



Final General Management Plan

Dear Friends of Ozark National Scenic Riverways,

I am pleased to present the *Final General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement* for Ozark National Scenic Riverways. This document represents careful consideration of a wide range of public comments received earlier this year. Your input has been invaluable in preparing the final plan.

The final general management plan establishes a new long-term vision for Ozark National Scenic Riverways and provides comprehensive guidance that will help fulfill this vision and address the Riverways' key management issues. To accomplish this, the plan sets forth a balanced approach for protecting the many distinctive natural and cultural resources along the Riverways, while also providing visitors with diverse and unique opportunities for high-quality land- and water-based recreation experiences.

The *Final General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement* is now available on the National Park Service website at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/ozarkgmp>. The document is over 600 pages long, so the number of printed hardcopies has been kept to a minimum. For your convenience, CDs are available upon request by contacting the Riverways.

The National Park Service places great value on your interest in and passion for the Ozark National Scenic Riverways. We look forward to implementing this plan with your support and collaboration!

Sincerely,

William N. Black
Superintendent



HOW TO RECEIVE A COPY OF THE FINAL PLAN

The Final General Management Plan is now available on the National Park Service website at:

<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/ozarkgmp>

CDs are available upon request by contacting the Ozark National Scenic Riverways using the address or phone number below:

Ozark National Scenic Riverways
404 Watercress Drive
PO Box 490
Van Buren, MO 63965
573.323.4236

WHY IS A GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN NEEDED FOR OZARK NATIONAL SCENIC RIVERWAYS?

Each general management plan (GMP) helps provide direction for managing park resources and visitor use, all the while establishing what resource conditions and visitor experiences should be achieved and maintained over time. Each plan takes a long-term view and is updated as conditions change. Since the last comprehensive planning effort for the National Riverways was completed in 1984:

- Patterns and types of visitor use have changed.
- The National Park Service has learned more about the Riverways' diverse natural and cultural resources and the challenges involved in protecting them.
- Existing uses have changed, providing opportunities to recommend a small portion of the Riverways' lands for designation as potential wilderness.

Each of these changes has had major implications for how visitors access and use the Riverways, the facilities needed to support those uses, how resources are managed, and how the National Park Service manages its operations and meets its obligations to the American public.

The general management plan represents a commitment by the National Park Service to the public on how the Riverways will be used and managed. As such, it is intended to:

- Confirm the purpose and national significance of the Ozark National Scenic Riverways.
- Determine the best mix of resource protection and visitor experiences.
- Allocate management zones that implement the goals of the National Park Service by defining specific resource conditions, visitor experiences, appropriate recreational activities, and facilities.

- Determine whether proposed actions are consistent with the goals embodied in the approved general management plan.
- Provide guidance for more detailed implementation-level planning documents such as a roads and trails management plan.

In addition, the general management plan includes a wilderness study for the Big Spring tract within the southern portion of the Riverways to evaluate whether these lands are appropriate for wilderness designation. The wilderness study concluded that 3,430 acres of the Big Spring tract are suitable for wilderness designation. Congress has the authority to make the final determination on wilderness designation.



PUBLIC INPUT ON THE DRAFT GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN

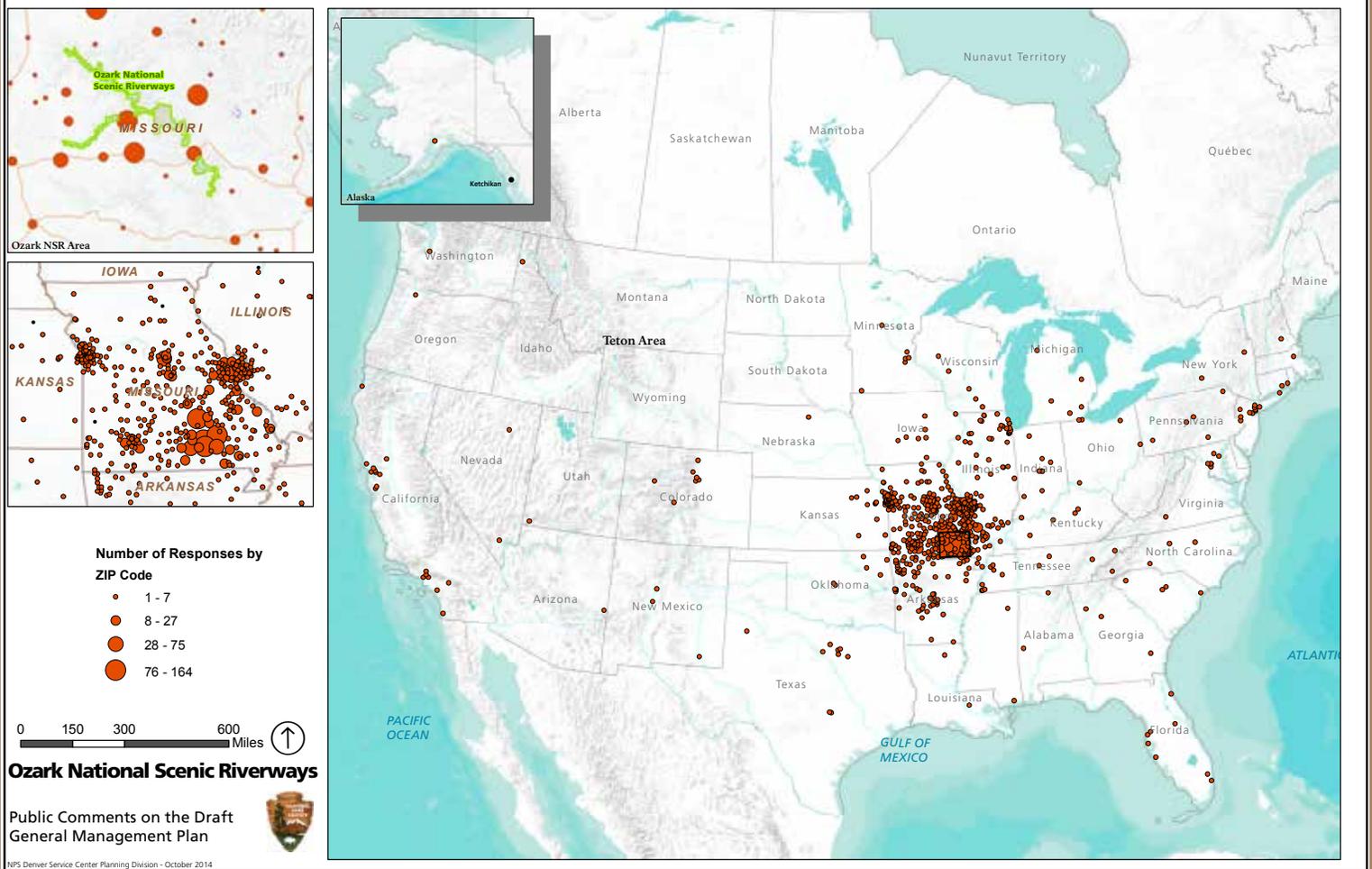
On November 8, 2013, the National Park Service released the Draft General Management Plan for public review. The draft plan was open for comment for 90 days, ending on February 7, 2014. During that time, Ozark National Scenic Riverways conducted four public open house events to share the draft plan with the public, answer questions, and request feedback. These open house events were held in Van Buren, Eminence, Salem, and Kirkwood, Missouri. Over 1,450 people participated in what were some of the most widely attended public meetings held by the National Park Service nationwide in recent years.

In total, the National Park Service received 3,094 correspondences during the public review period. Of the total correspondences, 83% came from commenters in Missouri, while the remaining were from 43 other states. The following map depicts the distribution of these public

comments by zip code. In addition, comments were received from individuals in eight foreign countries.

Many of the commenters were concerned with either excessive or inadequate access related to boating, gravel bar camping, equestrian use, and roads and trails. Other comments received were associated with the desire for partnerships and improved community interface and consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service regarding the Ozark hellbender.

Chapter 6 of the Final General Management Plan includes a summary of public comments on the draft plan. This section of the plan includes substantive comments received during public review of the draft plan and National Park Service responses to the concerns that were raised.



KEY CHANGES TO THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

After considering public comments on the Draft General Management Plan, the planning team revised the plan to correct misinformation, provide points of clarification, and refine key management practices that emphasize a balanced approach to the protection of natural and cultural resources while enhancing ways for visitors to experience and connect with these resources. Changes to the preferred alternative generally fell within four broad topic areas: (1) river-based access and use, (2) land-based access and use, (3) natural resource management, and (4) public outreach and partnerships. A summary of these key changes is provided below, along with select representative quotes from public comments on the draft plan.

River-Based Access and Use

Seasonal Motorboat Access to the Upper Current and Jacks Fork Rivers. In acknowledgement of the strong cultural ties to gigging and trapping in the upper portions of the Current and Jacks Fork Rivers, the planning team modified the preferred alternative to accommodate motorboats with engines rated up to 25 horsepower (hp) or less at the power head in order to allow these activities from the beginning of gigging season through the end of trapping season. The preferred alternative previously proposed year-round closure to all motorboats in these upper reaches of the rivers.



WHAT WE HEARD FROM YOU

"There is very little motorized boat traffic on the upper end of either of these rivers due to water level and that isn't going to change. But, there are a lot of local folks who like to gig and trap those upper sections in the fall and winter and making this a non-motorized zone would certainly limit their user experience."



Motorboat Horsepower Limits on the Lower Current River below Big Spring. In acknowledgement of the greater depth and width of the Current River below Big Spring to the southern boundary of the National Riverways, the preferred alternative was revised to allow up to 150 hp motorboats. The preferred alternative previously proposed changing the regulation in this portion of the river from unlimited horsepower to 60 hp/40 hp rated at the power head of the motor.

WHAT WE HEARD FROM YOU

"The plan proposes for 60/40 HP in the unlimited HP section from Big Spring to Gooseneck (southern park boundary). This is the stretch of the river that I spend almost 80% of my time boating on. I do think that there should be a limit on HP in this section, however, not the 60/40. There should be a section or zone of river open to boat operators who have larger size motors and fish on lakes. A limit of 150 HP would be sufficient. Motors with 300 HP have no place on the river of this size. I would be in favor of limiting the HP size to 150."



Land-based Access and Use

Gravel Bar Access and Camping. In reviewing the many comments on the topic of gravel bar access and camping, the planning team clarified language in the draft plan that was misleading concerning the agency's intention. The preferred alternative was modified to reflect the following language: Gravel bar camping would continue to be allowed for those accessing gravel bars by watercraft, as long as the location of the campsite is one-half mile away from any designated campground and at least 50 feet away from any designated river access. For some gravel bars that are accessed by licensed vehicles, the preferred alternative proposes designating gravel bar camping areas and/or campsites. This action is intended to improve visitor safety and enjoyment and resource protection.

WHAT WE HEARD FROM YOU

"I am troubled and a bit confused by the proposed "prohibition" on gravel bar camping. I have no problem with closing the gravel bars to vehicular traffic, this should have happened long ago. However, one of the greatest draws to the ONSR is ones ability to float/camp among these wonders of Nature...If you would, please clarify your meaning/intent in this regard."



Equestrian Trails. Currently, there are 23 miles of designated equestrian trails within the Riverways and approximately 90 miles of undesignated trails. Many of the undesignated trails have resulted in damage to natural resources and made navigation of the trail system difficult for many trail users. In acknowledgement of the great amount of interest and support for equestrian activities, the preferred alternative was revised to increase the amount of designated trails by an additional 25 to 45 miles. The remaining undesignated trails would be restored to natural conditions. The preferred alternative previously proposed designating 35 miles of additional trails and restoring the remaining miles of undesignated trails.

WHAT WE HEARD FROM YOU

"We have watched the horse trails multiply, up and down the rivers, seemingly without direction or planning. The result is that riders often cross onto private land, including ours, without permission. Resolving this issue should be one of your top priorities."



Roads and Trails Management. The preferred alternative was revised to include a commitment to develop and implement a roads and trails management plan. The plan will be the basis for making informed decisions about where to designate trails (for equestrian use, hiking, and mountain biking) and river crossings to minimize impacts to sensitive areas, while also ensuring that the National Park Service continues to provide high quality experiences for all trail users. The plan will also evaluate road ownership within the park boundary to ensure consistency with NPS objectives. Until a roads and trails management plan is completed, those unauthorized trails that pose the greatest threat to park resources and visitor safety could be closed on a case-by-case basis.

WHAT WE HEARD FROM YOU

"Locals have been aware of the gravel erosion problem for some time, and we would be more willing to accept measures to reduce it if the NPS themselves weren't notorious for circumventing that effort. ...Regardless of past erosion prevention failures, we do agree that there are more access points than necessary along the river, and that a great number of these are unmanaged by the NPS and in varying degrees of disrepair. We also understand and agree with the fact that in heavy rain, these roads and traces erode, dumping silt and gravel into streambeds already brimming with gravel. In general, we are in favor of a more detailed study that determines the access points that are the greatest offenders in contributing to the erosion problem, and the subsequent closing and restoration of these areas. When promoting the idea of road closures, it's important for the NPS to understand that this knowledge of the back roads is a point of pride for those who have grown up here. ...The study of closing these access points should be undertaken with transparency and with open feedback from the local population. A compromise that could be considered by the NPS would be to determine and retain several of the least damaging and most valued secondary roads that are frequented by locals."



Natural Resource Management. Based on comments from the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the preferred alternative was modified to emphasize that the National Park Service will continue to consult with the US Fish and Wildlife Service on all applicable phases of the plan's implementation. In addition, the National Park Service recommits to ongoing monitoring of rare species (e.g., Ozark hellbender) and interagency research efforts. The preferred alternative was also updated to state that the National Park Service would strive to partner with surrounding communities on wastewater management to improve water quality in the Riverways.

Public Outreach and Partnerships. Many commenters on the Draft GMP/EIS stated that the National Park Service should more effectively communicate with the public, including suggestions for establishment of a working group to enhance the interests of the National Riverways. The Final GMP/EIS commits the National Park Service to working cooperatively with others to anticipate, avoid, and resolve potential conflicts, protect National Riverways resources, and address mutual interests related to the quality of life for community residents.

Based on public comment, the preferred alternative was revised to emphasize more opportunities for partnerships, including those with local community organizations and chambers of commerce for park cultural demonstrations, special events, and assistance with protecting the Riverways' natural and cultural resources. In an effort to further improve communications, the Final GMP/EIS noted that the National Riverways would develop a communications plan. This plan would detail how park management proposes to disseminate information to the public on a regular basis, respond to concerns about park operations, and encourage feedback on park issues.

WHAT WE HEARD FROM YOU

"As noted in the plan, it will be necessary for the NPS to consult with the Service under section 7(a)(2) of the ESA before implementation of the General Management Plan. Through the consultation process, the NPS and the Service will evaluate effects of activities occurring within or authorized by the park to federally listed species and discuss ways to minimize or avoid adverse effects. If it is determined that any actions or activities are likely to result in adverse effects to threatened or endangered species, and these adverse effects cannot be prevented through implementation of conservation measures, then the NPS should initiate formal consultation and develop a biological assessment. It's also stated in the plan that the NPS will work with the Service under section 7(a)(1) of the ESA to develop and implement a conservation program for federally listed species. We fully support this measure as such a program will contribute to the recovery of threatened and endangered species and may help compensate for effects from actions occurring within or authorized by the park. The Service looks forward to working with the NPS on the development of a conservation program that will contribute to the recovery of all federally listed species that occur within the park's jurisdiction."



WHAT WE HEARD FROM YOU

"The Department requests the NPS to organize a working group that includes local community members, resource agencies, and other interest groups to develop new management approaches that resolve unauthorized access/use issues within the Scenic Riverways."



THE FINAL PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

Based on refinements to the draft plan, the final preferred alternative would enhance opportunities for visitors to discover and learn about the natural wonders and Ozark heritage of the National Riverways, while maintaining a mix of traditional recreational and commercial activities. Emphasis would be placed on increasing opportunities for visitor education and connections to natural resources and cultural landscapes.



This alternative would focus on providing a balance of diverse recreational opportunities and visitor experiences along with increasing visitor education and appreciation of natural and cultural resources of the park unit. For example, a mix of private and guided traditional recreational activities like boating, floating, and horseback riding would occur under this alternative. Additional trails and a small learning center at Powder Mill would be developed to better orient and inform visitors. Natural resources would be restored to more natural conditions, while maintaining greater opportunities for visitor access than under alternative A. The wilderness study concluded that 3,430 acres of the Big Spring tract are suitable for wilderness designation. Congress has the authority to make the final determination on wilderness designation.



Elements of this alternative would support the resilience of the Riverways to expected impacts from climate change, such as warmer temperatures, an extended fire season, and changes to water flow regimes, all of which may affect cultural and natural resources and visitor experience at the Riverways. Some of the strategies for climate change adaptation and sustainability in the preferred alternative include restoring key ecosystem features and processes, protecting cultural resources to increase their resilience to climate change, and providing additional opportunities for nonmotorized recreation during the peak use season.



This alternative would provide a comprehensive Riverways-wide approach to resource and visitor use management. Specific management zones detailing acceptable resource conditions, visitor experience and use levels, and appropriate activities and development would be applied to Riverways lands consistent with this concept.

Chapter 2 of the Final GMP/EIS includes a description of the preferred alternative.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
DENVER SERVICE CENTER – CHRIS CHURCH, PLANNING
12795 WEST ALAMEDA PARKWAY
PO Box 25287
DENVER CO 80225-0287

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NEXT STEPS AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN

Before NPS managers can carry out the various actions and proposals identified in the Final General Management Plan, the NPS Midwest Regional Director must sign a record of decision that approves the final plan and documents the alternative selected for implementation. The record of decision will follow distribution of the plan to the public and a 30-day no-action period.

NPS approval of the plan does not guarantee that the funding and staffing needed for its implementation are immediately forthcoming. Full implementation of the approved plan may be affected by changes in funding, requirements for additional data or regulatory compliance, competing national park system priorities, and other factors. As necessary, additional feasibility studies and more detailed planning and environmental documentation would be completed before selected actions are implemented.



Thank you for your support and collaboration as we move forward in the future!