

Request to Reallocate Oil & Gas Funds to Division of Parks and Watercraft

Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
Ohio State Senate

Re: Support for Reallocating \$40 Million in Oil & Gas Lease Funds to the Division of Parks and Watercraft

Dear Chairperson and Members of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for the restoration of \$40 million in oil and gas lease funds to the Division of Parks and Watercraft, as originally proposed in the Governor's FY 2026-2027 operating budget.

These funds—generated from bonus payments under state oil and gas leases—were never intended to sit idle. They were earmarked specifically for urgently needed operational support within the Division, including:

- Strengthening law enforcement presence in state parks to ensure public safety,
- Replacing aging and costly equipment with new, efficient alternatives,
- Covering contractual wage increases mandated by union agreements, and
- Addressing general inflationary operating costs that current funding does not cover.

The decision by the House to strip this funding from the Division's budget undermines the agreed-upon purpose of the oil and gas lease program and jeopardizes the safety, maintenance, and function of our state parks. These funds are not part of the General Revenue Fund and would not impact the state's broader budget—they are specific, dedicated funds intended to support the lands under which the oil and gas leases were executed.

If this reallocation is not restored, the Division will face difficult cuts to critical services like dredging, waterway management, and facilities maintenance. Additionally, the public will not see the benefits promised from oil and gas development on public lands, leading to a loss of trust and tangible harm to our parks.

I respectfully urge the Senate to reinstate this appropriation and allow the Division of Parks and Watercraft to carry out its essential mission of protecting Ohio's natural resources and the millions of visitors who rely on these spaces every year.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,