

House Ways & Means Committee
2-11-15

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee:

My name is Tom Hohman. I'm a professional engineer and retired Director of the Division of Engineering with Dept. of Natural Resources. I'm also president of Indiana Parks Alliance.

Indiana Parks Alliance is a not-for-profit organization with a mission of supporting Indiana's state parks and state owned nature preserves through education, promotion, and fundraising. We strive to raise funds to supplement state funding for projects and programs at these facilities without replacing state funding.

It is the belief of the Indiana Parks Alliance that the State of Indiana has an obligation to maintain the facilities and natural resources of Indiana's state parks and state owned, dedicated nature preserves. These properties and facilities represent a treasure for the citizens of Indiana. State government has a responsibility to future generations to protect and maintain these properties so that our children will have the same opportunities for contact with nature that we did.

Recent years have been rough ones for the Divisions of State Parks and Nature Preserves, and in fact for all of DNR. The Department of Natural Resources reverted over \$100 million dollars in unspent funds from the legislative approved budgets for the fiscal years 2008-2013. Those years were tough times for everyone, and a reduction in funding to help Indiana get through that period is understandable. However, that loss of funding has caused DNR to fall way behind on scheduled maintenance of its facilities.

In 2007, before the economic crisis of the following year, the legislature passed a biennium construction budget that included \$72.5 million dollars for DNR. That was a typical construction budget for the period, and is probably a sustainable budget.

Construction funding since then has been a fraction of that amount. At a quick glance the proposed 2015-17 construction budget appears to be returning closer to previous levels. However, of the \$61 million proposed, \$24 million is for a new inn at Potato Creek. That leaves only \$37 million for the remaining 3,900 buildings and structures that DNR owns. This is half of what would be a sustainable budget.

DNR has also struggled to maintain the operational level that the public expects. Current funding shortfalls have caused DNR to maintain a lengthy list of unfilled positions, positions that are needed to provide clean and safe facilities for users, nature programming for our children, and maintain high quality natural areas. As of January 15, 15% of DNR positions were held vacant, mostly due to lack of funds. Yet the proposed 2017 fiscal year operating budget for Department of Natural Resources is 8.9% less than in 2015, and 5.1% less than in 2008.

We urge you to increase the DNR budget across the board for operation and construction. To speak specifically to the two divisions that are the core of our mission, we urge you increase the Division of Nature Preserves budget by \$300,000 and the Division of State Parks budget by \$3 million.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak.