



**For Immediate Release**

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## **ODNR Announces Formation of Ohio State Parks Foundation**

*Foundation focuses on projects that enhance outdoor recreation at Ohio's State Parks*

COLUMBUS, Ohio – The Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) today announced the formation of the new Ohio State Parks Foundation, a nonprofit group focused on enhancing and protecting Ohio's 75 state parks. The Foundation will work to enhance visitor experience at parks across the state by partnering with individuals, corporations, and other entities to support unique and innovative projects in the parks.

"Ohioans place great value on the outdoors," said Ohio Governor Mike DeWine. "Whether they are spending a night under the stars or hooking a fish, people truly enjoy spending time in Ohio's state parks. It's wonderful that Ohioans can now be part of making them even better through this Foundation."

Since emergence of the coronavirus, many Ohioans have flocked to the outdoors to seek respite from the challenges of the pandemic. Between June 2020 and October 2020, visitors stayed an additional 72,608 nights in state park cabins and campgrounds compared to the same period in 2019. A record number of Ohioans registered paddle craft and purchased hunting and fishing licenses.

"The state park system is one of Ohio's most popular and visited recreation destinations and one of the best state park systems in the country," said Foundation member Fran Buchholzer. "Supporting and enhancing our state parks with the formation of an Ohio State Parks Foundation is supporting Ohio families and park visitors with more opportunities to relax, enjoy, and experience the beauty and wonders of nature in addition to quiet time for reflection and an escape from the challenges and stress of today's world".

"The trails in Ohio's State Parks are among the most beautiful in the entire country," said Foundation member Buck Niehoff. "Walking them is a great way to improve your mental, spiritual, and physical health, especially at this time of COVID."

A love of nature and a passion for outdoor recreation unite the founding members of the Foundation, including:

- Fran Buchholzer, former director of ODNR and conservation advocate
- Clyde Gosnell, military veteran, retired architect, educational and conservation advocate, and founder of related organizations

- Dr. Marcia Latta, vice president of university advancement at the University of Findlay
- H. C. Buck Niehoff, retired attorney and author
- Keith Shumate, attorney and chairman of the board at The Columbus Zoo and The Wilds
- Bob Taft, Governor of Ohio 1999-2007

"I'm honored to serve on the Ohio State Parks Foundation Board because the state parks have given me so many great memories, both as a child, and as a parent with my family on day trips and vacations," said Foundation member Dr. Marcia Latta. "I am pleased to support and advocate for our great parks to help make them even better to give all Ohioans the opportunity to explore their beauty and enjoy the outdoor activities."

The Foundation will first be working to fund a project focused on inclusion. Public spaces are for everyone, and the Foundation will focus on ensuring that all visitors feel welcome and safe. Funds will be used to enhance existing waterways and to create an accessible experience for all.

"Ohio is truly blessed with wonderful parks across the state," said Foundation member Keith Shumate. "I am delighted to be part of an organization whose mission is to improve and protect the parks in the state of Ohio, thereby ensuring even greater access and enjoyment by all."

Ohio ranks 6<sup>th</sup> in the nation for number of registered paddle craft. Making this popular pastime accessible is one priority for the Ohio State Parks Foundation. Accessible launch ramps, kayaks, and accessories will become available at select park locations. These purchases will enable individuals with limited mobility or who use a wheelchair or mobility device to safely access the water.

"Ohio's parks have been an amazing way for my family to enjoy the natural beauty of our state," said Foundation member former Governor Bob Taft. "I am honored to be part of this new foundation that will enhance our parks and make them even more accessible to every Ohioan."

Making trails safe and accessible to more Ohioans is also a priority for the Foundation. Trails naturally bring family and friends together while promoting healthy living. For visitors who use a wheelchair or mobility device, funds will be used to purchase all-terrain wheelchairs specially designed for the safe navigation of uneven surfaces. For visitors who are blind or have low vision, safety features and enhancements will be added at select trail locations to enhance the outdoor exploration experience. These features include braille signs along the trail, physical aids (such as guide ropes, which enable those with visual disabilities to navigate the trail without assistance) and sensory displays focused on touch (e.g. tree bark, soil, rocks), sound (audio guides, stream waters, etc.), and smell (wildflowers, pine cones, etc.).

"I consider serving the public natural experience made possible through the ODNR non-profit foundation a privilege and responsibility, and am grateful for doing so," Foundation member Clyde Gosnell said. "There are occasions in one's life that a special heart beat pulses to resonate the desire to make one perform a duty beyond, and a special relationship with those that do truly care."

Most Ohioans live within an hour of an Ohio state park. The parks never charge a fee to enter. ODNR encourages all Ohioans to get out and explore a state park, and to support the Ohio State Parks Foundation today.

For more information about Ohio State Parks Foundation and to support their work, please visit [ohiostateparksfoundation.org](http://ohiostateparksfoundation.org) or contact Catherine Fynes, interim executive director, at 380-209-2284 or Beth Waldren, fundraiser, at [beth.waldren@gmail.com](mailto:beth.waldren@gmail.com)

*ODNR ensures a balance between wise use and protection of our natural resources for the benefit of all. Visit the ODNR website at [ohiodnr.gov](http://ohiodnr.gov).*

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**For more information contact:**

Stephanie O'Grady, ODNR Communications  
(614) 265-6860