

Ohio Forward: An Environmental Road Map for Ohio's Next Governor



Ohio Environmental Council

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Ohio Forward: An Environmental Policy Agenda Rooted in Democracy

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Ohio stands at a pivotal moment. Our state possesses extraordinary natural assets, including a world-class freshwater system, a strong manufacturing base, and a workforce ready to lead in the next generation of energy and infrastructure. Yet Ohioans are also feeling the consequences of rising energy costs, aging water systems, and decisions that too often exclude the public interest.

This document presents a forward-looking environmental policy agenda with a clear vision of success: affordable clean energy, safe water, protected lands, and resilient communities. But the “how” of this vision is no less important than the “what.” As it has always been, environmental progress depends on a healthy, participatory democracy to be realized.

Ohio’s next governor will have broad bipartisan support for common-sense environmental policies. Across the state, Ohioans are remarkably united in prioritizing affordable energy, safe drinking water, and practical environmental solutions. These shared priorities cut across political lines and underscore the importance of civic engagement, transparency, and accountability in shaping policy decisions.

The recommendations in this document are designed to give Ohio’s next governor a place to start on day one and a clear path to follow throughout their administration. They reflect both the urgency of the challenges ahead and the opportunity to act with broad public support.

Ohio Forward offers a roadmap that connects environmental progress and economic wellbeing with the strength of our democratic institutions, ensuring decisions reflect the needs of Ohioans and that public systems deliver results people can see in their daily lives.



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Ohio Is Ready

Ohio has what most states envy: one of the world's greatest freshwater systems, a manufacturing base that knows how to build things, and a workforce ready to build the next generation of energy infrastructure. These aren't just environmental resources. They're economic, cultural, and social assets.

The next governor inherits all of it, along with real threats to our future. Electric bills have increased at least 20 percent and continue to rise. Drinking water infrastructure is aging faster than communities can afford to fix it. Data centers are placing enormous new demands on Ohio's electric grid and watersheds. Public lands that should be generating outdoor recreation revenue are being leased for oil and gas extraction. These challenges show up on utility bills, in drinking water test results, and in communities that can't attract investment because they can't secure affordable energy or clean water. Ohio families are already paying the price for decisions made without their best interests in mind. That must change.

Protecting Ohio's environment and Ohio's economic future are fundamentally aligned goals. Ohioans already know this. In a recent poll, Ohio voters rated energy costs as a top concern. The poll also found broad bipartisan support for common-sense environmental policies.ⁱ The next governor has the tools, the public support, and the opportunity to unleash Ohio's potential. This platform is a road map for getting it done.

WHAT OHIO VOTERS ARE SAYING

In the winter of 2026, we commissioned a poll of likely Ohio votersⁱⁱ across the political spectrum to understand their views on energy

and environmental issues. The independent polling found that there is more political common ground on environmental policy than the current debate reflects.

Key findings include:

- 94% of Ohio voters rate energy costs as important
- 86% support requiring data centers to pay additional fees for their energy and water impacts
- 86% rate safe drinking water as important
- Over 75% support solar energy policies, such as small-scale solar

These are not partisan positions; they are common-sense expectations that Ohio voters hold regardless of party. The polling data points to clear expectations that the next governor will need to meet. (Find the full polling data on our website: www.theoec.org.)

A ROAD MAP FOR THE NEXT GOVERNOR

This platform road map, developed by Ohio Environmental Council's experts in energy, water, and conservation policy, spans a wide breadth of environmental issues Ohio's next governor will need to face: energy, data centers, land, and water.

While the platform is divided into issue areas for convenience, it is important to note that these solutions are inherently interconnected and complementary. Data center policies are intimately related to and impacted by energy, land, and water issues. This document is organized to help the next governor

understand both the specific policy tools available and how the solutions build upon one another.

PRIORITY ACTIONS FOR OHIO'S NEXT GOVERNOR

This platform outlines a comprehensive environmental platform for Ohio's next governor and their administration. These goals are highly achievable, impactful, and foundational for Ohio's future.

Make Energy More Affordable, More Reliable, and More Sustainable

- Reform Ohio's energy siting regulatory environment to promote a level playing field that allows renewable energy to compete and more energy to come online, driving down costs.
- Make the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) work for Ohioans by appointing a chair committed to affordable, clean energy and consumer protection.

Regulate Ohio's Data Center Boom to Protect Communities

- Require data centers to pay for their energy demand and the infrastructure upgrades required to power these facilities, encouraging the use of renewable energy.
- Require data centers to publicly disclose water usage (source and quantity), regulate wastewater discharge, and commit to investing in water infrastructure.

Conserve Ohio's Public Lands and Natural Spaces

- End oil and gas extraction in state parks and nature reserves, preserving these spaces for recreation, natural habitats, and the enjoyment of all Ohioans.
- Make Ohio a leader in wilderness preservation by increasing Ohio's public lands by 25,000 acres.

Protect Ohio's Greatest Natural Resource: Clean Water

- Establish a long-term, reliable funding mechanism for H2Ohio to ensure that investments in Ohio's clean water continue to protect Lake Erie, support farmers, upgrade drinking water infrastructure, and expand Ohio's natural wetlands.
- Commit to replacing Ohio's lead service lines to protect Ohioans from lead contamination.

This is just the tip of the iceberg. Ohio's next governor will have the tools at their disposal, and the public support, to make Ohio cleaner, safer, and more affordable. The Ohio Environmental Council remains determined to work with the next administration to achieve a future where all Ohioans are empowered to live in harmony with their environment. This is a critical moment — we can't pass up the opportunity in front of us.

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2026 GUBERNATORIAL POLICY PLATFORM



Energy

Ohio is facing an energy affordability crisis. Electric bills have skyrocketed for Ohioans. The PUCO's utility rate surveyⁱⁱⁱ shows that electricity rates for residential customers in Ohio are up 19.3% in May 2026 compared to May 2025^{iv}. The next governor will face rising energy costs, pressure to expand Ohio's energy supply, and demand to hold utilities and large energy users accountable as large users drive up demand and prices.

Ohio voters are concerned about energy issues. Energy costs were a top concern for Ohioans in a February poll of likely voters. 94% rated energy costs as important, with 56% rating them as extremely important, on par with inflation and just behind health insurance costs and taxes.^v

The good news is that the tools are available, and the public is ready with strong bipartisan support for clean energy solutions. Renewable energy is the cheapest and fastest way to get new power onto Ohio's grid.^{vi} But the state's barriers to wind and solar development, its outdated regulatory framework, and a PUCO too often operating in the interest of utilities stand in the way. Meanwhile, the growth of data centers is placing new demands on the grid, and, without action, Ohio households will shoulder the cost.

After years of scandal that eroded public trust in utility oversight, the next governor will need to actively work to restore transparency and accountability to the institutions that shape Ohio's energy future.

Our priorities for the next administration are organized around four themes: accelerating clean energy development, modernizing Ohio's electric grid, reforming PUCO, and promoting energy affordability and utility accountability. Due to the nexus between energy and water, advancing clean energy solutions also reduces the strain on already burdened water systems.

All energy policies of the next governor should protect Ohio's air, land, and water; reduce the cost burden on Ohio households; and ensure Ohioans have a reliable energy system. With a focus on common-sense solutions, the next governor can create jobs, improve Ohio's energy infrastructure, and ensure all Ohioans can pay their utility bills, resulting in a more prosperous Ohio for all.

Energy Policy Priorities for the Next Governor

1. MODERNIZE OHIO'S ELECTRIC GRID AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Ohio's electric grid needs significant investment to reliably and cost-effectively meet growing demand. Grid-enhancing technologies, transmission expansion, battery storage, and interconnection reform are all essential tools. These infrastructure upgrades can make our energy grid more efficient, more reliable, and more cost-effective. To successfully modernize Ohio's electric grid, the next governor must put these tools to work.

At the same time, the rapid growth of data centers is placing new, significant demands on Ohio's grid, requiring careful planning and clear policy to manage. The next governor should establish a central energy office to coordinate policy and programs across state agencies.

Establish an Office of Energy in the governor's administration to coordinate energy policy and grant programs across agencies and serve as an energy data and forecasting hub to responsibly and strategically ensure Ohio is prepared for the future. **(Governor)**

FIRST 100 DAYS

Urge the PUCO to initiate an independent investigation into the impact of large load users on consumer bills, evaluating cost shifting and increases to distribution, transmission, and generation charges. **(Governor)**

Develop a slate of legislative recommendations on grid modernization priorities focused on increasing the use of advanced transmission technologies (ATTs), including dynamic line ratings, topology optimization, advanced conductors, and more. **(Governor)**

FIRST YEAR

Urge the PUCO to release an Ohio Grid Modernization Road Map, including energy demand projections and transmission needs, reliability risk assessment, audit of current grid capacities, and existing disparities. **(Governor)**

Urge the PUCO to incorporate non-wires alternatives (e.g., energy efficiency, demand response, dynamic pricing, and battery storage) that replace the need for traditional infrastructure upgrades such as power lines or substations. **(Governor)**

As a member of the PJM Governors Collaborative, take an active role in promoting PJM reforms, including interconnection queue reform, voting transparency, and capacity auction reform. **(Governor)**

Urge the Department of Transportation (ODOT) to create a statewide EV charging deployment analysis and strategy to expand access for Ohioans. **(Governor)**

Urge the Energy Office and PUCO to develop and release a statewide virtual power plant (VPP) strategy that leverages distributed energy resources such as rooftop solar, battery storage, demand response, smart thermostats, EV charging, and energy efficiency to reduce peak demand, modernize the electric grid, improve reliability, and lower costs for consumers. **(Governor, and governor-created Office of Energy)**

FIRST TERM

Advocate for regional transmission cost caps to drive down costs for Ohio ratepayers. **(Governor)**

2. ACCELERATE CLEAN ENERGY DEVELOPMENT IN OHIO

Ohio has placed needless barriers to developing clean, renewable energy. These policies keep the state from accessing a rapidly growing and less expensive source of power. Siting rules, including legislation providing blanket generation bans, and inconsistent permitting and zoning for distributed generation, slow Ohio's energy transition and drive up costs for consumers.

At the same time, the benefits of accelerating clean energy development extend beyond lower energy costs. Building a statewide clean energy workforce creates good jobs while positioning Ohio for the energy economy ahead.

Reforming how Ohio sites, permits, and supports clean energy development is one of the most direct options the next governor has to lower energy burdens and expand opportunity for all Ohioans.

FIRST 100 DAYS

Direct Ohio Power Siting Board (OPSB) to initiate rulemaking to define and improve its public interest analysis in siting decisions, with substantive responses to local and statewide stakeholder concerns, and to establish consistent criteria for evaluation of all generation types. **(Governor)**

Ensure every appointee and member of the cabinet who serves on the OPSB is focused on making Ohio's energy grid clean, affordable, and reliable moving forward. **(Governor)**

FIRST YEAR

Increase incentives for clean energy development on brownfields. **(Governor's Proposed Budget)**

Reform and expand clean energy and energy efficiency initiatives for public buildings across state agencies. **(Ohio Facilities Construction Commission)**

Require net-zero and 100% EV standards for state buildings using Ohio-sourced clean energy (as available), and expand energy efficiency incentives for income-eligible households. **(Governor)**

Urge PUCO to audit all utility load forecasts for accuracy and to ensure they are not double counting projected loads. **(Governor)**

FIRST TERM

Propose legislation to roll back wind setbacks. **(Governor)**

Champion policy to standardize permitting and zoning for distributed generation, such as residential rooftop solar and batteries. **(Governor)**

Propose legislation to establish a community solar program enabling customer subscription access. **(Governor)**

Develop a statewide clean energy workforce strategy in partnership with unions, community colleges, and apprenticeship programs that prioritizes better labor standards (e.g., prevailing wage, local hiring, etc.). **(Energy Office/state agencies)**

3. REFORM THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF OHIO

Years of scandal have eroded Ohioans' trust in the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio. Rebuilding that trust requires more than new leadership; it requires structural reform.

The demands facing Ohio's electric grid, from the growth of renewable energy to the surge in data center load, mean that PUCO must be equipped and empowered to use every tool available to manage the grid, improve energy efficiency, and ensure the commission operates in the interests of all Ohioans, not just the utilities it regulates. The next governor should move quickly to appoint a new PUCO chair and commissioners with demonstrated commitment to clean energy, non-wires alternatives, and transparency, and signal from day one that utility accountability is a priority of this administration.

Appoint a new PUCO chair committed to affordability, clean energy, and consumer protection. **(Governor)**

FIRST 100 DAYS

Appoint commissioners and top-level staff with expertise and a commitment to clean energy in Ohio, energy efficiency and other non-wires alternatives (e.g., demand response, dynamic pricing, battery storage, etc.), and transparency. **(Governor)**

Signal PUCO reform as a major administration priority through public announcements and early appointments. **(Governor)**

Task the PUCO commissioner to host energy affordability workshop sessions and issue a report at the end of the first year, including proceedings on large-load tariffs, energy efficiency, grid modernization, and affordability. **(Governor)**

FIRST YEAR

Increase overall PUCO staff to ensure they can better investigate utilities and effectively adjudicate cases. **(Governor)**

Task PUCO with workshops around increasing and strengthening distributed generation, resulting in policy recommendations and rulemaking (net metering, siting, etc.). **(PUCO)**

4. PROTECT ENERGY AFFORDABILITY AND CREATE UTILITY ACCOUNTABILITY

Ohio utility customers, especially low-income households, face rising energy burdens, and the regulatory framework has too often prioritized utility profits over the needs of Ohioans.

Structural reforms are needed to lower costs, restore accountability, and ensure that the benefits of Ohio's energy transition reach all Ohioans. That means establishing an Energy Affordability Task Force, directing state agencies to evaluate consumer protections, and expanding statewide energy efficiency programs.

The next governor should limit how much profit utilities are guaranteed to earn on regulated investments, and restrict the commission's ability to award utilities more than their own staff recommends.

Establish an Energy Affordability Taskforce to study energy burden, rate design, utility accountability, and submetering oversight, and provide specific policy recommendations. **(Governor)**

FIRST 100 DAYS

Issue an agency directive requiring all relevant agencies to evaluate energy affordability issues (rate structure, consumer protections). **(Governor)**

Temporarily freeze rate hikes pending affordability review. **(PUCO)**

Urge PUCO to stick to the midpoint or below on return on equity unless clear mitigating circumstances exist for going above the midpoint. **(Governor)**

FIRST YEAR

Release an Energy Affordability Action Plan addressing lower-income energy burden, ratepayer protections, and prevention of cost-shifting from data centers to residential customers. **(Governor)**

FIRST TERM

Expand statewide energy efficiency programs, prioritizing low-income households. **(Department of Development, Ohio Air Quality Development Authority)**

Encourage PUCO to directly support energy efficiency as part of utility rate planning or as stand-alone cases for energy efficiency. **(Governor)**

Require utilities to treat efficiency as a non-wires alternative. **(PUCO)**



Data Centers

Ohioans are concerned about the impact of data center growth on the energy grid, water resources, land, and communities. The next governor will take office at a pivotal moment in the growth of large-scale data centers in Ohio, and their decisions will shape Ohio's future. Ohio can protect its people and natural resources while leveraging the economic benefits of data centers, or allow decisions be dictated by the industry.

Ohio voters are paying attention. Across the political spectrum, voters believe that AI computing and data centers are driving up the costs of energy for everyday households. They support requiring data centers to pay additional fees to cover their energy and water impacts.^{vii} That is not a partisan position. It is a common-sense expectation that large commercial users should bear the costs they create.

The next governor should have a clear, strong policy agenda to address data centers. Hyperscale data centers, the largest facilities with very high electricity use and significant water consumption for cooling, are the primary concern. The policies in this section are focused on ensuring the industry pays its fair share, operates transparently, and is a good neighbor to the communities and natural resources around them.

Four themes guide this agenda: requiring transparency and disclosure, ensuring data centers pay their own way on energy and water, setting standards for tax incentives and community benefits, and protecting communities, water, and public lands.

1. REQUIRE TRANSPARENCY AND DISCLOSURE

Data centers currently operate with little public transparency and accountability for their water use, energy demands, or agreements with local governments. In too many cases, non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) between data centers and local governments prevent communities from understanding what is being built in their backyards, and at what cost. That must change.

Ohioans deserve to know what facilities are operating in their communities, how much water and energy those facilities consume, and what commitments have been made on their behalf.

FIRST 100 DAYS

Direct Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) to initiate rulemaking on water (surface and groundwater) management for all larger-scale water users including data centers. **(Governor)**

Support legislation to prohibit NDAs between data centers and local governments and state agencies. **(Governor)**

Require all hyperscale data centers in Ohio to publicly disclose water usage (source and quantity), wastewater discharge, and energy consumption. **(PUCO, OEPA, and ODNR)**

FIRST YEAR

Direct OEPA to cease the issuance of a general NPDES permit for data centers and instead to utilize the individual NPDES permitting process to ensure public participation and comment and meaningful monitoring requirements and effluent limitations. **(OEPA)**

Direct OPSB to investigate and issue a report on the siting process for data centers, including utility-scale on-site generation, and make recommendations on how to ensure projects account for public interest considerations. **(Governor)**

FIRST TERM

Direct OEPA to develop a dashboard to track and manage water use and energy consumption from data centers. **(OEPA)**

2. REQUIRE DATA CENTERS TO PAY THEIR OWN WAY ON ENERGY AND WATER

Data centers place enormous new demands on Ohio's electric grid. Without action, the cost of transmission and needed infrastructure upgrades will be absorbed by the residential ratepayers who are already facing an affordability crisis.

The next governor should move immediately to urge the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio to develop a statewide large-load tariff that ensures data centers pay their full share of grid costs, and to explicitly prohibit utilities from passing data center costs on to other customer classes.

**FIRST
100
DAYS**

Urge PUCO to develop a data-center-specific statewide large-load tariff. **(Governor)**

Urge PUCO to require utilities to develop strategies for managing large-load growth from data centers. **(Governor)**

**FIRST
YEAR**

Direct OPSB to initiate rulemaking on data center co-location requests, addressing consumer cost impacts, cost-shifting, and grid disconnection risks. Any co-location approvals should include a requirement that the facility can't disconnect from the grid. **(Governor)**

Urge PUCO to order each utility to define the costs of data centers and initiate rulemaking to prevent cost shifting to other customers/customer classes. **(Governor)**

Require data centers to implement best practices for energy, water, and wastewater efficiency and demand curtailment. **(PUCO, OEPA)**

3. SET STANDARDS FOR TAX INCENTIVES AND COMMUNITY BENEFITS

Ohio currently offers state tax incentives to data centers without requiring meaningful standards in return.^{viii} The next governor should consider closely whether data centers should receive any tax incentives at all. But if tax incentives stay in place, they should be tied to clean energy procurement, water infrastructure investments, water and energy efficiency best practices, decommissioning plans, and community benefits agreements, and can incentivize data center development that is good for Ohioans and the environment.

The next governor should direct a review of current incentive programs and signal a clear intent to raise standards. In the first year, they should also move to condition any state tax break on a requirement that data centers power themselves with 100% clean energy and deliver real benefits to the communities where they operate.

**FIRST
100
DAYS**

Direct a review of current data center tax incentive programs. **(Governor's Proposed Budget)**

Signal intent to eliminate tax incentives, or condition tax incentives on clean energy, efficiency, and community benefit requirements. **(Governor's Proposed Budget)**

FIRST YEAR

If state tax incentives remain, establish strict eligibility standards for those incentives, requiring energy and water efficiency best practices, water infrastructure investment, clean energy procurement, decommissioning plans, and community benefits agreements. **(Governor's Proposed Budget)**

Develop model data center development tools to guide decision-making across Ohio, such as model community benefits agreements. **(Governor)**

FIRST TERM

Require data centers to power themselves with 100% clean energy as a condition of any state tax break. **(Governor's Proposed Budget)**

Implement a fee on data centers to fund monitoring and oversight as well as decommissioning. **(Governor's Proposed Budget)**

4. PROTECT COMMUNITIES, WATER, AND PUBLIC LANDS

Data center development affects more than the electric grid. It has direct consequences for Ohio's water resources, land, and the communities closest to these facilities. Local governments are often the first line of decision-making on data center siting, but they frequently lack the tools, information, and guidance to evaluate proposals in a way that protects their communities and the state's natural resources.

The next governor should direct state agencies to develop statewide guidance for local governments, incorporate environmental justice standards into siting review, and require wetland impact disclosure and mitigation as a condition of data center development.

FIRST 100 DAYS

Direct state agencies to develop statewide guidance for local governments on evaluating data center proposals. **(Governor)**

FIRST YEAR

Incorporate environmental justice standards into data center permitting review, including community benefits agreements and decommissioning commitments. **(OEPA and other permitting agencies)**

Strengthen community outreach regarding wetland impact disclosure and mitigation for data center development, and encourage developers to proactively invest in watershed protection and restoration. **(OEPA)**



Land

Ohio's public lands are under pressure, and the next governor has a real opportunity to change that. The state has been ranked 44th in the nation for public lands per capita.^{ix} Yet Ohio's public lands face ongoing threats from oil and gas extraction, landscape fragmentation, and chronic underfunding.

Protecting and expanding public lands is not simply an environmental priority; it is an investment in Ohio. Public lands, forests, wetlands, parks, and trails play a crucial role in building resilience for Ohio's communities by stabilizing soil, sequestering carbon, cleaning the air and water, and providing wildlife habitat and migratory corridors. Access to public lands supports the mental and physical health and well-being of Ohioans.

Public lands are an underutilized asset in Ohio. Trails, parks, and natural areas drive tourism, support local businesses, and are the foundation for rural livelihoods across the state. Sustaining and improving the health of existing public forests, grasslands, wetlands, and riparian corridors while growing Ohio's outdoor recreation economy is an important economic development opportunity. The next governor should develop a clear agenda to end fracking on Ohio's public lands, expand Ohio's public lands by at least 25,000 acres, enhance the resilience of Ohio's public lands, and ensure access to public lands for all Ohioans.

1. PROTECT OHIO'S PUBLIC LANDS AND FRESHWATER COAST

Fracking does not belong in our state's public lands. Ohio's current policy allows the oil and gas industry to lease and extract resources from our state public lands — a practice that puts public resources at risk for private industry gain. The next governor should oppose fracking in state parks and state public lands through legislative and administrative means.

By establishing a state lands wilderness preserve system, the next governor can provide stronger protections to our existing state public lands for the benefit of current and future generations. The state should explore how to better connect existing public lands into recreation and wildlife corridors, including along Lake Erie, our major freshwater coastline.

FIRST 100 DAYS

Champion the legislative termination of future state lands oil and gas leasing. **(Governor)**

Propose rule amendments to strengthen public participation and government transparency in the state public lands leasing process. **(ODNR)**

Commission a study to assess which state lands should receive higher levels of protection in a new state wilderness preserve system, and to determine opportunities for expanding Ohio's public lands. **(Governor)**

Commission a study to restore Ohio's freshwater coast, increase access to Lake Erie, protect the lake from further pollution, and reduce flooding and coastal erosion. **(Ohio Lake Erie Commission)**

FIRST YEAR

Through rulemaking, establish a greater focus on preservation and old growth habitat recovery. **(ODNR)**

Advocate for increased allocations to Ohio through the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund. **(ODNR)**

Establish rules for wilderness preserve management and guidelines for inclusion in a state wilderness preserve system. **(ODNR)**

FIRST TERM

Increase Ohio's public lands and coastal parks by 25,000 acres. **(ODNR)**

Designate one-third of Ohio's public lands portfolio as protected wilderness preserves through administrative rulemaking. **(ODNR)**

2. GROW OHIO'S OUTDOOR ECONOMY

Ohio's public lands are an underutilized economic asset. Trails, parks, and natural areas, including Lake Erie's coast, drive tourism, support local businesses, and improve quality of life, but only when they are accessible, connected, and well-resourced.

Too often, conservation is framed as a cost to Ohio's economy rather than an investment in it. The next governor should reframe that narrative and back it up with action: creating an advisory board on Ohio's outdoor economy, developing Lake Erie's coastline parks and trails, championing the federal designation of the Buckeye Trail as a National Scenic Trail, and investing in the land acquisitions needed to complete it. Creating a Division of Trails and an Office of Outdoor Recreation within the Ohio Department of Natural Resources would give the outdoor economy the institutional home where it needs to grow.

**FIRST
100
DAYS**

Create an advisory board, with dedicated staff, on Ohio's outdoor economy. **(Governor)**

Champion federal designation of the Buckeye Trail as a National Scenic Trail. **(Governor)**

**FIRST
YEAR**

Include funding in budget proposal for remaining land acquisitions to complete the Buckeye Trail. **(Governor's Proposed Budget)**

Create a Division of Trails within ODNR to devote additional resources to state trail design, creation, and maintenance. **(ODNR)**

**FIRST
TERM**

Create an Office of Outdoor Recreation within ODNR to leverage Ohio's outdoor recreation potential. **(ODNR)**

Designate segments of the Buckeye Trail located within state lands and Lake Erie coast as part of the new state wilderness preserve system. **(ODNR)**

3. IMPROVE CONNECTIVITY, NATURAL INFRASTRUCTURE, AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Ohio's public lands are highly fragmented, which limits their value for wildlife, recreation, economic development, and climate resilience.

State transportation infrastructure has contributed to that fragmentation, but it also presents an opportunity. Directing the Ohio Department of Transportation to assess opportunities for native plantings, land bridges, and wildlife crossings can begin to reverse the damage while making Ohio's transportation network better for the environment and safer for vehicles and passengers.

At the same time, the work of restoring and connecting Ohio's lands can be a source of good jobs. A state workforce development program focused on ecological restoration and land stewardship can create opportunities for Ohioans while improving the health of the lands they depend on.

**FIRST
100
DAYS**

Form a task force to study creation of a state office of land management and workforce development, learning from work underway in Southeast Ohio. **(Governor)**

Direct ODOT to assess opportunities for native plantings, coastal restoration, land bridges, and wildlife crossings in transportation projects. **(Governor)**

**FIRST
YEAR**

Support a feasibility study on elk reintroduction in Ohio to help promote native ecosystem recovery and Ohio's outdoor recreation economy. **(Governor)**

Establish a conservation workforce development program to improve the health of Ohio's lands while providing training in important, transferable skills. **(Governor)**

Increase cross-agency coordination between ODNR, ODOT, and OGLMC on natural infrastructure. **(Governor)**

Evaluate state public lands roadway system for road retirements, which provide cost-savings and benefits to habitat connectivity. **(ODNR and ODOT)**

**FIRST
TERM**

Support development of a state-level wilderness system, focused on reducing fragmentation and improving wildlife migration corridors, including coastal habitat, critical for threatened fish and migrating birds. **(Governor)**

Create a state office of land management and workforce development programs to address ecological and coastal restoration and economic development. **(Governor)**



Water

Ohio is a water-rich state, but its waters face serious and growing threats. Harmful algal blooms (caused by excess phosphorus from farm fields), forever chemicals, and microplastics contaminate surface water and groundwater across the state. Large and small communities across the state are grappling with aging water systems and the rising costs of maintaining infrastructure.

At the same time, growing demands on the water supply, including data center development, are making water more scarce and more costly. Ohio voters across the political spectrum recognize the stakes.^x

As a key member of the Great Lakes Compact, an agreement among the eight Great Lakes states and two Canadian Great Lakes provinces, Ohio's governor plays an important role in protecting one of the world's most significant freshwater resources. The next governor should commit to upholding the Great Lakes Compact and ensuring it is durable by championing the sustainable use and responsible management of Great Lakes basin waters for the benefit of all Ohioans and the broader region.

Five themes guide the water priorities in this platform: fully funding H2Ohio for the long term, eliminating lead service lines, addressing water and sewer affordability, addressing PFAS and emerging contaminants, and committing to the Great Lakes Compact.

1. FULLY FUND H2OHIO FOR THE LONG TERM AND SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE FARMING PRACTICES

H2Ohio is one of the state's most important tools for investing in water quality across the state. It is a comprehensive program, covering nutrient pollution reduction, wetlands restoration and protection, and drinking water, stormwater, and wastewater infrastructure improvements, including lead service line replacements.

But it has lacked the sustainable, long-term funding it needs to deliver results. These are big problems that require time and persistence to address, and the longevity of H2Ohio's programs is essential to meeting Ohio's water quality goals. The next governor should support full H2Ohio funding for the Ohio Department of Agriculture, OEPA, and ODNR and work across agencies to ensure full implementation of its programs.

FIRST 100 DAYS

Propose full H2Ohio funding, including all subprograms, in the executive budget. **(Governor's Proposed Budget)**

Increase coordination across ODNR, Ohio Agriculture, and OEPA on H2Ohio implementation and evaluation. **(Governor)**

FIRST YEAR

Fully fund H2Ohio programs at the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Ohio Department of Agriculture, and Ohio Department of Agriculture through the state operating budget. **(Governor's Proposed Budget)**

Direct ODNR, OEPA, and ODA to analyze the impact that a 10-year secure funding system would have on long-term planning and the development of major projects. **(Governor)**

FIRST TERM

Champion a long-term, reliable funding mechanism for the state's H2Ohio water quality program. **(Governor)**

Support OEPA, ODNR, ODA, and OLEC in achieving the goal of 20% phosphorus reduction by 2030 through supporting H2Ohio and incentivizing agricultural best management practices. This would make significant progress in meeting the U.S. and Canada's shared goal of reducing phosphorous by 40%. **(Governor)**

2. ELIMINATE LEAD SERVICE LINES

Ohio ranks among the top three states in the nation for lead service lines with over 700,000 throughout the state. This poses a significant public health threat, especially for children.

A federal mandate requires full replacement by 2036. The next governor should commit in the first 100 days to replacing half of Ohio's lead service lines within the four-year term, putting the state on track to meet that deadline.

Replacing lead service lines across Ohio creates workforce development opportunities through apprenticeships, community college partnerships, and union partnerships. Creative funding strategies will be essential. The next governor should direct a comprehensive assessment of options to solve this critical public health issue.

**FIRST
100
DAYS**

Commit to replacing half of Ohio’s lead service lines within the four-year term. **(Governor)**

Update and complete statewide lead service line inventory and make it publicly accessible. **(OEPA)**

**FIRST
YEAR**

Develop a comprehensive lead service line replacement funding strategy. **(OEPA)**

Develop and launch a workforce development program for lead service line replacement, including apprenticeships, community college partnerships, and union partnerships. **(Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services)**

**FIRST
TERM**

Replace half of Ohio’s lead service lines, on track to meet the federal mandate for replacement by 2036. **(OEPA)**

3. ENSURE WATER AND SANITATION AFFORDABILITY

No Ohioan should have to choose between water and sanitation and other basic needs. Yet communities across Ohio are caught in a difficult position. Aging water and wastewater systems require significant investment to repair and modernize, but the costs of doing so fall on fewer ratepayers. At the same time, many Ohioans on well water and septic systems have little visibility into what they are drinking.

The next governor should convene a Blue Ribbon Commission in the first 100 days to study water affordability across Ohio, examining rate structures, modernization needs, and assistance options. The next governor should move in the first year to fund programs that help water systems improve without passing the full cost of that improvement to ratepayers. The commission should also address affordability proposals for Ohio’s well water and septic consumers.

**FIRST
100
DAYS**

Declare no Ohioan should go without clean and affordable drinking water. **(Governor)**

Establish a blue ribbon commission to address issues of water affordability across Ohio, to study rate structures, modernization needs, water monitoring, and assistance options. **(Governor)**

FIRST YEAR

Propose blue ribbon commission’s findings on water affordability through policy recommendations and agency actions. **(Governor)**

FIRST TERM

Establish a program, with incentives, to support well water improvements and monitoring for private well and septic owners. **(OEPA and/or Ohio Department of Health)**

Create and fund programs to help water systems modernize, including fixing leaks and improving efficiency, without passing full costs to ratepayers. **(OEPA)**

4. ADDRESS PFAS AND OTHER EMERGING CONTAMINANTS

PFAS and microplastics are threats to Ohio’s drinking water and waterways, and prevention at the source is the most effective long-term strategy for addressing them.

Ohio has an opportunity to become a national leader in PFAS research and solutions. This can be achieved through a university-based Center of Excellence, a public-private partnership to drive down pollution, a challenge grant for solving the PFAS problem, and legislation to establish maximum contaminant levels.

Testing for PFAS and microplastics should be incorporated into statewide fish advisories, and every drinking water source in the state — rural, urban, public, and private — should be tested.

FIRST 100 DAYS

Direct state agencies and government contractors to collaborate with OEPA to reduce microplastics and PFAS in Ohio’s waters. **(Governor, procurement process)**

Initiate a state assessment/study on PFAS and microplastics (i.e., PFAS Action Plan 2.0). **(Governor)**

Direct ONDR to include testing for PFAS and microplastics in statewide fish advisories. **(Governor)**

FIRST YEAR

Propose innovative legislation to ensure rural Ohioans have access to clean drinking water, establish a Private Well Testing program, such as well testing upon sale, and yearly well testing of rental properties, and invest in rural health departments to assist in private well testing. **(Governor)**

Establish a robust challenge grant for solving PFAS and microplastic problems, as well as safe PFAS replacements. **(Governor's Proposed Budget)**

Establish a working group to develop standardized drinking water and wastewater monitoring for PFAS and microplastics. **(Governor)**

FIRST TERM

Establish PFAS and microplastics standards for Ohio's waters. **(OEPA)**

Establish a drinking water right-to-know program, requiring regular water testing, to ensure every Ohioan (urban, suburban, and rural) knows what's in their drinking water. **(Governor)**

Create a university-based Center of Excellence for safe PFAS replacements, with a focus on public/private partnerships to reduce PFAS pollution. **(Governor's Proposed Budget)**

5. COMMIT TO THE GREAT LAKES COMPACT

While the Great Lakes are vast, their water supply is not endless. Much of the water in the Great Lakes, including Lake Erie, was left behind thousands of years ago from melting glaciers.

The Great Lakes Compact, a binding agreement among the eight Great Lakes states and two Canadian Great Lakes provinces, ensures that Great Lakes water is protected by preventing large-scale diversions and requires states to have and update water conservation and efficiency programs to adjust to new demand and the cumulative effects and climate.

Ohio's governor, as a member of the Compact Council, plays an important role in ensuring the Compact remains strong. As data centers and other development pressures test the Compact, Ohio's next governor will play a key role in enforcing state law implementing the Compact and ensuring Great Lakes water is protected for future generations.

**FIRST
100
DAYS**

Fully commit to continued participation in the Great Lakes Compact and Compact Council. **(Governor)**

Develop and recommend best practices for Ohio's water conservation and efficiency program, including water reuse. **(Governor, OEPA)**

Assign dedicated and empowered staff to represent Ohio in all associated Great Lakes organizations. **(Governor)**

**FIRST
YEAR**

Direct OEPA to adopt rules codifying a formalized water conservation and efficiency program. **(Governor)**

Direct ODNR to continue completing regional demand studies for the entire state as an ongoing part of Ohio's conservation and efficiency program.
(Governor)

**For more information, contact Melanie Houston,
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ENDNOTES

ⁱ EMC Research, Inc., “Ohio Voter Survey Results.” Memorandum, February 27, 2026. <https://theoec.org/news-and-information/new-poll-shows-ohioans-deeply-concerned-about-rising-energy-costs-and-strongly-support-clean-water-protections/>

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^{iv} U.S. Energy Information Administration, “Electricity Monthly Update: End Use, January 2026.” U.S. Department of Energy, March 24, 2026. <https://www.eia.gov/electricity/monthly/update/end-use.php>.

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^{viii} Good Jobs First, “Ohio’s Subsidized Companies Not Creating Promised Jobs.” January 21, 2026. <https://goodjobsfirst.org/ohio-jctc-audit/>.

^{ix} Natural Resources Council of Maine, “Public Land Ownership by State.” Augusta, ME: Natural Resources Council of Maine <https://www.nrcm.org/documents/publiclandownership.pdf>.

^x EMC Research, Inc., “Ohio Voter Survey Results.”

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