

Week in Review

6/5/2023

AGRICULTURE

The 2023 Ohio State Fair will be his last as fair general manager, Virgil Strickler announced Thursday. Strickler was joined at the news conference outside the Ohio Expo Center & State Fair administration building by Gov. Mike DeWine, Ohio Expositions Commission Chair Angela Krile and Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) Director Mary Mertz. Mertz, who also serves as a member of the Ohio Expositions Commission, will chair the committee responsible for identifying candidates for the general manager position. Details about the position and how to apply are available at www.ohiostatefair.com and www.ohioexpocenter.com. Job applications will be accepted until Friday, Sept. 1, 2023, with the goal of having a new general manager in place by the start of the new year, Mertz said.

More than 2,000 Northwest Ohio farmers have become involved in the Ohio Agriculture Conservation Initiative's (OACI) certification program since early 2020, OACI said Tuesday. The certification program helps farmers throughout Ohio take their conservation efforts to the next level with a free, confidential analysis that allows them to better manage on-farm nutrients to improve water quality, the organization said.

ATTORNEY GENERAL

Operators of public accommodations can legally restrict the use of restrooms, changing rooms and locker rooms to a single sex, according to an official opinion from Attorney General Dave Yost. "[A] policy limiting bathrooms, changing rooms and locker rooms to a single sex does not 'deny' anyone access to public accommodations, and thus does not violate R.C. 4112.02(G)," Yost said, responding to an opinion request from Greene County Prosecutor David Hayes. "I do not wish to diminish the reality that some transgender individuals may feel uncomfortable or disrespected if made to abide by such policies. But in this context, as in so many other legal contexts, the law does not protect subjective preferences," Yost said. "Some may consider this equal access right insufficient to protect the interests of our transgender citizens. But only the Legislature can broaden the statutory right -- I cannot make the statute confer something more than the equal access the statutory text guarantees."

Older Americans Month in May celebrated the achievements and longevity of the state's elders, but just as important, Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost says, is it reinforced the collective responsibility to protect their dignity and keep them safe as they age. "Not only does my office go after those who neglect, steal and abuse older Ohioans," Yost said, "but we also work hard to help older adults who go missing return home safely to loved ones." Key to the latter efforts, according to Yost, is the Endangered Missing Adult Alert program, which is administered by the attorney general's Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI). Using statewide emergency alerts, BCI works with local law enforcement agencies to help find endangered older Ohioans who are reported missing. In many cases, the missing adults have dementia or other health challenges and could be in danger.

AUDITOR OF STATE

Auditor of State Keith Faber Wednesday supported legislation that would increase the reporting requirements for government officials when it comes to waste, fraud and abuse. Faber, testifying before the Senate Government Oversight Committee, said that, while existing law covers many of the areas addressed in SB91 (Schaffer), it would hopefully get information to his office sooner. He noted that the sooner his office is made aware of fraud, the better chance they have to recover any lost funds, but the longer it takes to be reported, those funds will be harder to recover.

BALLOT ISSUES

A proposed reproductive and abortion rights amendment is a single constitutional amendment and the Ohio Ballot Board did not abuse its discretion in determining it as so, the Ohio Supreme Court unanimously ruled Thursday, rejecting a lawsuit that sought to have it divided into multiple issues.

Cincinnati Right to Life members John Giroux and Margaret DeBlase filed the lawsuit in March, arguing that the Ohio Ballot Board had abused its discretion by holding no discussion and debate as to whether to approve the measure as one issue and for failing to recognize that abortion is an "inherently different" and "unique act" compared to other reproductive rights. In its mandamus opinion, joined by Justices Michael Donnelly, Melody Stewart and Jennifer Brunner, the Court referred back to its precedent opinion in *Ohio Liberty Council v. Brunner*, where it held that a legislative proposal consists of one amendment to the Constitution if each of its subjects relates to some general purpose or object. The Court said the argument on abortion is not consistent with the *Ohio Liberty Council* standard.

FY24-25 BUDGET

The Senate version of biennial budget bill HB33 (Edwards) is expected to be introduced Tuesday, June 6 according to Senate President Matt Huffman (R-Lima), with a floor vote held by Thursday, June 15. Huffman told reporters passing the budget on that date should give lawmakers plenty of time to hammer out differences before sending the bill to the governor by the end of the month.

Meanwhile, Huffman maintains his skepticism about the sustainability of the Cupp-Patterson school funding formula and argues a forthcoming Senate version of the budget, HB33 (Edwards), will provide a predictable and more sustainable framework. He also expressed doubt about enacting totally universal voucher eligibility, saying he wants the Senate budget to focus on helping more kids, particularly those who don't have other choices. "This formula isn't any more predictable than it was before. Because in four years, the formula will require that a large number of school districts go off the guarantee," Huffman said. "It's even more unsustainable than I thought it was two years ago."

Teachers and parents urged senators to follow the House's lead in using the budget bill to repeal the retention mandate from Ohio's third grade reading law, among many other requests the Senate Finance Committee heard during a lengthy meeting Wednesday.

CORONAVIRUS/MONKEYPOX

New COVID-19 cases continued to decline Thursday, according to Ohio Department of Health (ODH) data, falling to 1,612 after previous totals of 1,926 and 2,770. The seven days ending June 1 are the lowest number of new cases since there were 1,480 over the week ending Thursday, July 8, 2021. New hospitalizations fell from 159 on May 18 to 80 Thursday, and ICU admissions dropped from 16 that day to four in the latest figures. The COVID-19 death totals are currently undergoing a revision of the cause-of-death codes by the National Center for Health Statistics, which is expected to continue through June. In total, ODH has reported 3.45 million cases, 140,961 hospitalizations, 15,264 ICU admissions and 42,292 deaths during the pandemic, with seven reported deaths removed Thursday due to the revisions.

Health Canal recently completed a national survey on previously-vaccinated adults age 65 and older on their views of the bivalent vaccine. The FDA has said that age group can receive an additional dose four months after the first one, and immunocompromised individuals can receive one after two months. Over 55 percent of the anonymous respondents said they were likely (18.93 percent) or very likely (38.26 percent) to receive an updated bivalent booster. The "neutral" group made up 18.04 percent, while 7.33 percent said they were unlikely and 17.44 percent said very unlikely.

DISASTERS

Ohio Emergency Management Agency Executive Director Sima Merick recently announced second round reimbursements of over \$3.4 million from the State Disaster Relief Program (SDRP) for areas statewide affected by severe storms last year. The SDRP is a reimbursement program that can be used in instances where storm damage amounts do not meet the threshold for federal assistance. The program is intended to provide supplemental state assistance to local governments and eligible nonprofit organizations for costs associated with debris removal, emergency protective measures, and permanent work. In November, Gov. Mike DeWine authorized the use of the SDRP to help provide relief to several counties impacted by severe weather in February, May, June, and July of 2022.

EDUCATION

Rather than spend time fulfilling the Senate's request to survey schools on how much they're spending on litigation challenging the constitutionality of vouchers, Auditor Keith Faber should look into charter schools' spending to fight union drives, the Ohio Federation of Teachers (OFT) said Thursday in a letter to the auditor. Faber recently sent a survey to Ohio school districts at the request of Senate Republicans to gather information on schools' spending in support of the Vouchers Hurt Ohio coalition's litigation on EdChoice. Melissa Cropper, president of OFT, wrote in the letter to Faber Thursday that OFT believes costs of funding litigation are warranted,

but suggested spending on consultants and communications to prevent charter school employees from unionizing is more suspect.

Amid another legislative debate on whether to keep Ohio's decade-old third grade reading retention law, the business coalition Ohio Excels is touting new research from the Ohio Education Research Center on the positive effects of retention on students' later performance. Ohio Excels is a group of business leaders focused on education and workforce issues. The Ohio Education Research Center brings together researchers from Ohio universities and research organizations to study education-related topics. "Retention leads to, on average, retained students within a specific bandwidth around the cutoff scoring between eight to 44 scale score points higher in fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh grades reading and mathematics assessments than students who were not retained but were within the same bandwidth around the cutoff score. The positive impacts of retention on performance in the fourth, fifth and sixth grades in both subjects are stronger than in the seventh grade," the research report states.

Three Ohio high school seniors are among 161 students recognized as U.S. Presidential Scholars for 2023. The program is meant to identify the most distinguished high school seniors in the nation, and the designation recognizes achievement in academics, the arts or career-technical education. The three Ohioans are Pranav Sompalle of Mayfield High School; Sanjana M. Velu of William Mason High School; and Jay G. Patel of Butler Tech Bioscience Center.

The Ohio Department of Education (ODE) has awarded five Ohio teachers with the annual Teachers of Ohio Representing Character and Heart, or TORCH, recognition. Jonathan Juravich, the 2018 Ohio Teacher of the Year, presented the awards on behalf of ODE at surprise meetings and assemblies at the teachers' schools. The 2023 TORCH recipients are the following:

- Mary Miller, Leader in Me teacher at Belpre Elementary School in Belpre.
- Carrie Burnworth, music teacher at Mt. Pleasant Elementary School in Lancaster.
- Denise Robertson, French and humanities teacher at Tippecanoe High School in Tipp City.
- Bryan Trego, social studies teacher at Botkins High School in Botkins.
- Kathy Patron, speech, debate and communications teacher at Perry High School in Massillon.

ELECTIONS 2023

Ballots for the Tuesday, Aug. 8 special election will start to be sent out Friday, June 23 for military and overseas voters, according to a list of important dates released by the secretary of state's office. Ohio voters will be deciding Issue 1, which would raise the threshold for passage of future constitutional issues to 60 percent. The deadline for voter registration for the August election will be Monday, July 10, with early, in-person absentee voting beginning Tuesday, July 11. Applications for absentee ballots must be received by county boards of elections on Tuesday, Aug. 1. Boards will remain open until 8:30 p.m. that day. Polls will be open from 6:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. on Election Day, Tuesday, Aug. 8.

The following endorsement was made over the week:

- The Ohio Farm Bureau endorsed a "Yes" vote on Issue 1.

ELECTIONS 2024

U.S. Rep. Warren Davidson (R-Troy) told supporters Tuesday he has decided to seek re-election rather than run for the U.S. Senate in 2024. Davidson said that he has built "an amazing political team and strong allies with the funding to win any race," adding he has been tempted to launch a campaign to take on incumbent U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH).

Republican J.R. Majewski announced this week that he was withdrawing from the race for the 9th Congressional District "due to my mother's health. â€ Last cycle, I lost my father before the primary election and I can't risk not giving my full attention to my family," he wrote on social media. Majewski won a crowded primary for the Republican nomination for the seat in 2022, but lost in the General Election to U.S. Rep. Marcy Kaptur (D-Toledo). He announced earlier this year that he was running for the seat again.

EMPLOYMENT/UNEMPLOYMENT

Ohio is the 20th-best state or district for remote work and second-best among its neighbors, according to a report from personal finance site WalletHub released recently. The report relied on 12 key metrics and ranked Ohio 21st in the "work environment" subranking and 29th in "living environment." It also noted that 12.7 percent of full-time employees work entirely from home and 28.2 percent have a hybrid model. The top five states overall were Delaware, Utah, Maryland, Connecticut and New Jersey, with the District of Columbia ranked sixth. Among neighbors, Pennsylvania was 18th, followed by Kentucky, 23rd; Indiana, 32nd; Michigan, 34th; and West Virginia, 42nd.

ENERGY/UTILITIES

The Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC) Governing Board congratulated Consumers' Counsel Bruce Weston Wednesday on his "Outstanding Public Service Award" from the Ohio State University John Glenn College of Public Affairs and passed a resolution honoring him for years of exemplary service to the state as he nears retirement after more than three decades and two tours with OCC. That date, however, will take longer than expected with the unexpected announcement that the board will repost the consumers' counsel position for an additional 30 days. OCC had launched its initial search in April. The consumers' counsel must be an attorney licensed by the Ohio bar and experienced in public utility proceedings. The individual directs OCC's legal strategy but also manages an office of several dozen employees and a budget of roughly \$5.8 million. The board has approved the position for an incoming salary of \$158,000 - \$175,000.

ENVIRONMENT

The U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Sackett v. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency* removes necessary protections for wetlands under the federal Clean Water Act (CWA), according to the Ohio Environmental Council (OEC). "The anti-science and pro-polluter decision strikes down protections for millions of acres of wetlands across the country that will cause disastrous impacts for thousands of wetland acres in Ohio," OEC said. Under the decision -- written by Justice Samuel Alito and joined by Chief Justice John Roberts, Justice Clarence Thomas, Justice Neil Gorsuch and Justice Amy Coney Barrett -- wetlands without a continuous link to navigable waters or their tributaries are not protected by the CWA. Justices Elena Kagan, Sonia Sotomayor, Ketanji Brown Jackson and Brett Kavanaugh concurred in judgment only.

FEDERAL

All of Ohio's members of the U.S. House voted to pass the Fiscal Responsibility Act, the compromise budget deal between U.S. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) and President Joe Biden that would raise the debt ceiling and avoid default. The bill cleared the U.S. House on Wednesday on a vote of 314 to 117, with 149 Republicans and 165 Democrats voting for it, and 71 Republicans and 46 Democrats voting against it.

GAMING/GAMBLING

Ohio Lottery revenues were lower in April 2023 when compared to April 2022, according to data provided by the Ohio Lottery Commission. Traditional Ohio Lottery ticket sales were \$356.3 million in April 2023, down from \$374.8 million in April 2022. Draw-based game sales for April 2023 were \$157.6 million, down from \$175.3 million in April 2022. However, Scratch-off ticket sales for April 2023 were \$198.7 million, up from \$197.9 million in April 2022. Operating transfers to the Lottery Profits Education Fund (LPEF) were \$121.2 million. Through April 2023, transfers to the LPEF are up over last year by \$58 million.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY/STATEHOUSE

The Senate unanimously passed three bills during its Wednesday session, including SB39 (Schaffer) that exempts a number of baby products from the sales and use tax. Sponsor Sen. Tim Schaffer (R-Lancaster) said removing the tax will ease the burden on raising children and encourage more families to relocate to Ohio. He noted 16 states permanently exempt tax for some baby products, including Florida, which recently enacted a similar law. He said the bill would likely cost the state about \$18-30 million in revenue each year and said it would have a minor impact on the total state budget.

The Senate also unanimously adopted SB74 (Gavarone), which sponsor Sen. Theresa Gavarone (R-Bowling Green) said "is a true modernization" and cleanup bill for the treasurer's office. She said it is not expanding any authority or creating new programs, and instead makes changes to the Ohio Revised Code that are decades overdue.

The third bill on the agenda passed along with its emergency clause unanimously. Sen. Nathan Manning (R-North Ridgeville) said SB122 (Manning-Hicks-Hudson) at first looks complicated but is simple and codifies Criminal Rule 46, which provides all state courts with instructions on bail-setting procedures. The Ohio Supreme Court has proposed repealing the rule after passage of State Issue 1 in 2022, which among other provisions, gives the General Assembly authority to prescribe factors for courts when they set bail. Manning said that if the bill and emergency clause is not passed by July 1, there will be no law, leaving the courts in disarray.

Sen. Bill Reineke's (R-Tiffin) legislation to update Ohio's waste disposal laws and ensure that "Ohio does not continue to become a trash can for the East Coast" was the subject of passionate debate during the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee meeting on Tuesday. The committee heard a range of testimony from opponents, proponents and interested parties during SB119's third hearing. Before testimony started, the committee accepted a substitute version of the bill that included the following changes:

- Removes the provisions on permitting/licensing new facilities and expanding existing facilities that require the application to show a benefit to the public and serve the public convenience and necessity.
- Clarifies that the \$1 per ton local oversight fund is part of the \$7.50 per ton fee for solid waste disposal.
- Reduces the previous bill's district disposal fees to \$4 per ton across the board, instead of \$7.50 per ton for all trash.
- Clarifies that construction and demolition debris (C&DD) fees are required to be charged on C&DD.

In other action, the Senate Community Revitalization Committee reported out SB90 (Roegner) which authorizes Ohio to join the Social Work Licensure Compact; the Senate Government Oversight Committee reported out SB44 (Brenner) which mandates use of electronic occupational license applications; and the Senate Health Committee reported out SB40 (Roegner) which authorizes the state to enter the Dentist and Dentist Hygienist Compact.

GOVERNOR

Appointments made during the week include the following:

- John E. Neff of Dayton (Montgomery County) to the Sinclair Community College Board of Trustees for a term beginning May 26, 2023, and ending Oct. 12, 2027.
- Tina I. Ernst of Cincinnati (Hamilton County), Larry L. Macon, Sr. of Richfield (Summit County), Avraham L. Goldstein of Columbus (Franklin County) and S. Zaheer Hasan of Waterville (Lucas County) reappointed to the Advisory Board of the Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives for terms beginning May 26, 2023, and ending May 4, 2024.

- Joan C. Seidel of Kent (Portage County) appointed and Kelly Maynard of Dublin (Franklin County), Edward J. Pauline of Worthington (Franklin County), Kathleen L. Barrett of Dayton (Montgomery County), Loren D. M. Pena of Cincinnati (Hamilton County), Tiffany N. Sammons of Batavia (Clermont County), Angela L. Snyder of Columbus (Franklin County), Patrick Londergan of South Vienna (Clark County), Kandamurugu Manickam of Columbus (Franklin County), Sanjay P. Ahuja of Solon (Cuyahoga County), Kimberly Wallis of Broadview Heights (Cuyahoga County), Andrea E. Hoffman of Lewis Center (Delaware County), Randi L. Clites of Ravenna (Portage County), Gretchen Blazer Thompson of Dublin (Delaware County), C. Daniel Bradford of Mansfield (Richland County) and Amista N. Lipot of Beverly (Washington County) reappointed to the Rare Disease Advisory Council for terms beginning May 26, 2023, and ending April 22, 2025.

- Amanda E. Crates of Dunkirk (Hancock County) reappointed to the Board of Embalmers and Funeral Directors for a term beginning July 1, 2023, and ending June 30, 2028.

- Daniel McCarthy of Columbus (Franklin County) appointed to the State Racing Commission for a term beginning May 26, 2023, and ending March 31, 2027.

- Mark C. Adams of Bellville (Richland County) appointed to the Ohio Standardbred Development Commission for a term beginning July 1, 2023, and ending June 30, 2027.

- Anna Brunicardi Villarreal of Chillicothe (Ross County) and Bryan D. Royer of Toledo (Lucas County) reappointed to the Chiropractic Loan Repayment Advisory Board for terms beginning May 26, 2023, and ending Feb. 20, 2025.

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

All rules on the Joint Committee on Agency Rule Review (JCARR) agenda cleared in Thursday's hearing, though Rep. Mike Skindell (D-Lakewood) and Sen. Bill DeMora (D-Columbus) raised questions about an Ohio Department of Health (ODH) rule reducing the training hour requirement for lead abatement workers. ODH Director of Government Affairs Lisa Griffin told Skindell the reduction was a recommendation of the Governor's Lead Advisory Committee's January 2021 report. The proposed reduction from 24 to 16 hours would be "in addition to the successful completion of the prerequisite core program" of at least eight hours and so it adds up to a statutorily required 24 hours. In response to DeMora, Griffin added that people who currently receive training have "the 24 training hours, with at least 10 hours devoted to the hands-on training, plus the core training program of eight hours." She also said they have seen challenges with the workforce available and need people for the remediation work to reduce the number of children exposed to lead.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Ohio State University (OSU) recently opened the new Pelotonia Research Center, which is the first new building to open at Carmenton, Ohio State's innovation district. This five-story, 305,000-square-foot laboratory building is equipped with new spaces, technologies and resources needed for researchers to work across disciplines. The research center will focus on areas such as

cancer, gene- and cell-based therapies, cardiovascular and pulmonary medicine, neurological disease, microbiome, food systems and health, artificial intelligence, sensory biology, and social and environmental determinants of health.

The University of Toledo (UT) College of Law has much greater needs than a new academic institute, students told the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee on Wednesday. During opponent testimony on SB117 (Cirino-McColley), rising third-year UT law student Benjamin Noah Woods said the bill's proposed Institute of American Constitutional Thought and Leadership is a solution to a "non-existent" problem and will harm the law school. "Toledo does not need an institute for constitutional thought. We have four professors specializing in constitutional studies that represent a diverse range of legal philosophies and approaches to constitutional thought. Instead, what we actually need is a family law professor and more criminal law experts. We need more contract law professors, as well as those specializing in estate planning," Woods said.

JUDICIAL

The group challenging the validity of the Tuesday, Aug. 8 special election argued to the Ohio Supreme Court that the election is unlawful because it violates unambiguous provisions of the Ohio Revised Code, which only allow elections on constitutional amendments in November, May, or March. One Person One Vote, the Issue 1 opposition group that filed the lawsuit along with three Ohio voters challenging the election, filed a brief Thursday in response to the defendants' arguments that election statutes cannot override powers conferred to lawmakers in the Ohio Constitution. The brief urges the Ohio Supreme Court to declare the election illegal, mandate that Secretary of State Frank LaRose remove it from the August ballot, rescind the directive authorizing county boards to proceed with the election, and instruct the boards that the election should not go forward. The response brief argues that the relevant sections of the Ohio Revised Code that only authorize constitutional amendments in November, May, or March, are not unconstitutional, but are the means by which the General Assembly has prescribed when elections on constitutional amendments may be held, and cannot be superseded by a mere joint resolution like SJR2 (McColley-Gavarone).

The state will take a further step away from the normalization of virtual court proceedings proposed by former Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor's iCOURT if the General Assembly allows the Ohio Supreme Court's annual rules package to take effect as is on Saturday, July 1. Changes to the Rules of Practice and Procedure also strip prosecutorial input on the wisdom of virtual arraignments and remove an original amendment that would have allowed defendants to request a new trial based on "relevant and admissible" evidence not previously heard in their case. The rules omnibus now before the Legislature not only eliminates a court's ability to order remote proceeding sua sponte -- independent of parties or lawyers' wishes -- but also allows judges to override parties' mutual agreement to virtual proceedings.

LIQUOR/ALCOHOL

The General Assembly should make small craft brewers exempt from the Ohio Alcoholic Beverages Franchise Act of 1974, according to the Ohio Craft Brewers Association (OCBA). "A

lot has changed since 1974, especially the Ohio craft brewing industry," OCBA said in announcing its new advocacy campaign, the Brewers Freedom Alliance. The law should be changed to allow wholesalers and small brewers to freely negotiate and agree to fair contracts that benefit both industries, the organization said.

MARIJUANA/HEMP

There are 362,980 patients registered in the Ohio Medical Marijuana Control Program (MMCP), according to the Ohio Board of Pharmacy (OBP) in its April 2023 patient and caregiver numbers update. Of registered patients, 21,719 are military veterans, 22,786 are classified as "indigent" and 1,316 have a terminal diagnosis. Of the 362,980 registered patients, only 172,076 have both an active registration and an active recommendation.

MENTAL HEALTH

Behavioral health and recovery services providers Wednesday raised concerns about SB105 (Johnson-Sykes), a bill they said would pit them against their local Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services (ADAMHS) Boards. The Senate Community Revitalization Committee heard opposition testimony on the bill, which is sponsored by the committee's chair, Sen. Terry Johnson (R-McDermott), and ranking member, Sen. Vernon Sykes (D-Akron). In opponent testimony, Teresa Lampl, CEO of the Ohio Council of Behavioral Health Providers, raised a number of concerns about the bill. In particular, Lampl highlighted concerns about the elimination of the 120-day notice and dispute resolution process in provider/board contracts.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Observers reported 357 sandhill cranes in Ohio during the volunteer-driven 2023 Midwest Crane Count on April 15, according to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) Division of Wildlife. The count was coordinated by the Division of Wildlife, International Crane Foundation, and Ohio Bird Conservation Initiative. The survey was conducted in 30 pre-selected counties during the crane's nesting season to monitor Ohio's growing breeding population of sandhill cranes. Cranes were observed in 24 of those counties. Counties were selected based on the availability of wetland habitat that cranes use for nesting. The six counties with the most crane sightings during this year's count were Wayne (96), Lucas (77), Geauga (63), Ottawa (18), Logan (15), and Williams (15).

Burr Oak State Park is the setting of this year's top image in the ODNR Ohio State Parks and Watercraft Photo Contest. Three park visitors received the top spots in the 2023 competition. "Ohio State Parks mean something different to each person and this contest gives everyone a chance to see the parks through a different lens," ODNR Director Mary Mertz said. "Photographs capture the special moments people enjoy in the parks, and these photo contest winners truly caught those."

Wild turkey hunters in Ohio checked 15,673 birds during the spring season which concluded on Sunday, May 28, according to the ODNR Division of Wildlife. The total statewide harvest represents all turkeys checked from Saturday, April 22 to Sunday, May 28, and includes the

1,823 turkeys taken during the two-day youth season, Saturday-Sunday, April 15-16. During the 2022 season, the total number of turkeys checked was 11,872. The three-year average (2020, 2021, and 2022) for the spring turkey season is 14,772.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ohio saw 22 crashes resulting in 23 deaths on state roadways during the 2023 Memorial Day weekend, the Ohio State Highway Patrol reported Tuesday. The patrol said the number of traffic fatalities is the highest since the 2020 Memorial Day weekend, when 20 individuals were killed. The four-day reporting period began Friday, May 26 and ran through Monday, May 29. During the reporting period, state troopers made 19,980 traffic enforcement contacts, including 399 impaired driving arrests, 233 drug arrests and 2,797 safety belt citations. The number was down 23.5 percent from 2022, the patrol said. In addition, the patrol made 10,463 non-enforcement contacts, including 2,107 motorist assists, it said.