

Ohio Marine Trades Association
and Government Advantage Group

LEGISLATIVE REPORT

OCTOBER 2025



Military Discounts at Parks

Senator Tom Patton has introduced Senate Bill 223, that would require the ODNR Division of Parks and Watercraft Chief to create a discount program offering reduced rates on state park services and rentals for veterans and active-duty service members.

The discount does not apply to merchandise purchases. Services discounted could include boat rentals and dock space. This bill is receiving hearings before the Senate Armed Services, Veterans Affairs and Public Safety Committee and is supported by veteran's groups.

Boat Dock Lottery for 16 Ohio State Parks Now Open

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources has opened its annual boat dock lottery for the 2026 boating season, offering slips at 16 popular state parks. Applications are accepted online through October 31, and winners will have the chance to renew their dock rental for up to five years. Applicants must provide proof of boat ownership and registration and may apply for multiple parks but only once per park per household.

Participating parks include Alum Creek, Buck Creek, Buckeye Lake, Burr Oak, Caesar Creek, Delaware, Dillon, Indian Lake, Lake Milton, Mary Jane Thurston, Mosquito Lake, Paint Creek, Rocky Fork, Salt Fork, Shawnee, and West Branch. For more information and to apply, visit ohiodnr.gov/docklottery or contact the local park offices.

Columbus funds park upgrades at Hoover Reservoir, Franklin Conservatory, Three Creeks

Columbus City Council unanimously approved nearly \$5.1 million in new funding for several parks and environmental projects aimed at enhancing recreation and conservation efforts across the city. The largest share, just over \$2.1 million, will go toward improvements at Hoover Reservoir. Another \$957,500 is allocated for wetland restoration at Three Creeks, supporting ecological preservation and flood mitigation. In addition, \$2 million in bond funds will support capital improvements and the master plan at Franklin Park Conservatory and Botanical Gardens. City officials said these investments are designed to strengthen community access to green spaces while advancing long-term environmental goals.

Governor DeWine Announces Formation of Public Safety in Ohio State Parks Working Group

Governor DeWine announced the creation of the Public Safety in Ohio State Parks Working Group to evaluate how emergency services are provided at Ohio's 76 state parks and their impact on surrounding communities. The group will be co-chaired by Andy Wilson, Director of the Ohio Department of Public Safety, and Mary Mertz, Director of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources. Members include representatives from law enforcement, EMS, local government, tourism, and recreation groups.

DeWine formed the group after vetoing a budget provision that would have required ODNR to reimburse local governments for emergency services at South Bass Island State Park without additional funding. The group will review emergency service demands in state parks and their costs to communities. Its first public meeting is scheduled for November 18, 2025, at ODPS headquarters in Columbus.

Senate Bill 233

Senate Bill 233 sponsored by Senator Patton which requires a 25% state park discount for verified veterans and service members, excluding merchandise purchases, was unanimously voted out of committee this week.

House Bill 399

House Bill 399 sponsored by Reps Rader and Cockley which effectively bans the taking or removal of oil or natural gas from and under the bed of Lake Erie and from and under Ohio state parks, had its sponsor testimony this week in House Natural Resources committee.

Engagement at Statewide Tourism Summit

OMTA sponsored and attended the 2025 Travel & Tourism Summit hosted by Ohio Chamber of Commerce, which convened state officials, business leaders, and tourism advocates to discuss the future of Ohio's tourism economy.

The summit focused on several key themes:

- **Tourism as an Economic Driver:** Presentations highlighted the economic impact of travel and tourism on Ohio's economy, emphasizing the importance of supporting venues, events, and attractions that draw visitors from across the region and beyond.
- **Public-Private Partnerships:** Speakers underscored the value of collaboration between state agencies, local governments, and industry groups to strengthen infrastructure and expand promotional efforts.
- **Destination Development:** Breakout sessions focused on how communities can enhance their tourism assets, such as state parks, and waterfront attractions.
- **Legislative and Policy Outlook:** Lawmakers and agency representatives discussed funding priorities, marketing strategies, and ways to align tourism growth with environmental stewardship.

Participation in this summit allowed OMTA to connect directly with state tourism officials, industry leaders, and other stakeholders to highlight the importance of maintaining and enhancing Ohio's recreational and event spaces. These discussions further reinforce the critical role that venues such as the I-X Center play in supporting the state's tourism and boating economy.

Officials in Ohio, beyond launch Great Lakes partnership

Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine and other Great Lakes leaders announced a new regional initiative to promote sustainable agriculture during the 2025 Great Lakes St. Lawrence Governors & Premiers Leadership Summit in Quebec City. The multiyear effort aims to strengthen the region's \$1 trillion agriculture industry, which employs more than 6.5 million people, while protecting water quality and improving food security.

In its first year, the initiative will develop a research and action agenda to guide policy, foster collaboration, and inform future pilot projects. A guiding resolution commits participating states and provinces to ongoing information sharing and joint problem-solving to ensure long-term agricultural and environmental resilience.

Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Ontario, and Québec are all participating. Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro was elected the group's new chair, succeeding Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, with Indiana Gov. Mike Braun as vice chair. The initiative aligns with DeWine's continued

focus on water quality improvements, including through his H2Ohio program, though its funding was reduced by over \$100 million in the latest state budget.

Waterways Safety Council Meeting on November 12 Open to Public

The Ohio Waterways Safety Council (WSC) will hold its next quarterly virtual meeting on Tuesday, November 12, from 9 to 11:30 a.m. The meeting, open to the public via Microsoft Teams Live, will include updates from the ODNR Division of Parks and Watercraft on current projects and boating issues across the state. OMTA is pleased to have our Chairman Gary Tennefoss serving on the Council.

Cleveland I-X Center

Michelle Burke, OMTA President, along with Amanda, and RJ, OMTA lobbyists, are meeting with members of the Ohio Legislature to emphasize the critical importance of keeping the Cleveland I-X Center open and operational for major public events, particularly the Cleveland Boat Show. They have outlined how the I-X Center serves as a vital economic engine for Northeast Ohio—supporting thousands of jobs, generating significant tourism and local business revenue, and providing a unique venue capable of hosting large-scale consumer shows that drive regional commerce. Attached in the link is Michelle's letter to the editor regarding the impacts of the [I-X Center closing](#).

Senate Bill 223

The Ohio Senate unanimously passed Senate Bill 223, which requires the ODNR Division of Parks and Watercraft to create a discount program for veterans and active-duty service members covering state park services and rentals. The bill now advances to the Ohio House for further consideration.

ODNR Meeting

OMTA was represented by Michelle, Amanda, and RJ in a meeting with ODNR staff to review existing laws related to watercraft dealers. During the discussion, industry concerns were reiterated that the current requirements to be granted a watercraft dealer license could be strengthened, noting that many entities hold watercraft dealer licenses without appearing to operate as bona fide dealers.