

As Introduced

136th General Assembly

Regular Session

2025-2026

H. B. No. 641

Representative Pizzulli

To require the Department of Natural Resources to
conduct two comprehensive studies on elk
reintroduction and side-by-side trail expansion,
to name this act the Trails and Tails Act, and
to make an appropriation.

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BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF OHIO:

Section 1. The Department of Natural Resources' Division
of Parks and Watercraft shall conduct a study to evaluate the
creation and expansion of all purpose vehicle and side-by-side
riding opportunities across Ohio. The Division may conduct the
study in consultation with state universities, local
governments, and relevant stakeholders. The Division shall use
Shawnee State Park, East Fork State Park, and Salt Fork State
Park as primary study sites. The study shall include all of the
following:

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(A) A geographic and environmental assessment to identify
terrain types suitable for side-by-side use. The assessment
shall include an environmental impact analysis and assess
seasonal weather effects and trail durability.

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(B) An economic and social impact assessment to estimate
the potential tourism revenue, local business growth, job

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creation opportunities, and permit and trail pass revenue potential. Such assessment shall include a cost-benefit comparison of trail construction, operation, and maintenance. 21
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(C) A safety and enforcement analysis. The analysis shall establish standards for trail width, visibility, and speed limits. Such analysis also shall evaluate emergency access routes, signage, and communication coverage. The Division shall coordinate with local law enforcement to recommend enforcement protocols. In conducting the analysis, the Division shall review noise, dust, and emissions standards to ensure environmental compliance with all applicable laws. 24
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(D) A public use and conflict management assessment. The assessment shall include proposals for zoning or temporal separation of uses and identify designated quiet or wildlife zones adjacent to trail systems. Such assessment also shall recommend seasonal or rotating trail closures to protect sensitive habitats. In conducting the assessment, the Division shall survey trail users for input. 32
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(E) An economic development and tourism integration assessment that includes statewide economic modeling of projected tourism and tax impacts. The assessment shall include developments for branding opportunities, assess potential for interstate trail connections and integrated tourism corridors, and evaluate partnerships with local tourism bureaus, chambers of commerce, and private outfitters. 39
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(F) An infrastructure and funding assessment to provide cost estimates for trail construction and grading; parking and staging areas; signage, safety, and wayfinding systems; wildlife fencing and protecting features; and visitor education kiosks and interpretive displays. In conducting the assessment, the 46
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Division shall explore federal and private funding 51
opportunities, including the U.S. Department of Transportation 52
Federal Highway Administration's Recreational Trails Program and 53
the Appalachian Regional Commission's grants and funding 54
opportunities. Such assessment also shall evaluate the 55
Division's capacity for ongoing maintenance and collaboration 56
with volunteer trail clubs. 57

Section 2. The Department of Natural Resources' Division 58
of Wildlife shall conduct a study to evaluate the feasibility of 59
reintroducing elk into Ohio's state forests and wildlife areas. 60
The Division may conduct the study in consultation with state 61
universities, local governments, and relevant stakeholders. The 62
study shall include all of the following: 63

(A) A habitat suitability assessment to identify candidate 64
zones based on size, vegetation, forage, shelter, and water 65
access. Such assessment shall utilize geographic information 66
system mapping of public and adjacent private lands to evaluate 67
habitat connectivity. The assessment also shall assess human 68
proximity to a proposed habitat and identify natural and man- 69
made migration barriers. 70

(B) An ecological impact assessment to evaluate potential 71
effects on biodiversity, native vegetation, and species 72
interactions. Such assessment shall assess potential soil, 73
forest, and water impacts from elk movement and grazing. The 74
assessment also shall analyze the risk of crop damage and 75
mitigation strategies and determine compatibility with existing 76
wildlife management zones and deer hunting practices. 77

(C) A risk analysis for chronic wasting disease, bovine 78
tuberculosis, and other transmissible diseases. The analysis 79
shall include veterinary health screening and quarantine 80

procedures for any translocated elk. The Division shall 81
coordinate its findings with the Ohio Department of Agriculture 82
and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health 83
Inspection Service. 84

(D) A source population and logistics analysis to identify 85
donor states, analyze transportation methods, mortality risks, 86
and relocation costs, and to evaluate genetic suitability, 87
appropriate transfer seasons, and acclimation procedures. 88

(E) A management and monitoring analysis to model regional 89
carrying capacity and long-term population growth. The analysis 90
shall include proposals for management strategies, including 91
potential limited hunting seasons. Such analysis also shall 92
develop annual monitoring, collar-tracking, and public reporting 93
procedures. 94

(F) A fiscal and economic evaluation to estimate the costs 95
to the state and potential return on investment through license 96
sales, tourism, and related tax revenues. The evaluation also 97
shall include cost estimates for wildlife fencing and protection 98
features and visitor education kiosks and interpretive displays. 99
In determining the cost estimates, the Division shall explore 100
federal and private funding opportunities, such as the Pittman- 101
Robertson Wildlife Restoration Fund. The Division may 102
collaborate with state universities, including The Ohio State 103
University and Shawnee State University, for ecological and 104
tourism impact research. 105

Section 3. (A) In conducting the studies described in 106
Sections 1 and 2 of this act, the Division of Parks and 107
Watercraft and the Division of Wildlife, as applicable, shall 108
require at least one public meeting for the presentation of 109
study goals and collection of feedback. Prior to final 110

submission of each study, the Divisions shall provide for a
formal public comment period on the draft report. The Divisions
shall solicit written input from all of the following:

- (1) County commissioners; 114
- (2) Farm bureaus; 115
- (3) Local tourism boards; 116
- (4) All-purpose vehicle associations; 117
- (5) Wildlife conservation organizations; and 118
- (6) Hunting and angling groups. 119

(B) The Department of Natural Resources shall submit a
comprehensive report of the studies described in Sections 1 and
2 of this act to the General Assembly and the Governor not later
than December 30, 2028. The report shall, at a minimum, include
all of the following:

- (1) Maps of candidate areas for elk reintroduction and
side-by-side trails; 125
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- (2) Economic and environmental assessments; 127
- (3) Cost estimates and funding strategies; 128
- (4) Stakeholder feedback summary; and 129
- (5) Legislative and rulemaking recommendations. 130

Section 4. All items in this act are hereby appropriated
as designated out of any moneys in the state treasury to the
credit of the designated fund. For all operating appropriations
made in this act, those in the first column are for fiscal year
2026 and those in the second column are for fiscal year 2027.
The operating appropriations made in this act are in addition to

any other operating appropriations made for these fiscal years.	137
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A DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

B General Revenue Fund

C GRF 725520 Special Projects	\$3,000,000	\$0
D GRF General Revenue Fund Total	\$3,000,000	\$0
E TOTAL ALL BUDGET FUND GROUPS	\$3,000,000	\$0

SPECIAL PROJECTS 139

Of the forgoing appropriation item 725520, Special Projects, \$2,000,000 shall be used to conduct a study to evaluate the creation and expansion of all purpose vehicle and side-by-side riding opportunities across Ohio under section 1 of this act. 140
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Of the forgoing appropriation item 725520, Special Projects, \$1,000,000 shall be use to conduct a study to evaluate the feasibility of reintroducing elk into Ohio's state forests and wildlife areas under section 2 of this act. 145
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An amount equal to the unexpended, unencumbered balance earmarked for the aforementioned studies remaining in appropriation item 725520, Special Projects, at the end of fiscal year 2026 is hereby reappropriated for the same purposes in fiscal year 2027. 149
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Section 5. Within the limits set forth in this act, the Director of Budget and Management shall establish accounts 154
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indicating the source and amount of funds for each appropriation	156
made in this act, and shall determine the manner in which	157
appropriation accounts shall be maintained. Expenditures from	158
operating appropriations contained in this act shall be	159
accounted for as though made in, and are subject to all	160
applicable provisions of, H.B. 96 of the 136th General Assembly.	161
 Section 6. This act shall be known as the Trails and Tails	162
Act.	163