

In Support of H.C.R. 13 – Urging Congress to Designate the Buckeye Trail as a National Scenic Trail Before the Ohio Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee

October 7, 2025

Chairman Schaffer, Vice Chair Koehler, and Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer my testimony on behalf of the Buckeye Trail Association.

What makes the Buckeye Trail so special?

I am writing this from the perspective of my Great Grandmother, Emma Gatewood. She is better known as Grandma Gatewood by many people in the hiking community. Her story is one of perseverance, courage, and resilience.

Great Grandma had a difficult life, both physically and emotionally. After her children were grown, her marriage ended in divorce after several decades of turmoil and a tumultuous relationship with her husband. As a result, she instilled in her children the importance of having a strong work ethic, as well as a strong character. She set an example for them, and many others to follow throughout their lives.

She lived in an area during a time where walking was her primary method of traveling. So, it was not too surprising that after reading an article about the Appalachian Trail (AT) in the National Geographic magazine, she decided to “take a walk.” At age 67 she was the first person to through hike the AT. She hiked the AT a total of three times, along with hiking the Oregon Trail and other various trails as well.

Over the course of her lifetime, she found solace in the woods and on the trails. There was a peace like no other and she would write poetry, sing songs, gather herbs for medicines and teas, and enjoy the changing seasons. Through her travels, which were primarily walking, across the U.S., she had the privilege of seeing many breathtaking areas. She wanted to help people appreciate not just the beauty, but the true value of being in nature.

It was during these times that an idea started to form. Great Grandma was getting older and perhaps a little slower, although walking always remained her preferred means of transportation. Keeping her walks closer to home, while introducing the beauty she found in Ohio to others became her new passion. The concept of the Buckeye Trail (BT), a trail around the state of Ohio, began to take shape. She collaborated with like-minded people, such as Merrill Gilfillan and others such as the late Congressman Ralph Regula, in conversations about what would eventually become the BT. Creating a trail around the state was a daunting task, but those that saw the significance of what the trail could provide individuals, the communities along it, and the state overall, were not swayed from their mission. Each area of Ohio adds something different to the hiker experience, as it winds through Ohio's five eco-regions.

In 1959 the trail began with Hocking Hills. It was only the beginning and solidified that all roads lead to home, as represented by the complete loop. Grandma Gatewood participated in the dedication hike of the first twenty miles and purchased the first can of “Sweeping Blue” paint, which is the

color of the trail's blue blazes. Her favorite hike in Ohio was the 6-mile route from Old Man's Cave to Cedar Falls and then Ash Cave. That part of the Buckeye Trail is now named after her. She led an annual hike along this route, which still takes place every winter. This annual event draws thousands of people from around the country and is one of Ohio's most popular hikes.

I understand what the trail meant to my Great Grandmother. I too find solace in nature, with its beauty and wonder giving me peace and tranquility in thought and spirit. In recent years, I have started section hiking the BT, and participating in events to maintain, plan, and promote it. I also joined the Board of Trustees of the Buckeye Trail Association. My motivation has been the realization that my Great Grandmother was not only an inspiration to our family, but to many, many others too.

The following is a poem written by Emma Gatewood that sums up her thoughts about the healing power of nature.

"The Reward of Nature"

If you'll go with me to the mountains
And sleep on the leaf carpeted floors
And enjoy the bigness of nature
And the beauty of all out-of-doors,
You'll find your troubles all fading
And feel the Creator was not man
That made lovely mountains and forests
Which only a Supreme Power can.

When we trust in the Power above
And with the realm of nature hold fast,
We will have a jewel of great price
To brighten our lives till the last.

For the love of nature is healing,
If we will only give it a try
And our reward will be forthcoming,
If we go deeper than what meets the eye.

Having the Buckeye Trail designated as a National Scenic Trail would ensure that the Buckeye Trail Association, that oversees the maintenance and promotion of the trail, has the support and resources it needs to continue improving the trail and making it one of the best trails not just for Ohioans, but for others around the country for years to come. There is so much to discover on the Buckeye Trail. The trail crosses farmlands, sandstone cliffs, rolling hills, waterfalls, deep valleys, covered bridges, towpaths along canals, and communities. And you are guaranteed to meet wonderful people all along the trail.

Thank you for your time and attention. I will be glad to answer any questions, but Andrew Bashaw will be the best to answer detailed questions.