

OZARK NATIONAL SCENIC RIVERWAYS FINAL GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why do we need a new General Management Plan (GMP)?

The purpose of the GMP is to clearly define the park's mission and management direction. It provides a foundation to guide and coordinate all subsequent planning and management for the next 20 years. Ozark National Scenic Riverways (ONSR) was established as a unit of the National Park System in 1964. The first GMP was completed in 1984. The 1984 plan is outdated and the Riverways is now facing an array of issues that require guidance through an updated general management plan. A new plan will clearly define resource conditions and visitor experiences to be achieved, provide a framework for NPS managers when making future management decisions, and to ensure that the framework for decision making has been developed in consultation with interested stakeholders and adopted by NPS leaders after adequate analysis of alternative courses of action. The GMP is also needed to meet the requirements of the National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978 and NPS policy, which require development of a GMP for every park unit.

What is an Environmental Impact Statement?

An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is a detailed environmental analysis document that is prepared when a proposal or alternatives have the potential for significant impact on the environment. National Park Service GMPs and Wilderness Studies require an EIS.

How were my comments used during the latest round of public input?

The Superintendent and Deputy Superintendent read and considered every comment submitted. All comments were analyzed to determine if they presented corrections or additional factual information, discussed important new issues, or offered reasonable alternatives or mitigation measures. These comments were used to make revisions to the preferred alternative.

What comes next?

Following distribution of the final GMP and a 30-day no-action period, a record of decision to approve the plan will be prepared for signature by the National Park Service Midwest Region Director. The plan will then be implemented depending on available funding and staffing. A record of decision does not guarantee funds and staffing for implementing the plan.

How quickly will you begin implementing the changes to current management practices?

In some cases implementation may begin soon after the record of decision is signed. In others, where additional funding, feasibility studies, regulation, compliance, or legislative action are required, implementation may be delayed until those actions are accomplished.

Why are you trying to designate a piece of the park as wilderness?

The National Park Service is required to study the suitability of lands within the national park system for preservation as wilderness (43 CFR 19). The inclusion of a wilderness study in the latest GMP is to fulfill the NPS commitment in the 1984 GMP to initiate a formal wilderness study should "conditions precluding legislative wilderness designation change in the future." The 1984 GMP identified three

areas (Cardareva, Upper Jacks Fork, and Big Spring) for assessment of their suitability as wilderness. At that time, all three areas were determined to have wilderness characteristics, but land ownership and nonconforming uses made them unsuitable for wilderness designation. Since then, the nonconforming conditions at Big Spring have been removed.

The wilderness study in the 2014 GMP concluded that 3,430 out of 3,434 acres within the Big Spring Wilderness Study Area are suitable for wilderness designation. Only Congress has the authority to make a final determination on wilderness designation.

What type of recreation is allowed in wilderness areas?

Wilderness is intended for recreational use by people who want to enjoy a primitive, “get-away-from-it-all” experience. The Wilderness Act of 1964 states that wilderness “shall be administered for the use and enjoyment of the American people” and “shall be devoted to the public for purposes of recreation, scenic, scientific, educational, conservation and historic use”. Most types of recreation are allowed in wilderness, except those needing mechanical transport or motorized equipment.

Can I hunt in the Big Spring Wilderness Study Area?

The Big Spring Wilderness Study Area has been managed as a “no hunting” area since the days when it was part of Big Spring State Park. That status may or may not change if the area is designated as wilderness.

What will happen to the fire tower, the roads, and any other structures in the wilderness area?

If the area was to receive wilderness designation, the fire tower, incinerator, barn, and Civilian Conservation Corps-era camp would be retained. The NPS training range would be removed and the area would be restored. Administrative vehicle use of the access roads to the fire tower and barn would be eliminated. The roads could be restored as hiking trails.

The determination of suitability for wilderness designation will change very little about current management of the area. There are no public roads in the wilderness study area. The public hiking trails would not be affected.

Will you be closing roads or accesses to the rivers?

The National Park Service will continue to review each area on an individual basis in order to see if the current usage is consistent with that set forth in the final GMP. The NPS will develop a roads and trails management plan that will evaluate roads and trails and their associated accesses or river crossings and provide specific guidance for future use. The plan will provide an opportunity for the public, elected officials, and park stakeholders to express their concerns and provide input into final decisions. In the interim, until a roads and trails management plan is completed, unauthorized roads, trails, and river crossings that pose the greatest threat to park resources and visitor safety could be closed on a case-by-case basis.

Will horse trails be eliminated?

Currently there are 23 miles of designated horse trails at Ozark National Scenic Riverways. There are approximately 90 miles of social or undesignated horse trails. The preferred alternative recommends designating an additional 25-45 miles of horse trails. The remaining undesignated trails would be

restored to natural conditions. Evaluation of park horse trails and decisions about designating trails will be specifically addressed in a roads and trails management plan. In the interim, unauthorized trails that pose the greatest threat to park resources and visitor safety could be closed on a case-by-case basis.

Will permits be required for horseback riding?

A permitting system could be established, if necessary, to manage impacts of horse use. A roads and trails management plan would consider this option.

Does the GMP propose to eliminate all ATV and UTV use?

ATV and UTV use will continue to be allowed on county roads within the park and regulated by state statute.

Does the GMP propose restricting gravel bar camping opportunities?

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 proposed designating gravel bar camping areas and/or campsites. There will still be motor vehicle access to gravel bars in many areas. However, campsites may be designated on some gravel bars that are accessed by licensed vehicles in order to improve visitor safety and enjoyment and resource protection. If gravel bars are currently being accessed by roads that are unauthorized, those roads will be evaluated and may be closed or rerouted so that they don't enter the gravel bar.

Will motorized boat usage be eliminated in some areas?

The NPS proposes to designate areas in the upper stretches of each river for non-motorized recreation during the peak season (currently defined as April 1 to September 14), which may increase non-motorized recreational opportunities in those areas. From September 15 to March 31 the upper stretches will allow motorized boats in order to accommodate traditional cultural activities such as gigging and trapping. The preferred alternative previously proposed year-round closure to all motorboats in these upper reaches of the rivers.

Does the GMP propose regulations that will reduce boat motor horsepower? How quickly could those proposed changes occur?

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 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 powerhead of the motor.

The National Park Service would need to pursue rulemaking under Part 7 of the Code of Federal Regulations in order to implement this horsepower change. The current horsepower limit would remain in effect during the rulemaking process, likely a minimum of two years.

Another horsepower changes that the NPS would need to pursue is an increase in horsepower along much of the river. Currently, 60/40 horsepower motors have been and are being allowed even though

that is in conflict with the current Code of Federal Regulations. The NPS will go through rulemaking in order to continue to allow the 60/40 horsepower motors.