many bills throughout the years. While SB 219 pretends to elevate and improve laws governing oil and gas operations in Ohio, the bill does just the opposite.

I am once again dismayed, but sadly, not surprised by the eagerness with which the majority of the senate passed this industry inspired bill so swiftly. Although several parts of the bill were changed, the bill reeks of industry influence. Perhaps some of you on this committee have taken the in-depth look at what the bill will change in favor of the oil and gas industry's need to control more and more of the extraction of oil and gas anywhere and everywhere in Ohio that it desires. Hundreds of Ohioans from all over the state have protested the use of our public lands for oil and gas extraction by the oil and gas industry. In spite of those protests, the general assembly once again chooses the industry over the people who elect you.

Public Lands

Expediting the selection of public lands for fracking and the selection of the company that will apply for a permit is ludicrous. You are going to greatly reduce the time it takes to evaluate the nominated public land to be leased and yet extend the time period of the lease from 3 to 5 years. This gives the company exactly what it wants and reduces the benefits to the state by eliminating the possibility of being able to charge a company to renew a lease. The right to lease should have been decided by the people who pay the taxes and use our parks and wildlife areas!

It would be prudent and honest to explain how the general assembly and administration excitedly started leasing our public lands with the promise of adding more money to parks and recreation and wildlife programs in Ohio and then promptly reduced ODNR's parks and recreation budget—financed by tax revenue in the General Revenue Fund—by 50% in fiscal year 2026 and 13% in fiscal year 2027, according to Legislative Service Commission documents. Then, it would redirect the royalties to fill those holes. However, SB 219 further reduces funding to ODNR ,approx. \$\$834,000/year, (FY17-25) from oil/gas production on federal lands that will be deposited into a dedicated clearing fund. The state must transfer these funds to the county of origin within 30 days. THIS money could have been used to support the Orphan Well Program; it could have been used to fund our parks and public lands! In stead it will be “gifted” to counties for certain purposes that the general assembly will never know how it is spent. Is that good fiscal management? Absolutely not! If that is

not reduction enough the bill also sends injection well fees formerly paid into the treasury and dispersed to ODNR , now changes and reduces ODNR oil and gas division funding by, *H) shall deposit the money in the state treasury to the credit of the oil and gas well fund created in section 1509.02 of the Revised Code then disburse the money to the county treasurer of the county in which the injection well is located.* Again, money that could have been used for the health, safety, management and oversight, ensure enough staff in the division of oil and gas, and fund our parks, is given to counties as an “incentive” to accept and like and not protest extraction or more than likely injection wells, which are documented by ODNR as failing in southeast Ohio, in particular, Athens, Noble and Washington Counties.

Orphan Wells

The purpose of the well plugging program has always been to eliminate the methane releases and dangers to landowners plagued by oil and gas wells abandoned often decades ago. Studies reveal many abandoned wells have not only methane but cancer-causing benzene and other VOC’s which increase the possibility of fires and explosions.

<https://insideclimatenews.org/news/06062023/abandoned-oil-gas-wells-health/> Identifying the abandoned wells with the highest emissions of harmful substances and then determining which are closest to communities and their drinking water sources has been and should always be the priority.

Another contradiction of the statutes in this bill is the chief has been given the authority to prioritize abandoned wells needing to be plugged under ORC 1509.071 (b) *In accordance with division (F) of this section, to correct conditions that the chief reasonably has determined are causing imminent health or safety risks at an orphaned well . And the competitive bidding requirements of Chapter 153. of the Revised Code do not apply if the chief reasonably determines that a situation exists requiring immediate action for the correction of the applicable health or safety risk.* But this bill changes that by requiring the Chief to choose abandoned wells near injection wells. *However, when determining the priority of plugging wells or restoring land surfaces at orphaned well sites, the chief shall ensure that first priority is given to orphaned wells located in close proximity, as determined by the chief, to one or more active injection wells* Clearly, risk factors are the highest priority and have been designated in Ohio law. How can you as lawmakers have blatant disregard for the purpose of plugging abandoned wells in favor of the industry’s desire to plug near injection wells? Anyone knowing the dangers of abandoned oil and gas wells would never allow this part of the bill to pass.

Expedited drilling permit review

Although I have not been able to verify this. I read the statute and this bill to include injection wells if the definition under ORC 1509.06 includes injection wells I do not understand how language in this part of the bill excludes them.

The bill eliminates the Chief’s authority to refuse to accept requests for expedited reviews of applications for drilling permits (to drill, reopen, convert, or plug back a well). Under current law, if, in the Chief’s judgment, the acceptance of expedited review requests would prevent the

issuance, within 21 days of their filing, of permits for which applications are pending, the Chief may refuse to accept the requests. The bill eliminates this authority. However, the bill also limits the number of expedited review requests that a well owner may submit to the Chief to no more than ten times within a calendar year. Accordingly, the bill prohibits the Chief from issuing more than ten expedited permits to an owner within a calendar year unless an emergency requires that an expedited permit be issued, as determined by the Chief.

What is **NOT** in this bill is the fact that it includes Class II injection well permits. ORC 1509.01 clearly states (A) "Well" means any borehole, whether drilled or bored, within the state for production, extraction, or injection of any gas or liquid mineral, excluding potable water to be used as such, but including natural or artificial brines and oil field waters. "Well" includes a stratigraphic well.

Therefore, if Class II drilling permits are expedited, the public process is eliminated. New rules were written to increase the public participation for injection well permitting and this bill would eliminate that if a company requested an expedited permit. It is true that the drilling permit is only part of the process, however, the injection permit is not a public process.

Road use agreements and heavy hauling permits

Under current law, horizontal well permit applicants must enter into RUMAs, ensuring that local governments or ODOT can recover costs for road impacts. RUMAs establish maintenance obligations, duration, and compensation for road use, while special regional heavy hauling permits provide additional revenue.

The bill could result in uncertain fiscal effects for the state and political subdivisions related to road maintenance and heavy hauling associated with horizontal well operations. The bill makes road maintenance and safe use agreements (RUMAs) voluntary rather than mandatory. As a result, local governments and the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) may no longer be guaranteed compensation for road wear or damage caused by oversized or overweight loads. Additionally, an exemption from special regional heavy hauling permits, under the bill, could reduce permit revenue that would otherwise help offset road maintenance costs. A standard RUMA is not achieved by eliminating the mandate. The fiscal effect would be significant if roads are used without compensation. I strongly object to this part of the bill.

Statute of limitations – oil and gas lease termination action

The bill requires an action alleging that an oil and gas lease has terminated or is no longer in effect or expired to be brought within six years after the cause of the action accrued.

This clearly reduces liability to an operator or company and puts a greater burden on the landowner. The reasoning of it makes good business sense without looking at the effects of a landowner is an egregious attempt by industry to nullify the importance of leases in good

faith. References to the statutes affected are not even cited in the bill (R.C. 2305.041 and 2305.06). This issue has been controversial for years and many settlements in court have taken place because of breach of contracts by oil and gas companies. This important issue should be considered by at least the Farm Bureau and the Royalty Landowners Association.

Without establishing a statute of limitations with other interested parties and stakeholders, I object to this portion of the bill.

Respectfully submitted,

Roxanne Groff
Advisory Board Member, Buckeye Environmental Network
Amesville 45711