

My name is Mike Rex and I'm a resident of Athens County.

For the past 36 years, I've resided on property that's borders Strouds Run State Park, one of the 76 state parks in Ohio.

During this time, I have witnessed a dramatic decrease in park staffing. In 1989, there was a full-time park manager living on site, a maintenance manager with 3 fulltime and 2 seasonal maintenance staff members and a park ranger/officer on duty 24/7.

Today, Strouds Run State Park is managed from the Burr Oak State Park Office, a half hour away with 1 full-time maintenance worker and 2 seasonal staff. A single park ranger is responsible for 4 separate parks including Burr Oak, Strouds Run, Forked Run and Jesse Owens, which are spread out over 4 counties. There is currently no coverage after 2am nightly.

To the credit of ODNR Division of Parks and Watercraft, this "skeleton" crew remarkably continues to maintain these grounds for all Ohioans to enjoy.

A silver lining of the covid 19 pandemic was the "rediscovery" of state parks. Mostly by in-state Ohio residents, thanks in part to the travel bans imposed at the time. And park visitation continues to remain high. Ohio State Parks had a record 1.1 million overnight stays last year and visitors provided \$392 million in direct spending in park facilities while contributing over \$39 million in state and local taxes!

That being said, I am deeply concerned about further budget cuts to the Division of Parks and Watercraft!

When the Oil and Gas Land Management Commission was created by the General Assembly, it was agreed that the Division that owned the land under which oil and gas leases were executed would be able to utilize the funds from the bonus payments and royalties. Unfortunately, the House cut \$40 million of the oil and gas funding from the Division's budget.

The Division of Parks and Watercraft has several necessary uses for these funds, including:

Bolster law enforcement ranks.

Recruiting and retaining law enforcement officers.

Replace aging equipment.

Pay contractual wage increases required from recent agreements between employee unions and the state.

H2OHIO

Governor DeWine created H2Ohio with support from the General Assembly. Since then, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources has worked tirelessly to improve wetlands and river health across the state. An example of this would be the Cuyahoga River that runs through downtown Cleveland. Many years ago, the river caught on fire due to heavy pollutants and poor water quality. Today, steelhead trout are targeted by anglers.

To date, 203 wetland projects have been initiated and thousands of acres of wetlands have been restored.

The House-passed version of the bill cuts the H2Ohio program at ODNR and the other two H2Ohio agencies by roughly 44 percent.

State Parks, Preserves and Natural areas are the crown jewel of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources. I cannot overstate the importance of your continued support for these treasures!

Thank you for your time!