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Kasich proposes \$346M for open space and farmland preservation, park and trail improvements, and Lake Erie clean up

(Columbus, OH)--Ohio Governor John Kasich is receiving high praise from conservation and environmental groups for his proposal to invest in land and water conservation projects across the state. The funding is part of the Governor's proposed capital improvements budget, introduced at the Statehouse on Tuesday.

The centerpiece of the Kasich conservation plan is \$100 million for the popular Clean Ohio Fund, including \$75 million to acquire open space and parkland and protect ecologically sensitive areas and stream corridors. Rounding out the funding is \$12.5 million to build new recreational and bicycle trails and \$12.5 million for preserve prime, family farmland.

Kasich is proposing the maximum funding allowed for the Clean Ohio Fund, a pool of state bond dollars that matches local funds for qualifying projects.

Another significant conservation investment includes \$10 million for the Healthy Lake Erie Initiative. Begun in 2012, the fund helps reduce the threat of harmful algal blooms and divert contaminated harbor dredges from open-lake disposal, which can harm fish and wildlife habitats and the lake's \$11 billion annual recreational and tourism industry.

The Governor's overall capital budget of \$236.4 million for the Department of Natural Resources includes investments in Ohio's popular state parks. The funding is urgently needed to address an enormous backlog of well documented, needed improvements to its campgrounds, cabins, lodges and other recreational facilities while also investing in local parks projects statewide.

"We appreciate and support the Governor's ongoing commitment to the Clean Ohio Fund, which is recognized nationally as a successful, effective public-private partnership. And, the continued investment in the Healthy Lake Erie Initiative enhances and leverages existing efforts among many stakeholders to improve the lake's water quality," commented Josh Knights, executive director of The Nature Conservancy in Ohio.

"The Clean Ohio Fund is an enduring example of the public consensus in support of a healthy environment and quality of life. Hats off to Governor Kasich for recognizing the importance of this vital program," said Don Hollister, Executive Director of the Ohio League of Conservation Voters.

"Like most Ohioans, Governor Kasich recognizes that conserving natural resources and providing high quality recreation opportunities contributes greatly to our quality of life," said Woody Woodward, Executive Director of the Ohio Parks and Recreation Association. "We are incredibly grateful for the Governor's commitment to invest in the future of Ohio by investing in these important resources."

"This is a huge step forward for conservation in Ohio and a genuine recognition of the importance of preserving our state's tremendous natural resources. We applaud the governor for his support of one of the most valuable and impactful programs we have seen. Clean Ohio will continue to create healthier, more vibrant communities across our state," said Rich Cochran, President and CEO of the Western Reserve Land Conservancy.

"These smart investments will enable more families to hike, bike, fish, camp, canoe, and explore Ohio's great outdoors. Gov. Kasich is flexing major-league conservation leadership, and all Ohioans will be better off because of it," said Jack Shaner, Deputy Director for the Ohio Environmental Council.

Lawmakers are expected to quickly approve the capital budget bill (HB 497). Project funding would begin on July 1, the start of the next state fiscal year, and continue for two years.