

**Ozark National Scenic Riverways  
General Management Plan/Wilderness Study/Environmental Impact Statement**

**Public Comment Summary Report on the Preliminary Management Alternatives  
December 2009**



**INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of public comments received on the preliminary management alternatives for the Ozark National Scenic Riverways General Management Plan/ Wilderness Study. It will be used to help refine the preliminary alternatives and develop the National Park Service's preferred management approach for the national riverways.

The preliminary alternatives were distributed to the public for review in *Newsletter 3* in May 2009, and were presented at five open houses held in June 2009. The official comment period on the preliminary alternatives ended September 11, 2009. During this time, the National Park Service received 5,117 pieces of written correspondence, including: handwritten and typed letters, NPS comment forms, e-mails, and NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website entries.\* There were also hundreds of comments recorded on flip charts at the five open houses. All correspondence submitted to the National Park Service via mail or e-mail has been uploaded to the PEPC website.

A tally of written correspondence types and the number of attendees at the public open houses follows:

**Written Correspondence**

<b>Correspondence Type</b>	<b>Number Received</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
NPS comment forms	2,896	57%
Entered directly into PEPC	1,048	20%
Form letters (# of signatures)	778	15%
Individual letters	395	8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,117</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Public Open Houses**

<b>Location</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Attendance</b>
Van Buren, Missouri	June 22, 2009	265
Eminence, Missouri	June 23, 2009	323
Salem, Missouri	June 24, 2009	116
Columbia, Missouri	June 25, 2009	127
St. Louis, Missouri	June 26, 2009	186
<b>Total</b>		<b>1,017</b>

\*A table presenting the full comments submitted by the public can be found separately on the PEPC website. The number of correspondence in that table is a total of 4,344. This is because each of the nine form letters were entered only one time each, even though 778 total signatures were received. Also, the flip chart notes for the five open houses were entered into the spreadsheet as five separate entries. These flip chart notes also can be found on the PEPC website as separate PDF files.

## ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

The National Park Service developed four preliminary alternatives and presented them to the public in *Newsletter 3*. The newsletter included a comment form with five questions. Through these questions, the public was asked which alternative they preferred, what aspects of the alternatives they felt strongly should or should not be included, and whether they had any suggestions for future strategies to manage park resources or visitor experiences.

All correspondence and meeting notes were read and analyzed for comments, then summarized and organized into three main categories: (1) the most cited reasons for support for the alternatives, (2) public comments in support of the alternatives organized by planning issues, and (3) other suggestions and strategies not specific to the alternatives, which are also organized by planning issues.

Planning issues were identified by the public during initial scoping for this planning effort in 2007. The reason for organizing public comments by planning issues is because an important role of the management alternatives is to analyze different ways to address these issues. The categories of planning issues include the following:

- River Use
- Trails and Horse Use
- Roads and ATV Use
- Camping
- Facilities and Services
- Resource Management
- NPS Management and Operations
- Visitor Behavior
- Trash and Litter
- Water Quality
- Wilderness
- Interpretation

Public support for the different alternatives is based mostly on how the alternatives address these issues. However, this was not the case for visitor behavior, trash and litter, water quality, wilderness, and interpretation. For these issues, public comments were generally not specific to any particular alternative.

Some commenters did not state support for a specific alternative, yet commented on particular aspects of the alternatives and/or provided suggestions or strategies for addressing different issues. These valuable ideas are captured in the last section under each planning issue.

Please note that in the report the words “national riverways” refers to the entire Ozark National Scenic Riverways and “river(s)” refers to the Current and Jacks Fork rivers.

**MOST CITED REASONS FOR SUPPORT OF THE ALTERNATIVES****No-Action Alternative**

- No restrictions or no new restrictions on motorboat horsepower.
- No more restrictions on the types of recreational opportunities or the numbers of recreational users.
- Concern for negative impacts on the local economy.
- No changes are necessary, everything is fine the way it is.
- Focus on where problems are, not the entire national riverways.

**Alternative A**

- Keep the national riverways as natural and primitive as possible.
- Protect and improve water quality.
- Reduce and repair environmental degradation caused by crowds, horses, ATVs, motorboats, noise, and access.

**Alternative B**

- Maintain horseback riding.
- Provide a manageable mix of traditional uses.

**Alternative C**

- Maintain a balance to preserve the river and allow high levels of use and mixed recreational opportunities.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS IN SUPPORT OF THE ALTERNATIVES — ORGANIZED BY PLANNING ISSUES****RIVER USE**

*No-Action Alternative.* Not wanting additional limits on motorboat horsepower was the most often cited comment. Commenters were concerned about their ability to enjoy the rivers and recreate with family and friends if there were additional motorboat restrictions. Commenters also stated that it would be a hardship on owners of 40 horsepower motors if they had to change to 25 horsepower motors. Some suggestions for other ways to address river use issues included limiting the number of canoes and tubes by permit or lottery; increasing enforcement of existing laws; providing boater safety courses; and lifting horsepower restrictions from the southern edge of Van Buren gap to Big Spring — which would allow large boats to go down river and relieve congestion in the gap on Saturdays during the summer. Some commenters also expressed concern about the effect of motorboat restrictions on local businesses and the economy.

*Alternative A.* Commenters felt that the rivers should be kept natural and water quality should be protected and restored. Suggestions for achieving these goals included limiting horsepower and the number of motorboats; restricting the rivers or sections of the rivers to nonmotorized use; limiting access to the rivers; limiting noise from motors, radios, and vehicles; and in general limiting the numbers of people. Some suggested stricter and more enforcement of regulations

on boaters and limiting boat speed. Some suggested limiting the numbers of tubes and canoes and implementing a permit system with fees and using those funds for restoration. A few suggested that the number of guided trips be limited. A few suggested reducing the number of commercial operations. Others suggested buffer zones along the rivers with certain activities and vehicles banned within them, such as car camping, trailers, and recreational vehicles (RVs).

*Alternative B.* In general, using seasonal strategies to manage river use was supported. Strategies included implementing nonmotorized restrictions in segments of the river, using seasonal horsepower restrictions, and either limiting or scheduling tubes and canoes. Many felt that blanket nonmotorized restrictions should not be implemented. Some supported guided float trips. Others expressed concern that motorboats interfere with fishing; and some stated that no gigging, horses, powerboats, or loud music should be allowed on the river at night.

*Alternative C.* Most commenters were concerned about restrictions on horsepower and felt that restrictions were not needed or supported. Some advocated for removal of existing restrictions. A few suggested that a section of the Current River should have access on both sides (from Powder Mill down) for more convenience and to reduce congestion. A few suggested getting the tubers to spread out their launch points. One commenter stated that there should be canoes only on the Jacks Fork and motorboats only on the Current River.

#### *Other Suggestions and Strategies Related to River Use*

- Measure horsepower at the jet pump.
- Make and enforce speed limits, not horsepower limits for motorboats.
- Limit number of motorboats.
- Use “green” boat technology.
- Remove motorboat horsepower limits in the off-season.
- Reduce motorboat horsepower and boat traffic during busy seasons.
- Limit power boats to speeds of 5 miles per hour.
- Eliminate jet boats.
- Have stricter enforcement of boater regulations.
- Eliminate motorboats, except for NPS rangers.
- Reduce the number of river access points.
- Require that boaters read regulations.
- Use varied seasonal and day use of motorboats to achieve management goals.
- Eliminate large inboard motors and jet skis.
- Add more and improved river access points to relieve congestion.
- Have a schedule for tubers and limit numbers.
- Add float camps.
- Allow overnight floats by commercial operators.
- Limit number of guided overnight trips.
- Emphasize nonmotorized recreation.
- Add better signs on rivers.
- Educate floaters and canoeists.
- Have concessioners and NPS staff teach floaters how to use rental canoes and tubes.
- Control increasing congestion and excessive noise.
- Continue to offer all activities in no-action alternative.

- Expand and develop new facilities to accommodate people and recreational interests.
- Visitors should enjoy the national riverways in the variety of traditions that are part of Ozark heritage (boating, fishing, camping, and picnicking).
- Increase number of NPS rangers to help stop shoal runners.
- Implement closures when environmental impact is too great.
- Increase primitive and natural recreation opportunities.
- Manage the national riverways for maximum use.
- Allow no vehicular (car or ATV) access to gravel bars.
- Reduce high density of floaters in the Upper Current area, Alley to Two Rivers area, and Waymeyer to Van Buren area.
- Reduce high density of boaters in the Log Yard area and the Big Spring to Gooseneck area.
- Designate the areas from Bay Creek to Alley, and Akers to Jerktail Landing, as nonmotorized.
- Limit motorboats to 40 horsepower from Lower Current River from Gooseneck; 25 horsepower from Two Rivers upstream; and all boat speeds should be limited to 30 miles per hour.
- Eliminate motors in upper reaches of Jacks Fork and Current rivers.
- Limit canoe and tube use from Waymeyer to Van Buren gap — put tubes on a schedule.
- Initiate 90 horsepower motorboat limits from Big Spring to Gooseneck.
- The number of tubes and canoes are the main problem on Current River — 95% are put in the river at the same boat ramp causing congestion.
- Initiate 40 horsepower motorboat limits from Two Rivers to North Van Buren (25 horsepower limit is not necessary to achieve goals).
- Designate upper reaches of Jacks Fork and Current rivers as nonmotorized.
- No need for 40 horsepower limits for motorboats on the Current River.
- Restrict motorboats in specific segments of Two Rivers, Jacks Fork, and Upper Current rivers above Highway 60.
- Allow only canoeing on the Jacks Fork River and motorboating on the Current River.
- Rivers should be designated nonmotorized or nonmotorized in the upper reaches.
- Have no limits from Van Buren Gap to Big Spring.
- Do not restrict motorboat horsepower from Round Spring to Jerktail (there are no conflicts).
- Consider visitors' investments in outdoor equipment when proposing rule changes.

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## TRAILS AND HORSE USE

*No-Action Alternative.* Most comments were for controlling horses and riders, not eliminating them. Suggestions included limiting horse group size, moving horse trails away from the river, or providing more horse trails. A few commenters wanted to keep horses out of the river.

*Alternative A.* Respondents suggested that horses should either be banned entirely, or the number of horses and size of groups should be limited. Many suggested moving trails away from the river, having designated trails and crossings, and not allowing horses in the river. A few commenters suggested adding additional mountain bike and hiking trails.

**Alternative B.** Horseback riders strongly advocated for this activity, citing that it was a traditional use and that it was a way to enjoy the national riverways' scenery. Some stated that horses and mules are a source of access for the disabled and aging populations. One commenter stated that it was the number of horses in one place at one time that caused the problems and that the size of horse groups needed to be reduced. Another suggested that horses be banned. Some stated that nonmotorized forms of recreation were fine as long as there are adequate allowances for staging areas and trailheads to park trucks and trailers. Many advocated for well-planned and maintained trails. Some commenters supported closing illegal trails, while others did not support closing any trails.

**Alternative C.** There were not many comments specific to horse use; however, maintaining current uses was strongly encouraged. One suggestion was to construct a wrangler camp with designated trails for horses. In general, more trails were strongly supported.

#### ***Other Suggestions and Strategies Related to Trails and Horse Use***

- Do not implement new restrictions
- Apply and enforce stricter regulations to eliminate large horse groups and relocate horseback trails.
- Limit number of trail riders and relocate trails away from rivers, creeks, and sinkholes to prevent E. coli contamination.
- Favor nonmotorized forms of recreation with allowances for adequate numbers and size of equestrian staging areas and trailheads for trucks and trailers.
- Provide a manageable mix of traditional activities.
- Reduce large number of horses on the river.
- Increase education on use and where uses are appropriate.
- Limit number of horses, use designated trails only, keep horses out of river, and limit group size.
- Reduce river crossings.
- Eliminate large groups of horseback riders.
- Provide well-maintained and planned trails.
- Provide education and promotion of outdoor ethics.
- Close illegal trails.
- Increase public access to outdoor recreation and opportunities.
- Keep roads and trails open.
- Add more wheelchair-accessible trails.

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## **ROADS AND ATV USE**

**No-Action Alternative.** There were few comments regarding all-terrain vehicles (ATVs). Those who did comment supported more ATV access and trails. There were also few comments regarding roads. Those who did comment supported more and better roads.

**Alternative A.** Many commenters expressed concern about the negative impacts of illegal off-road vehicles (ORVs) and ATVs on land and riverbanks, and on the camping and natural experience. These commenters cited an increasing number of unsanctioned roads made by

visitors seeking access to river shorelines. Many suggested that ATV use should be completely banned from the national riverways, or at a minimum limit them to designated roads away from the river. Many commenters advocated closing illegal roads, reducing the number of river crossings, and limiting river access for vehicles.

*Alternative B.* There were very few comments regarding ATVs; one suggested that ATVs should be banned, and one stated that there should be ATV access. Some commenters supported closing illegal roads, while others did not support closing any roads.

*Alternative C.* There were not many comments specific to ATV use; however, maintaining current uses was strongly encouraged. More trails, in general, were strongly supported, especially for older users; and a few suggested designated roads for ATVs and ORVs. A few commented that the roads were necessary to maintain utilities on private property in-holdings.

#### *Other Suggestions and Strategies Related to Roads and ATV Use*

- Relocate trails away from the river.
- Limit designated river crossings.
- Create new measures for control of increasing congestion and excessive noise.
- Expand existing facilities and develop new facilities to accommodate people and recreational interests.

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## CAMPING

*No-Action Alternative.* Commenters wanted unrestricted camping to continue, more campgrounds, and improvements to existing camping facilities.

*Alternative A.* Comments included that many of the “primitive” campsites were often occupied by RVs, which impacted the feeling of solitude. Others contended that vehicle camping along the shoreline was negatively impacting boat and canoe camping in the same locations. Others commented that camping on gravel bars was a family tradition; however, it was not family-friendly anymore. Suggestions included restricting trailers and RVs to designated campgrounds, and a few suggested banning riverbank camping completely.

*Alternative B.* There were very few comments specifically regarding camping; however, commenters tended to support mixed-use opportunities.

*Alternative C.* Comments regarding camping included wanting unrestricted camping to continue, and wanting more primitive campgrounds and formal campgrounds with additional RV hook-ups. Float camps were supported by some.

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## FACILITIES AND SERVICES

*No-Action Alternative.* Most comments that addressed facilities were in support of more facility development (e.g., visitor centers, restrooms, campgrounds, roads, parking lots, concessions along the river, boat ramps, roads, and river access points). Some stated that

parking area should be increased in low use areas, but not in high use areas. Others asserted that it is important to maintain historic structures. Others suggested better universal access for the disabled.

*Alternative A.* Most respondents supported no new development or limiting new development to facilities that support more primitive opportunities and natural experiences. There was interest in learning centers and restoring historic structures for interpretive purposes. One suggestion was for installing composting toilets along the river (out of the floodplain), and limiting parking in over-used areas.

*Alternative B.* There were very few comments specifically on facilities. Adequate staging and parking areas to accommodate horse riders were suggested. One stated no new development. Another suggested installing emergency phones.

*Alternative C.* Most commenters supported development of new facilities (e.g., more trails, more camping facilities, more recreational facilities, more boat ramps, and more access points). A visitor center in Salem was suggested. A few commented that certain areas are currently underused and developing these areas for recreational use would stimulate jobs. One suggested adding mile markers on the river.

#### *Other Suggestions and Strategies Related to Facilities and Services*

- Add more river access points to relieve congestion.
- Allow free recreational use—do not charge for launching, parking, camping, etc.
- Manage the national riverways for maximum use.
- Limit river access.
- Install emergency phones.
- Add fish cleaning stations.
- Create better trail maps, habitat areas (for birders), and river access points.
- Add more walking trails.
- Add more universally accessible facilities and areas for the disabled.
- Add a wrangler camp with designated trails for horses.
- Add hitching posts for horses.
- Add more trails for wheelchair access, not just hiking trails for young.
- Add more camping and access to remote historic and natural sites.
- Add more mountain bike trails.
- Add more primitive camping areas.
- Add more camping facilities with electricity and water access.
- Add more trails and an off-road area designated for ATVs and ORVs.
- Open preserved farmstead to public tours and visitation to include living history.
- Close illegal roads.
- Add guided small group cave tours.
- Maintain historic structures and enlist local help for historic site use.

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**RESOURCE MANAGEMENT (ALSO SEE WATER QUALITY)**

*No-Action Alternative.* Individuals stated that resource management actions should be focused on where specific problems are and not the entire national riverways. A state agency was concerned that limiting motorboats would affect the agency's ability to manage fisheries. A few individuals suggested burning and opening fields for improved hunting. A few others suggested size limits for fish, and installing fish cleaning stations.

*Alternative A.* Individuals expressed concerns about how the national riverways' resources are being managed. Conservation advocates contended that stricter enforcement was important, and more management is needed to protect resources, including water quality. Some suggested purchasing additional land, as necessary, to protect resources. Some comments included protection for and adding more fisheries. Some suggested stocking trout, while others said not to stock trout. A few commenters suggested removal of nonnative plant species. One commenter wanted to reduce the beaver population. Another suggested incorporating resource management and new trail options described in alternative B. One stated that commercial gravel operations should not be allowed in the river.

*Alternative B.* Individuals made suggestions for resource management including restoring the national riverways to conditions of earlier days, restoring glades and other natural areas, managing for a more primitive experience, burning areas to restore natural conditions, and controlling nonnative plant species.

*Alternative C.* There were few comments specific to resource management. One commenter wanted remote areas to be managed as primitive and another was grateful that the orchard glades had not been destroyed.

***Other Suggestions and Strategies Related to Resource Management***

- Ban car-camping by creating a buffer zone along riverbanks.
- Develop effective measures that monitor and minimize human waste pollution.
- Develop new measures that eliminate excess river access points and river openings.
- Reduce large number of horses on the river.
- Focus on river-based management to decrease visitor density.
- Protect and restore the national riverways' natural qualities.
- Limit numbers of guided overnight trips.
- Add more fisheries.
- Remove/extract and/or control the amount of gravel/sand and rocks.
- Do not allow gravel mining or dredging in the river.
- Implement closures when environmental impact is too great.
- Remove river otters.
- Strictly enforce existing policies and easements for natural resource management.
- Develop plans to eliminate illegal roads and trails.
- Eliminate illegal camping on or near the river.
- Increase education about natural resources and cultural heritage of the national riverways.
- Develop research, monitoring, and preservation programs.
- Focus on conservation and preservation.

- Increase management to protect resources and prevent abuse.
- Develop resource-based recreation, with some nicely developed areas.
- Leave remote areas natural and primitive.
- Provide education and promotion of outdoor ethics.
- Restore the national riverways to condition of earlier days.
- Provide maps of historic sites and access to special sites (historic and natural).
- Add more primitive and natural recreation opportunities.
- Open the caves.
- Manage old farms for agricultural production for wildlife and food.

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## NPS MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONS

*No-Action Alternative.* Some stated that the National Park Service was already too restrictive, there should be less government presence, and that solutions should be kept simple. Others thought that the National Park Service should not be in competition with local businesses.

*Alternative A.* Many individuals thought the National Park Service should make protection and preservation of resources and low-impact recreation with nonmotorized vehicles its management priority. Many stated that enforcement of laws and regulations should be increased, as well as enforcement of scenic and conservation easements. A few suggested that mixed-use areas (zones) were a source of conflict and should not be included in the new management plan. Partnerships were suggested for future management of the national riverways.

*Alternative B.* There were few comments on NPS management. One commenter wanted the National Park Service to purchase more land for increased recreational opportunities.

*Alternative C.* Commenters supported management for maximum and mixed recreational use. Suggestions included forming citizen committees to help with management decisions and using volunteers to help with restoration and management of historic facilities.

### *Other Suggestions and Strategies Related to NPS Management and Operations*

- Devise new measures to eliminate excess river access points and river openings.
- Eliminate mixed-use zones.
- Ban electronic audio without headphones to reduce excessive noise.
- Purchase land as needed to protect resources or increase recreational opportunities.
- Include Springfield and Kansas in public meetings.
- Develop research, monitoring, and preservation programs.
- Add more rangers and guides.
- Increase NPS staff and visitor contact to protect the resources through education and enforcement.
- National Park Service should not compete with commercial businesses.
- Create user group committees and/or advisory board to help with management.
- National Park Service is doing a good job.
- Hire more local people.
- Make law enforcement officers more visible and approachable.

**OTHER SUGGESTIONS AND STRATEGIES NOT SPECIFIC TO THE ALTERNATIVES—  
ORGANIZED BY PLANNING ISSUES****VISITOR BEHAVIOR**

Some commented that drugs and alcohol use make areas unfit for families. There were many suggestions for limiting and banning alcohol on the rivers. Many commenters indicated that increased law enforcement and a visible ranger presence would curb inappropriate behavior. Other ideas included the following:

- Implement new measures to control increasing congestion and excessive noise.
- Eliminate mixed-use zones on the river and ban electronic audio without headphones to reduce excessive noise.
- Add more ranger patrols.
- Institute sobriety checkpoints on the river.
- Allow visitors to enjoy the national riverways in the variety of traditions that are part of the Ozark heritage (boating, fishing, camping, picnicking).
- Increase ranger presence on the river to discourage rude behavior.
- Implement education and promotion of outdoor ethics.
- Strengthen enforcement of laws and regulations.

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**TRASH AND LITTER**

Many commenters suggested strict enforcement and fines for littering, banning the use of glass and Styrofoam, and use of bear-proof trash cans. Other suggestions included the following:

- Eliminate illegal camping on or near riverbanks.
- Implement community service or clean-up duty for littering.
- Add more rangers and guides.
- Increase enforcement.
- Increase education.
- Improve and increase river clean-up activities.
- Provide trash bags.

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**WATER QUALITY**

Many noted that declining water quality was a major concern, and they suggested keeping horses out of the rivers, moving trails away from the river, reducing river crossings, and reducing river access points. A few advocated for river closures when the environmental impact becomes too great. One commenter stated that protection of the springs should be a high priority in preserving water quality. Some commenters felt that the water quality was fine and was not

impacted by recreational activities. A few suggested designating river crossings and removing gravel and debris from the river. Other suggestions that would affect water quality included the following:

- Create a buffer zone along riverbanks that would ban car camping.
- Implement use of “green” boat technology.
- Take effective measures to monitor and minimize human waste pollution.
- Minimize horse manure by enforcing stricter conditions on horseback outfitting permits.
- Eliminate large-group horse riding events.
- Eliminate illegal camping on or near riverbanks.
- Reduce number of motorboats.
- Control or reduce visitor use levels.
- Add composting toilets along the river (out of floodplain) for human waste disposal.
- Reduce beaver population.
- Remove and/or control the amount of gravel/sand and rocks that fill the riverbed and valley.
- Collaborate with Missouri Department of Conservation to stop development in areas like Angeline that cause runoff in the rivers.
- Require proof of insurance for all mechanized equipment for trail riding; and require they have a fire extinguisher, trash bags, and no oil leaks.
- Protect headwaters to gain greatest benefit to water quality (a wilder, more natural experience is available toward the headwaters, while more diverse recreation opportunities could be allowed on the mid to lower river segments provided there is adequate protection of water quality).
- Discourage floodplain development — institute controls to ensure water quality protection if development occurs (use of erosion control, best management practices, and setbacks for riparian corridors).

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## WILDERNESS

Wilderness designation for the Big Spring tract was strongly supported by alternative A advocates. Otherwise, the comments were split for and against designation.

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## INTERPRETATION

Education and interpretation was mentioned numerous times and was strongly supported across all of the alternatives. The importance of Ozark cultural heritage and education was stressed. Many commented that the interpretive program should continue to focus on the area’s prehistory and history, as well as heritage demonstrations. Many suggested offering instruction on boater safety, etiquette, and regulations. Other suggestions included the following:

- Open preserved farmstead to public tours and visitation and include living history.
- Add trails, camping, anything to encourage parents to teach their children to love and use the outdoors.
- Develop better maps of trails, habitat areas (for birders), and river access points.

- Add more walking trails.
- Add new guide services to help small groups explore caves.
- Add more access to remote historic and natural sites.
- Develop guided cave tours for small groups.
- Add more interpretive tours.
- Add education and promotion of outdoor ethics.
- Balance people's activities with other discovery and learning opportunities.
- Add more educational and interpretive activities and visitor centers.
- Provide maps (on-line and handouts) of historic sites and access to special sites (historic and natural).
- Enhance cultural/historical awareness.
- Add a series of learning centers.
- Teach the big picture — take care of the river and land around it. It may be possible to allow all user groups to use the natural resources once they understand the impact — negative or positive — on that resource. Remember to respect the flow of the river upstream and downstream.