



BUCKEYE TRAIL ASSOCIATION, INC.

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Buckeye Trail Association Testimony in support of H.R. 6142 to the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands of the House Committee on Natural Resources

February 3, 2022

Good Morning Chairman Neguse and Members of the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands.

Thank you for the opportunity to express the Buckeye Trail Association's enthusiastic support for H.R. 6142 - The Buckeye National Scenic Trail Feasibility Act of 2021 - introduced by co-sponsors Congressmen Tim Ryan and Anthony Gonzalez. Your consideration is a great compliment to the hard work of generations of Buckeye Trail Association volunteers who have built, maintained, protected and promoted the trail they dreamed to hike and share with us all. This bill could bring increased National recognition to one of Ohio's greatest ideas as well as a cost effective investment in America's National Trails System.

"The Buckeye Trail; So far it is just an idea" is the name of the 1958 Columbus *Dispatch* article written by Ohio Department of Natural Resources employee Merrill Gilfillan. This ambitious vision of a hiking trail connecting our Great Lake Erie to our great river; Lake Erie near Cleveland to the Ohio River in Cincinnati through the forested hills of Appalachian Ohio in the image of the Appalachian Trail predated the National Trails System Act by a decade.

The idea of a Buckeye Trail (BT) inspired the creation of the Buckeye Trail Association (BTA) by a small group of Ohioans in 1959 who immediately set to work routing the first 20 miles through the Hocking Hills region of Ohio with its towering blackhand sandstone cliffs, waterfalls and unique Hemlock forests. Six miles of the BT here are named in honor of Emma "Grandma" Gatewood, the first woman solo thru-hiker of the Appalachian Trail and a founding member of the BTA.

The idea continued to grow and become the reality that Ohioans dreamed of through the hard work of BTA volunteers and an expansive network of landowner partnerships. In 1967, then Ohio State Senator Ralph Regula, stewarded Ohio Senate Concurrent Resolution 22 to designate the Buckeye Trail as the state trail of Ohio. Regula went on to become a US Congressman and a longstanding member of this Committee on Natural Resources. His seat for the Ohio District is now filled by Congressman Gonzalez, co-sponsor of H.R. 6142. In 1970, State Senator Regula painted the last blaze at the dedication of the then 500 mile Buckeye Trail. In 1974, the BT saw its first thru-hike completion, a high school teacher leading four students on a 500-mile adventure of a lifetime.

And then the idea continued to grow. Perhaps taking a cue from the original vision that "it should be as endless and as boundless as the energy and the imagination of those who would use it," the BT was extended into our nation's longest continuous loop trail, completed in 1980 at a site that would one day become Cuyahoga Valley National Park.

Today, 64 years later, Ohio's 1,448-mile Buckeye Trail continues to grow in depth of experience while remaining focused on that original idea. Two-by-six inch painted blue blazes serve as simple beacons leading us from Lake Erie to the Ohio River all around Ohio and back again. These

thousands of blazes have been the starting point for millions of people's adventures of hiking, joining, and volunteering on the Buckeye Trail. Today the Buckeye Trail is many things to many people.

The NTSA of 1968 describes National Scenic Trails as "...extended trails so located as to provide for maximum outdoor recreation potential and for the conservation and enjoyment of the nationally significant scenic, historic, natural, or cultural qualities of the areas through which such trails may pass."

The Buckeye Trail meets the criteria set forth in the National Trails System Act for designation as a National Scenic Trail. At 1,448 miles it is an extended and continuous route that would be the 5th longest of the existing National Scenic Trails, between the 2,190 mile Appalachian Trail and the 1,300 mile Florida Trail.

Ohio's Buckeye Trail maximizes outdoor recreation potential and conservation and enjoyment of the nationally significant scenic, historic, natural, and cultural qualities by physically connecting, highlighting, and stewarding sites around the Buckeye State in one unified trail experience. These include but are not limited to:

- Federally-managed public lands, including the Wayne National Forest, with arguably the nation's first environmental restoration effort after the coal mining boom of the late 1880's and subsequent Labor organizing history; and the scenic Cuyahoga Valley National Park, with its breathtaking natural features and miles of Ohio & Erie Canal remnant waterways and locks. In addition, the Buckeye Trail ties together the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historic Park including the Wright Brothers Huffman Prairie Flying Field in southwest Ohio to the Ohio & Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor and the National Historic Landmark of Zoar Village.

- National Historic Landmarks such as the Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Center and Home in NW OH and the James A. Garfield National Historic Site and Home in NE OH, are connected in one visionary experience to National Natural Areas around the state. From Tinker's Creek Gorge and Mentor Marsh State Nature Preserve in NE OH, to prehistoric mound builders work at the Fort Hill Earthworks and Nature Preserve to the internationally known Serpent Mound Cryptoexplosive Structure - a National Historic Site and America's largest effigy mound perched on rim of a meteorite crater in SW OH. Our connected National Natural Areas include the serene Glen Helen Nature Preserve and the Little Miami River, Ohio's first National Wild & Scenic River as well. Many more sites of national significance on the National Register of Historic Places are part of the Buckeye Trail experience, including the Village of Shawnee National Historic District where the statewide office of the BTA is located.

- Other sites of national significance include Fort Laurens, OH's only Revolutionary War Fort, Fort Defiance and other sites from the front lines of the War of 1812. Pickawillany, the Miami Tribes largest city at the time of Euro-american expansion, with Johnston Farm and Indian Agency. The stair-stepping Lockington Locks along the historic Miami & Erie Canal that saw the last of the Miami Tribe removed by canal boat to Oklahoma under the Indian Removal Act. Various stops along the Underground Railroad from Cincinnati, to the Village of Chesterhill in the Appalachian hill country to the Lighthouse at Fairport Harbor on the shore of Lake Erie, the last stop on U.S. soil for escaped enslaved people enroute to Canada. As well as Civil War mustering grounds at Camp Dennison and overlapping points of General John Hunt Morgan's Confederate Raid across Ohio's hill country.

For some the Buckeye Trail is their very first outdoor adventure in a new parent's backpack carrier

on a local nature trail, an outdoor classroom on a school field trip, or the first real overnight backpacking trip with their scout troop over the challenging ridges of the “Little Smokies” of Shawnee State Forest and Wilderness Area. For many it has been the safe place to meet and reconnect during the Covid-19 pandemic, and for others it’s the needed time and space for a combat veteran to walk off the war by completing a three-month thru-hike - and for millions of everyday citizens, a welcome few hours of respite from modern-day life.

For many, the Buckeye Trail is all about the people. It’s the people whom we meet when we step out of our comfort zone to attend a local BTA Chapter hike and find a group of people just like us who are looking to explore their own backyard. The hikers we connect with that share hiking advice at the end of the day’s hike over a drink at a local restaurant in Loveland, OH - one of 18 designated Buckeye Trail Towns. Near the Village of Chesterhill, it’s a landowner’s pleasure to see friendly hikers coming out of their woods as they had hoped for, and looking forward to chatting on their back porch.

For others the Buckeye Trail is the act of giving back and feeling good about it. It can be found during those chance moments when a Buckeye Trail Crew volunteer takes a moment from digging new trail out of the side of a hill by hand in the Wayne National Forest to allow a group of backpacking college kids to pass by and continue their weekend adventure.

The BT is a place to step onto and give back – a volunteer act filled with hope that the hikers that follow will have an equal or better life-changing experience. Each year hundreds of BTA volunteers devote thousands of hours so that millions of hikers can enjoy the BT. On average 10,000 to 20,000 volunteer hours are invested each year, an *Independent Sector* value of \$285,400 to \$570,800, building, maintaining, protecting and promoting Ohio’s BT.

Today the BTA is a large volunteer corps served by a small professional staff supported by 1,300 members and donors without state or federal funding for daily operations. The BTA is also a land trust, purchasing its first property from a willing seller in 1977, continuing to find strategic parcels and partnerships with private landowners to relocate segments of the BT off of road walks and on to newly constructed hiking trail. The BTA is a hiking organization with a family oriented spirit encouraging more and more Ohioans and visitors to get out and explore all of Ohio’s natural and cultural treasures unified into one experience by those painted blue blazes.

The BTA is also an economic driver, an important segment of Ohio’s \$10.7 billion outdoor recreation economy (Outdoor Industry Association, 2020). Anecdotally, the Hocking Hills region experiences higher visitation numbers than Yellowstone National Park. Tourism is the number one industry in Hocking County in SE OH -square in Ohio’s Appalachian region - and the BT is a primary access point to most of the highest demand sites in the region. Combined with the BT experience in Cuyahoga Valley National Park in NE OH and the Little Miami Scenic Trail in SW OH, it is easy to see how the BT has become the backbone to Ohio’s trails network and an important infrastructure to our outdoor recreational economy.

The Buckeye Trail is inspiring and deserving of national consideration. We are pleased that Congressmen Ryan and Gonzalez have been inspired by the trail in their backyards that connects their constituents to the rest of the Buckeye State, and the National Trail System, to elevate Ohio’s treasure for consideration.

The potential of the idea of the Buckeye National Scenic Trail would add significant visibility and recognition to the efforts of BTA volunteers and our partnerships with federal, state and local land

management agencies such as the Wayne National Forest and Cuyahoga Valley National Park. Also, there would be no significant change or impact to adjacent landowners along the Buckeye Trail corridor as property owners have peacefully coexisted with the trail for many years. (The Trail celebrated its 60th anniversary in 2019.) Designating Ohio's Buckeye Trail would be an investment in the people of Ohio, their outdoor recreation economy, assisting to meet the increased demand for access to Ohio's great outdoors for a greater diversity of Americans, and sharing our nationally significant stories all around the BT's circuitous route. If the Buckeye Trail were considered for designation as a National Scenic Trail it would be a cost-effective investment in the enrichment and interconnectedness of the National Trails System as a whole.

Thank you for your consideration, and go Bengals!



Andrew Bashaw
Executive Director
Buckeye Trail Association

Buckeye Trail by the Numbers

- 1,448 miles long circumnavigating Ohio, including:
 - 259 miles within 17 different county metro park system lands
 - 245 miles within Ohio Department of Natural Resources lands
 - 18 State Parks, 11 State Wildlife Areas, 6 State Forests, 4 State Nature Preserves, several State Canal Lands, and 6 Ohio History Connection Historical Sites.
 - 64 miles with US Army Corps of Engineers waterways
 - 60 miles with 40 Villages and Cities
 - 58 miles on 2 Units of the Wayne National Forest
 - 43 miles on 2 Watershed Conservancy Districts
 - 35 miles on Non-governmental organization preserved lands
 - 19 miles on private lands
 - 16 miles within the Cuyahoga Valley National Park
 - 6 miles on 5 Buckeye Trail Association Preserves
 - 60% of the BT is planned to be off road within 5 years
 - 40% primarily incorporates less used, often scenic Ohio backroads
- 26 Sections of the Buckeye Trail
- 100 Ohio Communities
- 18 officially-designated Buckeye Trail Towns
- 47 Counties
- 1,300 members
- 8 BTA Chapters
- 200 regular BTA Volunteers
- 10,000 20,000 volunteer hours per year
- 3 Full Time Equivalent Staff

Buckeye Trail Association Mission

The Buckeye Trail Association is the leader in building, maintaining, protecting and promoting use of Ohio's longest scenic hiking trail for our citizens, communities and partners. We provide outdoor recreation, opportunities to volunteer, education, access to the varied resources of Ohio and local economic benefits.

Buckeye Trail Association Vision

The Buckeye Trail, Ohio's State Scenic Trail, is a sustainable hiking trail that provides a safe and unique experience throughout the state reflecting the diverse resources, people and stories of Ohio. The trail is a dedicated, recognized and protected route developed and maintained by the Buckeye Trail Association, an organization reflective of the diversity of the trail. The Buckeye Trail Association works in close partnership with communities, organizations and agencies around Ohio creating a legacy for present and future generations.

Buckeye Trail Timeline

- 1958 - The Buckeye Trail; "So Far it is Just an Idea" published in the Columbus *Dispatch*
- 1959 - The 501(c)3 nonprofit Buckeye Trail Association forms and the first 20 miles are laid out in Hocking County
- 1967 - The Buckeye Trail is designated Ohio's State Trail by OH Senate Concurrent Resolution 22
- 1970 - The 500-mile Buckeye Trail is completed from Lake Erie to the Ohio River
- 1974 - The first known thru-hike of the BT is completed
- 1977 - BTA purchases its first property to permanently protect the BT corridor, and donates it to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources
- 1980 - The 1,200-mile Buckeye Trail is completed as the nation's longest loop trail at Cuyahoga Valley
 - The BTA hosts a segment of the new 4,600-mile North Country National Scenic Trail
- 2000 - The Buckeye Trail is designated as a Millennium Legacy Trail
 - The BTA hosts a segment of the new 6,800-mile American Discovery Trail
 - The BTA leads in developing the Ohio Trails Partnership with other leaders of Ohio's non-motorized trail community which continues today
 - The Buckeye Trail reaches a full length of 1,400+ miles.
- 2010 - The BTA hires its first professional staff
- 2011 - The BTA develops the Buckeye Trail Town program, Ohio's only trail town program
- 2018 - The BTA leads in developing the Ohio Legislative Trails Caucus
- 2021 - Buckeye Trail hike Fastest Known Time recorded: 1,448 miles in just 38 days.