

# Ozark

National Scenic Riverways • Missouri



General Management Plan / Wilderness Study

Newsletter #2 / Summer 2007

*Dear Friends of Ozark National Scenic Riverways,*

*Late last summer we started the public involvement process for our general management plan and wilderness study. We sent out a newsletter, posted information on our Web site, and held several public meetings. As a result, we heard from hundreds of people. Many expressed very specific ideas and concerns about the national riverways and its future. Thanks to each of you who took time from your busy schedules to attend a meeting or drop us a line. Your input will be invaluable in helping the National Park Service (NPS) develop a plan that will make a lasting difference in the long-term management of this national park system unit.*

*As you read further, you will discover what a wide range of interests and concerns people have about the national riverways. Many expressed how much they value the scenic beauty of the park, the wonderful clear water, the opportunity for quiet and solitude, and the opportunity to have fun with friends and family. We also heard from many who will no longer bring their families to the national riverways because of alcohol abuse and related inappropriate activities. We learned that many avoid the park at certain times of the year because of overcrowding, and we heard a lot of concerns about conflicts between different recreational groups, such as floaters, motorboaters, all-terrain vehicle (ATV) users, campers, and horseback riders.*

*Hearing your comments has strengthened my resolve to focus even more on inappropriate behaviors, and with your cooperation we will “clean up the national riverways” in more ways than one! Together we can restore the national riverways as a place where you will enjoy bringing your family and having experiences that can be found nowhere else in the region.*

*Please read this newsletter and find out what people are thinking and saying about the national riverways and its future. These issues and concerns provide important insights about what park visitors, neighbors, other agencies and organizations expect from the general management plan. If you have any comments, contact us at the national riverways’ Web site, <[www.nps.gov/ozar](http://www.nps.gov/ozar)>. Remember — respect for the rivers has a ripple effect!*

*Sincerely,*

Noel R. Poe, Superintendent

## Our Public Involvement Effort . . .

To kick off the public's involvement in the national riverways' new general management plan and wilderness study process, we reached out in a number of ways and received extensive feedback. In August 2006 we distributed approximately 1,500 copies of our newsletter and made it available through the park's Web site and the National Park Service's PEPC Web site that is available for comments on planning documents. The newsletter included a mail-back comment form asking about what the public found special about the national riverways, activities they enjoyed, any conflicts they have had with other visitors or activities, interest in wilderness designation near Big Spring, and how they envision the national riverways 20 years from now.

## What We Heard from You . . .

Through the newsletter and press releases, the public was invited to five public meetings that were held in Van Buren, Eminence, Poplar Bluff, Salem, and St. Louis during the week of September 18, 2006. The 291 people who attended were able to speak with National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service staff at five topic tables as well as attend breakout discussion sessions. Altogether, more than 1700 individual comments were recorded at these meetings. In addition, the national riverways staff attended Chamber of Commerce meetings in Mt. View, Ellington, and Doniphan, providing an opportunity for attendees in these other communities to learn about and comment on the planning effort. Also, comment forms were made available at some local coffee shops in Van Buren and Eminence.

In addition to the public meeting comments, the national riverways has received more than 400 responses in the form of letters, comment forms, and electronic messages. The response from the public has been overwhelming. There isn't enough space here to record all the comments we received, but hopefully the following summary captures many of the public's most common concerns.



### River Use

A frequent comment was that there are far too many tubing, canoeing, rafting, and boating parties on the national riverways. Using the existing permit system to further limit the number of parties on the water was offered as a possible solution. Another idea proposed was to zone different portions of the rivers for different uses. Another frequent comment was that the number of vehicle access points (many informally developed by visitors) should be reduced to minimize visual impacts and manage the number of craft in the water. Commenters also noted that river users could benefit from more education on the use of and operation of both motorized and nonmotorized watercraft. Concerns were also expressed about the use of jet boats in the rivers and off-road vehicles (ORVs) on gravel bars or in the river and banning such uses were offered as potential solutions. Others did not see these uses as a problem.

### Visitor Behavior

A recurrent complaint was disrespectful and lewd visitor behavior. This behavior was characterized by the use of loud and profane language, consumption of large amounts of alcohol, and the consumption and trafficking of illegal drugs. Many stated that while they regularly visited the national riverways in the past, they now avoid using it because the rivers are no longer "family friendly." There were many suggestions for limiting the availability of alcohol on the river or banning it completely. Conversely, some stated that having beer on the river was fine. In the middle ground were people who advocated that alcohol should be allowed, but that abusers should be dealt with sternly and existing laws and regulations should be more consistently and forcefully enforced. Repeatedly, responders noted the need for visitors to show greater respect for other visitors and suggested education, interpretation, and increased law enforcement as ways to help reduce visitor use conflicts.

### Trash and Litter

A majority of commenters had concerns about litter and trash along the rivers and surrounding lands. Items most often mentioned were empty beer cans and even the red trash bags that are distributed by concessioners but thrown away by visitors. Solutions suggested included that the national riverways should better partner with

local businesses, concessioners, and special interest groups to help clean up litter and encourage visitors to pack out what they bring into the park.

## Water Quality

The wonderful clear water of the Jacks Fork and Current Rivers was frequently mentioned as an important characteristic of the national riverways. However, declining water quality was a major concern for many. Many pointed to horse use in general and specifically horses crossing the rivers in numerous locations as the source of the water quality problem. Visitors supporting horseback riding in the national riverways disputed the claims that horses were the source of bacterial contamination and claimed that more documentation was needed. Several commenters expressed concerns about sewage from local communities or homes along the river finding its way into the rivers. Still others thought that jet boats contributed greatly to shoreline erosion and water turbidity and called for a ban on these crafts on the rivers. The numerous informal vehicle access points along the shoreline, others said, contribute to shoreline erosion and riverbed disturbance. Many noted that water quality issues were more acute downstream of Eminence on the lower Jacks Fork River.



## Trails and Horse Use

Respondents were divided on horseback riding in the national riverways. Horseback riders strongly advocated for this activity, citing that it was a traditional use, that it was a way to enjoy the national riverways' scenery, that it was an excellent form of exercise, and that major horse events (e.g., Cross Country Trail Ride and others) had economic benefits for local communities. Horseback riders asserted there was a need for more designated horse trails, especially ones going north and south through the national riverways to reduce the need for river crossings. Many expressed worries about recent trail closures and contended that the National Park Service was being too restrictive. Several suggested that old or unsanctioned roads should be converted to horse trails. Conversely, other commenters stated that there were too many horse trails. A few complained about conflicts between equestrians and other users, and many complained about horse crossings and manure on gravel bars. Some commenters wanted current trails to be better maintained. Other park users wanted more hiking trails. Several commenters expressed the need for improved signs along trails (and the river) so visitors knew where they were in the park. One commenter requested that trail maps be available via the park website.



## Roads and ATV Use

Many commenters complained about the impacts of illegal off-road vehicles and all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) on lands surrounding the rivers. Many cited an increasing number of unsanctioned roads made by visitors seeking access to river shorelines and noted that the maze of unsanctioned roads spoiled the feeling of solitude and strained the capacity of law enforcement rangers to adequately patrol them. Several suggested that ATVs should be banned in the national riverways, while others said they should be prohibited from entering the rivers, and others stated they should be restricted to certain roads and crossings. ATV users did not support such restrictions. Many commenters asserted that most of these roads should be closed and allowed to revegetate or be converted to horse trails. Others contended that roads should remain open and be better maintained, especially those leading to old homesteads and cemeteries.





## Wilderness

On the topic of wilderness designation for the Big Spring tract, many responders advocated for wilderness designation; conversely, others stated that the designation would be too restrictive or that the Big Spring tract should remain “roadless” but not be designated as wilderness. A few were unclear about the implications of wilderness designation and stated that hunting should be permitted in wilderness.

## Camping



There were differing views on what constitutes appropriate camping in the national riverways. Comments included wanting unrestricted camping to continue, wanting more primitive campgrounds with only vault toilets, and wanting designated and formal campgrounds with additional recreational vehicle (RV) electric hook-ups. Others claimed that many of the “primitive” campsites often were occupied by RVs with generators, which impacted the sense of solitude. Others contended that the vehicle camping along the shoreline was negatively impacting boat and canoe camping in the same locations.



## Facilities

There was also disagreement about providing visitor facilities. Development of facilities (e.g., visitor centers, campgrounds, replica historic structures) should be kept to a minimum, some said, so the national riverways would retain a more primitive “feel.” Others asserted that it is important to maintain historic structures, such as those constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps. There were suggestions that the Akers Ferry Campground and landing should be open and better maintained, and that the Waymeyer landing and parking, Alley Spring campground and playground, and Williams landing and access road be improved. A museum for displaying regional artifacts was also suggested.



## Resource Management

Commenters frequently noted how much they value the outstanding scenic beauty of the national riverways. However, many individuals expressed concerns about how park resources are being managed. Conservation advocates contended that the national riverways should have a more hands-on approach to resource management and that several park practices were leading to wildlife habitat fragmentation. There were comments about the national riverways’ problems with invasive exotic species and declining fish populations. One commenter suggested restocking the rivers with walleye and trout, but another discouraged restocking the rivers with trout because this species was not native to the watershed and was an active predator of the dwindling numbers of hellbender salamanders. A small mouth bass management plan similar to ones developed by the state was among other suggestions.



There also were varying views on songbird populations and managing open fields to support those populations. A number of birding enthusiasts believed former fields should be reopened and managed as food plots for songbirds and quail. Another commenter discouraged this practice, stating that it would decrease the overall biodiversity in the national riverways.



A few respondents pointed out the value and importance of the national riverways’ caves. One stated that the national riverways’ cave management program was a model that others should follow.

## Interpretation

The importance of Ozark cultural heritage was a recurrent theme. Many commented that the interpretive program should continue to focus on the area's prehistory and history, as well as heritage demonstrations. One responder noted how much she enjoyed the earlier living history demonstrations of the 1970s and was disappointed that much less living history is done today. Others expressed the need for more interpretive displays and kiosks, especially at some of the historic structures and replica structures. A few expressed interests in seeing artifacts recovered from the national riverways in museums or visitor centers.

## Park Management and Operations

Commenters held divergent views on park management and operations topics, including the following:

**National Riverways' Mission** — Many individuals thought the national riverways should stress as its management priority the protection and preservation of resources and low-impact recreation with nonmotorized vehicles. However, some stated the National Park Service was already too restrictive and there should be less government presence.

**Law Enforcement / Park Management** — Many responders stated there was a need for more law enforcement rangers and that existing laws and regulations needed to be more consistently enforced, while others complimented the rangers for doing a good job and did not see a need for more rangers. A few reported having negative interactions with law enforcement rangers that left them feeling intimidated. Some suggested it would be more effective to have rangers visible on the river rather than watching from the woods.

**Scenic Easements** — Some commenters thought scenic easements were a good way to protect the aesthetic qualities of the national riverways, but noted that new construction and utility powerline cuts were visually disfiguring river shorelines. There were concerns that the national riverways was not fully enforcing the terms of existing easements.

**Community Relations** — The value of good communication between the national riverways and local communities was noted, and commenters also said that the scoping public open houses had been very beneficial. Many recognized that the national riverways had limited funding and staff and encouraged the national riverways to reach out to local businesses, special interest groups, and community leaders for ways local individuals could be co-stewards and help the national riverways staff protect the rivers and other park resources.

**Wilderness** is intended specifically for recreational use by people who want to enjoy a primitive, get-away-from-it-all experience — whether for hunting, hiking, or backcountry camping. 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" (Sections 2a and 4b).

This *General Management Plan/Wilderness Study* will identify and evaluate alternatives for possible designation of the Big Spring tract, approximately 3,400 acres in the southeast part of the national riverways, adjacent to the Mark Twain National Forest. The alternatives will look at ways to protect the tract's primitive qualities and opportunities for solitude. Ultimately, it is up to Congress to enact legislation to designate an area as wilderness.



## We Listened!

For those of you that attended the first round of meetings, the first sign you saw said "*We are here to listen!*"

And we did listen. Many of your concerns were about inappropriate visitor activities and behaviors that diminish the quality of your visit. Although resolving some of these issues will require a formal planning process, there are others that we can begin to resolve *now*.

**Alcohol Abuse.** The number one concern expressed was the inappropriate behaviors related to the abuse of alcohol. Time and time again, we heard the rivers need to be family friendly. I agree, and after consulting with park staff, other agencies, the canoe outfitters, etc., we have placed more restrictions on activities related to alcohol and inappropriate activities. If you missed the press releases announcing the new rules, please visit the national riverways' web-site at <[www.nps.gov/ozar](http://www.nps.gov/ozar)>.

**Flying W.** Also, this year we have a site rehabilitation project being planned for an undeveloped area on the upper Current River, locally known as Flying W. This area has become a traditional "party" location where many inappropriate activities occur. The project's purposes include finding ways to rehabilitate the site's resources that have been impacted by visitor activities, improving the quality of visitor experiences, and better managing river access and parking. Following announcements in the local papers, the *Flying W Environmental Assessment* was released to the public for a 30-day review and comment period that closed July 6. You can continue to access this document through the National Park Service Web site for planning (<http://parkplanning.nps.gov>).



Noel R. Poe, Superintendent

## What's Next?

The next planning step for the general management plan and wilderness study is to develop a vision for the national riverways' future. Several possible visions (called alternatives) are developed and analyzed before a preferred direction is identified. Evaluating a range of alternatives enables us to compare and contrast the advantages of one course of action over another, and provides a sound approach to decision-making required by the National Environmental Policy Act. In the coming months, a preliminary range of alternatives will be developed. Each alternative will be developed within the context of the national riverways' legislated purpose, significance, interpretive themes, and planning issues. What we heard from you will greatly assist us in this next step.

Please note that once we have developed the preliminary alternatives, you will have opportunities to comment and contribute ideas through newsletters, meetings, and our Web site. We look forward to your continued interest and involvement.

# The Planning Process Schedule

Step	Timeframe	Planning Activity	Participation Opportunities
1	Spring 2005	<p><b>Initiate Project</b></p> <p>The planning team assembles, begins to identify the project's scope, customizes the planning process, and begins to establish contacts with participants.</p>	
2	Fall 2005-Summer 2006	<p><b>Define Planning Context and Foundation</b></p> <p>The team examines and reaffirms the purpose and significance of the unit, and determines the primary issues and concerns for the <i>General Management Plan / Wilderness Study / Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)</i>. Team members collect and analyze relevant data and public comments.</p>	Attend public meetings and voice your concerns orally or by using a response form, mailing a letter, or commenting online.
We are here	3	<p><b>Develop and Evaluate Alternatives</b></p> <p>Using staff and public input from step 2 above, the team will identify a range of reasonable alternatives for the future of the national riverways, present preliminary alternatives to the public, analyze public reactions, and select a preferred alternative.</p>	Read preliminary alternatives newsletter and send us your ideas and comments. Attend public meetings to provide additional input.
	4	<p><b>Prepare and Publish the Draft General Management Plan/Wilderness Study/EIS</b></p> <p>A <i>Draft General Management Plan/Wilderness Study/EIS</i> will be published and distributed to the public. The draft document will describe the alternatives and their impacts.</p>	Read the draft plan and send us your ideas and comments via mail or the Internet. Attend public meetings and the wilderness study hearing(s) to provide more input.
	5	<p><b>Revise and Publish the Final General Management Plan/Wilderness Study/EIS</b></p> <p>The team will analyze public comments on the draft document, prepare responses to substantive comments, and make appropriate revisions to the draft document. The final document will then be distributed to the public. A Record of Decision will be issued to adopt the approved management plan.</p>	Read the final document.
	6	<p><b>Implement the Approved Plan</b></p> <p>The approved plan will then be implemented as funding allows. The findings of the <i>Wilderness Study</i> will be transmitted, as appropriate, to the NPS Director, Secretary of the Interior, President, and Congress.</p>	Stay involved throughout the implementation of the approved plan. You will have opportunities to comment on future implementation projects.

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