



# Ohio Department of Natural Resources

JOHN R. KASICH, GOVERNOR

JAMES ZEHRINGER, DIRECTOR

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**House Buckeye Lake Caucus  
Public Comments Provided by  
Ohio Department of Natural Resources Director James Zehringer  
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Members of the Buckeye Lake Caucus, thank you for having me here today. My name is Jim Zehringer and I am the Director of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) and I'm joined by Assistant Director Fred Shimp, Lead Engineer and Chief of Projects Steve Berezansky, as well as Deputy Director and Chief of Ohio State Parks Gary Obermiller. There has been a lot of attention lately in regards to Buckeye Lake, what the status is and what the future holds. I would like to provide you with an update on where we are on various topics, answer questions you have and see how we can work together.

Prior to joining the Kasich Administration, I served for four years in the Ohio House of Representatives, representing Mercer County, as well as portions of Darke and Preble Counties. I also served for four years as a Mercer County Commissioner. I bring this up because I want you to know that I've been in your shoes and I understand the position you are in to provide the people you serve with detailed information to the questions they are asking. That responsibility is one that I continue to carry with me in my service as the Director of ODNR.

ODNR is a very large and diverse agency with both regulatory and recreational divisions. We employ dam safety registered professional engineers that are experts in their field. They are charged with ensuring that thousands of Ohioans that live near dams are safe each day. They inspect and regulate more than 1,500 dams across Ohio. With that being said, safety remains our top priority.

The Governor was very clear about two points; we will replace Buckeye Lake dam and for safety reasons the water level will remain at winter pool as recommended by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers until a new dam is in place. Everything else is up for consideration and we are willing to discuss ideas. We understand that fixing the dam and keeping the lake level at winter pool may make things difficult for lake residents and visitors, and will do what we can to preserve the recreational experience. However, these efforts cannot compromise the safety of the more than 3,000 people who live and work within the inundation zone.

Allow me to provide you with some examples of where we have been open to public input thus far and updates on other issues that have been of interest to the public:

- We have heard from people within the community that want to be able to use their power boats on the water. So, early this month we had our Division of Watercraft do a sight inspection, using an underwater sonar device, to see if it was feasible. Within two weeks a speed zone was created, allowing boaters to operate their boats and jet skis in the designated area. However, for safety reasons no tow sports such as water skiing or tubing will be permitted.
- We are aware that many dock owners on the dam remain uncertain about the current usability of their dock. We are currently in the process of doing a technical inspection of the 320 docks on the dam. This will help us determine which docks may stay until construction and which docks might pose a threat to the dam and need to be removed sooner. Our engineers, along with our engineering consultant will be on the dam for the next couple of weeks performing this evaluation. When we have made a determination we will share that information with interested parties so plans can be made. We are committed to working with the owners to keep them informed and let them know what options would be available to them as we move through this process, including the potential for residents to add floating docks providing them access to the lake, as long as those structures are not anchored to the dam. Docks that are not on the dam will follow the normal permitting process and be allowed modifications with the appropriate approval.
- There have been questions regarding who will be covering the costs of removing the docks and where will the docks be stored. No decision has been made at this time. We are taking things one step at a time, and right now the first step is to evaluate all of the docks on the dam. Once we have addressed this safety precaution, then we will begin considering these other important follow up questions.
- Many have suggested that while the water is low, we should use this opportunity to dredge the lake – and we are doing exactly that. Two dredges are allocated for Buckeye Lake with the intent to increase navigable channels from businesses to the speed zone, as well as channels to the islands for safety purposes. The possibility of adding private sector dredging partners is also being explored to assist us in our efforts. Ideally these efforts will provide improved water quality for Buckeye Lake. Currently, one issue we have encountered is where to put the dredge material. We have designated Dredge Material Relocation Areas (DMRA). We are seeking additional locations in the area and this is where we would ask the local community to help identify areas or possible other options. If you or the public know of any potential locations, we hope you will let us know immediately.
- We are also mindful of the safety of the residents that live on the islands around the Lake. We continue to work with our local partners to explore options on how we can share resources. For instance, we have offered the Millersport Fire Department access to our jet boats that can operate in very shallow conditions.

They will be given full access and keys to both boats to help expedite any necessary emergency responses on or around the lake.

- Natural fish mortality is normal in every lake coming out of winter due to changes in oxygen levels and near outflow channels below dams. ODNR is working on a contingency plan to address this issue, as well as addressing the potential for an increase in geese population, which could cause more of a nuisance due to increased shoreline.
- A project of this magnitude has multiple moving pieces. The Governor has indicated that all options are on the table and that it's imperative this project be done safely and as quickly as possible. People ask why the work can't begin now. Unfortunately, it's not a simple. This dam is 4.1 miles long and the poor condition of the dam due to decades of postponing this project to avoid public discomfort make undertaking this task to fix it even more complex. We recently put out a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for a design consultant. Once the design consultant is on board they can design how the dam will be constructed. This is where public input will be helpful and we hope to make this process very transparent.
- The timetable that has been established currently is quite aggressive:
  - Summer of 2015: Engineering design contract
  - Early Spring of 2016: Design is complete
  - Summer of 2016: Construction begins
- We are all in this together. My communications team is working with other state agencies, such as the Office of Tourism as well as the local Convention and Visitors Bureau to market Buckeye Lake as a region, and not just by county or municipality. There are still a lot of good things going on out there and we want to help tell that story. If there are any ideas on how we can help, I'm here to listen.

We understand that questions will continue to arise as we work through this multi-year process. We don't attest to knowing every answer immediately after it is asked, but we are committed to providing the answers. Buckeye Lake is just as important to ODNR as it is to its residents and visitors. If it weren't, we would not stand as resolute in fixing the dam as we are. And we feel strongly that once the work is complete, a better and brighter Buckeye Lake will be usable for generations to come. At this time I'd be happy to answer any questions you might have.