



TRANSFORMING OHIO FOR JOBS + GROWTH

2016 MID-BIENNIUM REVIEW

A COMMON SENSE APPROACH TO SERVING OHIO BOATERS

Consolidating Ohio State Parks and the Division of Watercraft Delivers Greater Efficiencies for Boaters, Park Visitors and Others Who Enjoy Ohio's Outdoors

Governor John R. Kasich continuously has challenged agencies to seek out new ways to make government more efficient, cost effective and user friendly. The Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) has undertaken a number of initiatives aimed at reducing the costly and inefficient overlap that exists between its nine divisions, while improving service for its customers. One such step, passed into law as part of the governor's 2016 Mid-Biennium Review, consolidates ODNR's divisions of Watercraft and State Parks. This reform not only offers Ohioans improved services and cost savings while also enabling ODNR law enforcement to provide greater protections for visitors at Ohio's state parks, natural areas, rivers and lakes. This builds on ODNR's efforts in recent years to cross-train its Forestry, Parks and Watercraft officers, successfully reducing training costs and improving officer response and safety efforts across state properties.

Boating Opportunities are the Centerpiece of Ohio's State Parks: Nearly every one of Ohio's 74 state parks is home to a lake or river that is used for recreational boating and the Ohio State Parks system maintains most of the docks, marinas and access points for boaters at these locations. Yet for years, two different ODNR divisions have had to staff and maintain separate operations to serve the public at a single state park. In fact, under the traditional bureaucratic set-up, officers of these different divisions have been confined to patrolling very specific areas based on the separation of the duties – creating response and safety concerns for the public as well as the officers.

Improving Customer Service: By bringing together these two operations, Ohio will now provide watercraft and parks users with a single office and a unified corps of officers to assist with service requests. Work already is underway to consolidate office space and share services, so that avid boaters and paddlers will be able to register their vessels and conduct other business in the same place where they intend to go boating. As this consolidation is implemented, Ohioans will benefit from a one-stop shop for all their recreational needs. In addition, eliminating patrol boundaries that had previously restricted state park and watercraft officers will improve response times and provide better protection for visitors.

Driving More Money to Support its Customers: As separate staffs of ODNR's Watercraft and Ohio State Parks divisions are consolidated into a unified corps, unnecessary duplication of services is being eliminated. Without the need to maintain separate office space and related utility and overhead expenses, cost-savings ultimately free up more money for ODNR to serve its customers. Costs associated with overtime and training will also be significantly reduced.

Maintaining Transparency and Separation of Funding That Boaters Deserve: By longstanding state law, Division of Watercraft operations are funded in part by a portion of state motor fuel taxes attributable to fuel purchased for boating. That law is not changing and the segregation of dedicated funding sources for Ohio State Parks and Watercraft will remain unchanged, even as the divisions are now consolidated into a single entity. This ensures stakeholders of continued opportunities to provide input in the projects that impact Ohio's parks, nature preserves and waterways. The formula by which a defined share of state gas tax revenue is dedicated to boating-related activities remains the same.

BOTTOM LINE: Boating is one of the most popular activities in Ohio's state parks. With consolidation of these two ODNR divisions, outdoor enthusiasts and taxpayers will now be better served by enhanced customer service and safety.

