

THE
FUTURE
OF
AMERICA'S
NATIONAL
PARKS

First Annual
Centennial Strategy for

Buffalo National River

August 2007

CENTENNIAL INITIATIVE



Site: BUFF

Year: 2007

Vision Statement

Buffalo National River's enabling legislation provided the foundation for developing the park's Centennial Initiative vision. "For the purposes of conserving and interpreting an area containing unique scenic and scientific features, and preserving as a free-flowing stream an important segment of the Buffalo River in Arkansas for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations."

BUFF receives national attention not for any single quality, but for an array of natural resource attributes and recreational experiences related to the free-flowing turquoise colored river populated with a robust aquatic faunal assemblage, comprised of an exceptional fishery symbiotically associated with rare mussels and surrounded by diverse prairies and woodland glades inhabited by a rich integration of eastern and western biota. This array of attributes make the river an outstanding remnant of early America, worthy of perpetuating as a National River for the enjoyment of future generations and the enhancement of its biological communities.

Pre-park disturbances related to agricultural development significantly altered Buffalo National River's stream bank integrity, water quality and river hydrology, which in turn adversely impacted fish and mussel populations, replaced native prairies with disturbed lands infested with exotic plants, and deleteriously altered recreational activities related to wildlife viewing, canoeing, hunting and fishing.

BUFF strategically crafted Centennial Initiative projects to rectify these resource deficiencies and enhance recreational opportunities by restoring prairie habitat relied upon by a recovering elk population immensely enjoyed by the visiting public; recovering fresh water mussel populations that enhance water quality for visitors who depend on high water quality standards for recreational boating and fishing; and restoring the prodigious trumpeter swan to enhance visitor wildlife viewing satisfaction and interpret the value of preserving wetland habitat.

The FY-08 park base increase will be used to provide dispatch services for Buffalo National River, Ozark National Scenic Riverways, Pea Ridge National Military Park and Wilson's Creek National Battlefield. Seasonal funding will provide the additional law enforcement services, interpretive programs and maintenance staff required to meet Centennial Initiative stewardship, environmental leadership, education and recreation goals.

Park/ Superintendent/ Program Manager

Kevin Cheri

Site: BUFF

STEWARDSHIP

Provide inspiring, safe, and accessible places for people to enjoy - the standard to which all other park systems aspire.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

Buffalo National River staff will cooperate with entities that influence the integrity of park watershed resources, such as the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, Arkansas Forestry Commission and county Soil and Water Conservation Districts. The goal is to conserve and where possible enhance watershed natural resource conditions, landscapes and water quality, which will positively influence park natural resources.

Recreation facilities, visitor support structures and trails will be situated where they will blend with the natural surroundings and strategically located so as to preserve the river's rich native riparian, prairie and forested habitats for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations.

The Resource Management Division will provide empirical resource data to park managers in a format that will be utilized to make informed and adaptive resource management decisions that preserve the integrity of river resources in a manner that assures public enjoyment.

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Site: BUFF

STEWARDSHIP

Improve the condition of park resources and assets.

Restore native habitats by controlling invasive species and reintroducing key plant and animal species.

Due to the productive nature of prairies they were plowed and converted to crops and pastureland. When BUFF was established in 1972, these farmlands and pastures were abandoned, creating large tracts of disturbed land, choked with exotic plants.

BUFF will restore the Lane Bend property and open fields within Richland Valley to tall grass prairie, eliminate exotic plant species within these sites and concurrently attenuate severe site erosion, thereby enhancing Buffalo National River water quality, and reintroduce the federally endangered Running Buffalo Clover and Missouri Bladder Pod.

Historic 1912 native mussel surveys of Buffalo River found a diverse mussel community. However, several of the original mussels found in 1912 are today endangered, rare, or missing from the Buffalo River.

By systematically reintroducing extirpated and declining native mussels into Long-term Monitoring Sites (LTMS), populations can be recovered, which will enhance water quality (an adult mussel filters 6 to 8 gallons of water daily). Enhanced water quality will improve fish populations such as smallmouth bass and channel catfish, which are highly prized by fisherman.

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Improve the natural resources in parks, as measured by the vital signs developed under the Natural Resource Challenge.

The BUFF prairie and fresh water mussel restoration projects will improve water quality within Buffalo National River, which will enhance habitat quality for the river's aquatic macro invertebrate community. Both water quality and aquatic invertebrate communities are monitored by the Heartland Network as vital signs.

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Site: BUFF

STEWARDSHIP

Assure that no compelling chapter in the American heritage experience remains untold and that strategically important landscapes are acquired, as authorized by Congress.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

BUFF will cooperate with Ozark universities and schools to implement an Ozark Science and Learning Center. The primary goal of this new program is to utilize Ozark parks as living laboratories where science and education are coalesced to increase the park's knowledge and understanding of resource trends and conditions. This gained knowledge will be disseminated to educators and students. By pairing researchers and students we desire to provide science mentoring experiences for students of all ages.

BUFF will pursue development of a program titled "Discovering Life and Managing Biodiversity" which involves an all-taxa biodiversity inventory that is a biological information acquisition process reliant upon and sustained by the constituents (the people) of the Ozark ecoregion. The program's second major component involves long-term monitoring of ecological indicators that act as surrogates for ecosystem health and integrity, which will provide data to determine status and trends of key ecosystem indicators as they respond to anthropogenic perturbations and natural stressors. Gained information will be utilized to make informed management decisions.

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Site: BUFF

STEWARDSHIP

Serve as the Preeminent resource laboratory by applying excellence in science and scholarship to understand and respond to environmental changes.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

Interpretive wayside signs that explain the ecological role played by mussels and the Centennial Imitative mussel restoration project will be installed at key canoe launch sites, in order to showcase this Centennial Initiative project and increase visitor awareness of the role a healthy mussel community plays in maintaining clean water and bolstering fish populations.

BUFF will cooperate with project partners Missouri State University and the University of Arkansas to sponsor mussel ecology and restoration graduate student thesis projects. By providing university students with opportunities to participate in this restoration project via thesis research we will be training the next generation of malicologists and aquatic biologists. The Park will incorporate and disseminate information about the Centennial mussel restoration project and the ecological role mussels play into interpretive programs know as "Days Beside the Buffalo River", which serves to inform local teachers and students about river ecology and natural resources.

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Site: BUFF

STEWARDSHIP

Encourage children to be future conservationists.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

Since the Land Bend site is close to the Marshall County educational facilities, students will be transported to the restoration site to learn about prairie restoration techniques, the ecological value of prairie habitats and how to manage this habitat in a manner conducive to maintaining prairies as a landscape component of a larger ecosystem, and to increase their awareness of the severity of the threat of invasive species and also highlight the beauty and value of native prairie plants on the landscape. Furthermore, future restoration projects will be better supported through the use of "in house" native seed harvested from the restoration sites.

In partnership with USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service and Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, the park will sponsor a tall grass prairie restoration workshop. Workshop participants will visit the Lane Bend and Richland Valley restoration sites and receive an education about the techniques used to convert disturbed lands into properly functioning prairie habitats. Therefore, the utilized restoration protocols will be transferred to local farmers so that private land within the park's watershed can be restored to prairies.

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Site: BUFF

ENVIRONMENT

Reduce environmental impacts of park operations.

Reduce the environmental impacts of park operations on air and water quality.

Buffalo National River will synthesize a planning team comprised of natural resource managers, cultural resource specialists, rangers and facility management staff to review project ideas and needs before project statements are fully developed in order to design and shape strategies that will be employed to reduce environmental impacts of park operations on air and water quality. This planning team will also develop and acquire expertise to assist with development of best management practices that will be field applied to protect and where possible enhance the river's water quality, protect rare and unique plant communities and facilitate recovery of state and federally listed threatened and endangered species.

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Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

BUFF staff will cooperate to write and implement a Road Maintenance and Facility Landscape Management Plan (including mowing strategies) that will preserve rare and sensitive plant communities, control exotic plant invasions and maintain historically significant landscapes.

The Resource Management Division will cooperate with the University of Missouri to update the River Use Management Plan in a manner that identifies the Buffalo National River's carrying capacity limits and critical use thresholds needed to preserve water quality parameters, fish spawning habitat and fresh water mussel communities.

The Fire Management Team will rewrite the Fire Management Plan in a manner that identifies wise use fire practices employed to reduce fuel loads to protect BUFF facilities and maintain the integrity of fire dependent habitats and cultural landscapes. The plan will identify habitats such as glades and prairies that require prescribed fire or wildland fire use and elucidate the required fire return intervals necessary to support diverse floral and faunal communities, and control exotic plants.

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Site: BUFF

ENVIRONMENT

Inspire an environmental conscience in Americans.

Establish programs to showcase exemplary environmental practices and increase visitor awareness of how the practices apply to their daily lives, as measured by surveys.

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Site: BUFF

ENVIRONMENT

Engage partners, communities, and visitors in shared environmental stewardship.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

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Site: BUFF

RECREATION

Encourage collaboration among and assist park and recreation systems at every level—federal, regional, state, local—to help build an outdoor recreation network accessible to all Americans.

Rehabilitate over 2,000 miles of trails within or connected to national parks, including trails accessible to those with disabilities.

Work has started on the extension of the Buffalo River Trail (BRT) with a connection to the Ozarks Highland Trail (ORT), adding approximately 40 new miles of trail. Future trail building will eventually allow the park to reach the goal of a river-long, multi-use trail that will provide visitors great hiking opportunities for short or extended-day trips. With the connection to the ORT, our trail system will be reachable from starting points in Fort Smith, AR, and St. Louis, MO.

Potential wildlife viewing areas for elk and trumpeter swans will facilitate visitors making personal observations with these exciting creatures, at the same time providing protective restraints for the welfare of the animals.

The Collier Homestead and Overlook Trail will be improved to allow for mobility disabilities. A proposed exhibit trail at the Tyler Bend VC will allow wheelchair access to an exhibit on agriculture in the Ozarks.

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Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

Additional accessible experiences will be developed to meet the diverse needs of park visitors. All park Audio-Visual equipment will be upgraded to insure that auditory and limited-visual disabilities are given opportunities for participation in park interpretive programs.

Park directional signage will be improved to aid in way-finding, both inside the park at facilities and trailheads, but also within the communities that are adjacent to the park and on major state highways. This will add to the consistency in appearance and will communicate to the visitor, "We want you to visit your park."

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Site: BUFF

RECREATION

- Establish "volun-tourism" excursions to national parks for volunteers to help achieve natural and cultural resource protection goals.
- Increase annual volunteer hours by 100 percent, from 5.2 million hours to 10.4 million hours.

With the adaptive-use or re-use of park residences as housing for VIPs, the national river would be able to expand its volunteer workforce by at least double. Previously, a shortage of housing limited the volunteer workforce to local VIPs. Participation by volunteer groups like American Hiking Society, Sierra Club, Ozark Society, and others from Elderhostel and local universities would assist in the completion of much needed work at the park.

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Site: BUFF

RECREATION

- Expand partnerships with schools and boys and girls associations to show how national park experiences can improve children's lives.
- Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

The park will build upon its established school outreach programs to explore programs that will address specialized boys and girls associations. Currently, the park has hosted groups like the Boys & Girls Clubs, scouts, homeschool associations, and an inter-city camping program. Additional programs will expand on this effort and can include adaptive recreation opportunities for disabled individuals. This effort will help to establish strong connections between children and the environment and leave no child left inside.

- The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Site: BUFF

RECREATION

Focus national, regional, and local tourism efforts to reach diverse audiences and young people and to attract visitors to lesser-known parks.

Increase visitation by 25 percent at lesser-known parks through a national tourism effort aimed at helping people to discover the breadth of parks and experiences.

A strong partnership with the Harrison Convention and Visitors Bureau (HCVB), Harrison Chamber of Commerce, Ozark Mountain Region Tourism Association, and the Buffalo Marketing Association has led to in-depth highlighting of Buffalo National River. This approach will be expanded to other venues locally, statewide, and regionally. Partnerships with the state's Department of Tourism, landmark businesses such as Bass Pro, Big Cedar Lodge, and other entities in Branson, MO, and travel magazines will help to increase visitation from other parts of the country. A joint information facility has been proposed in the Harrison area to promote all outdoor recreational opportunities.

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Increase the number of visitors that attend ranger-facilitated programs such as campfire talks, hikes, and school programs.

This will increase as staffing increases to accommodate the ever growing visitation looking for meaningful interpretive programs drawing connections between the resources and the visitor.

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Site: BUFF

EDUCATION

Cooperate with educators to provide curriculum materials, high-quality programs, and park-based and online learning.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

The park will continue to develop its relationships with local educators from O.U.R. Educational Cooperative, North Arkansas College, local universities, and groups like the Ozark Society, to expand learning opportunities about the park's significant resources. Existing programs have collaborated on curriculum-based offerings like A Day by the Buffalo (DBB), Buffalo National River Resources University teacher workshops, and the review of park-developed materials like Around the Bend, an interactive, educational CD program. Future efforts will revise and expand our successful DBB program. New curriculum will address archeology, pioneer history and All-Taxa Biological Inventory (ATBI). Scientists and students will interact through the ATBI, Bio-Blitzes, and online databases for maximum involvement between schools, educators, and students involved in the programs. Creating the Ozark Science Learning Center will provide facilities and equipment, a staff specialist to coordinate participation, training opportunities for local educators to strengthen their knowledge of park resources, and it will stimulate creative curriculum creation. New programs will expand participation four-fold.

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Site: BUFF

EDUCATION

Introduce young people and their families to national parks by using exciting media and technology.

Increase the number of web hits through the introduction of advanced, interactive features that attract young people to national parks.

The recently developed Around the Bend: Buffalo River and its Watershed interactive, education software program will be placed on the park web site for use by individuals, students, and educators for distance-learning opportunities. Additional offerings are planned to bring exciting visual and interactive programs to our web site utilizing Flash and other technologies to stimulate interest not only in the national river, but in learning about natural systems and human histories. An on-line means to collect input about park resources from visitors will stimulate interest and develop a sense of participation and stewardship in our nation's heritage from the visitor's direct involvement. Although a National Junior Ranger web site exists, BUFF would develop an on-line, site-specific site for developing learning relationships with young people from around the world.

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Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

A series of audio-visual, computer-driven programs will be developed for touch-screen application at the park's contact stations and visitor center. These programs will be user-selectable from the touch-screen and will offer the visitor choices to explore various topics. These programs will be as interactive as possible to stimulate interest and to reinforce learning about the significance of park resources; they will facilitate connects between the resource and the visitor. They may also have a database capability to receive visitor input and statistics. Many program ideas are underway with content development and equipment purchased.

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Site: BUFF

EDUCATION

Promote life-long learning to connect generations through park experiences.

Enroll an additional two million children in the Junior Ranger program.

Buffalo National River has Junior Ranger program given primarily during the summer months. Dedicated, conducted Jr. Ranger programs are presented daily so that participants can have opportunities to interact with a ranger as well as meet the requirements for graduation from the program. The Jr. Ranger program will be expanded to include opportunities on the shoulder seasons through Family Exploration Days, which would be geared to whole family participation as a unit, and would be given on weekends. Also, the Jr. Ranger program will be expanded to the park web site.

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Site: BUFF

EDUCATION

Impart to every American a sense of their citizen ownership of their national parks.

Increase visitors' satisfaction, understanding, and appreciation of the parks they visit.

All education/ interpretive programs are designed to increase the visitor's understanding of the significance of the park and to help them have an enjoyable visit. Future programs will strive for the same goal. The park staff will continue to look for ways to improve the delivery of the park message and ways to assist visitors in receiving a high-quality visit to Buffalo National River.

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Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

Through the development of facilities like the Ozark Science Learning Center (OSLC), field seminars and workshops, park publications, posters, waysides, and other interpretive media, the park will impart to the visitor a sense of ownership and direct participation. They will be given "behind the scenes" opportunities or information that will promote their personal interest in the park's resources and management of those resources. Opportunities to participate in Citizen Science type programs (Envirothons, Bio-Blitzes, ATBI, and park-specific data collection) will promote a sense of ownership and advocacy for the park. On-going and future educational-TV opportunities exist to bring the park story to a wider audience. Opportunities for engaging diverse individuals and communities will be explored.

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Site: BUFF

PROFESSIONALISM

Use strategic planning to promote management excellence.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

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PROFESSIONALISM

Model what it means to work in partnership.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

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