

OZARK NATIONAL SCENIC RIVERWAYS

DRAFT GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Is the Draft GMP just another name for the National Blueways that the Department of Interior tried to establish recently?

No. Unfortunately, the draft GMP has been erroneously linked in the press recently to the National Blueways initiative. In fact, the two are not at all related. In contrast to the Riverways, which were designated by law as a unit of the National Park Service in 1964, the Blueways initiative was developed in 2012 by the Department of the Interior and has recently been “paused” by new Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewel while she briefs herself on the program and determines its future. Another important difference is that the level of public involvement in this GMP is far greater than that undertaken by the managers of the Blueways initiative. Public feedback was critical to the development of the range of four alternatives in the current GMP draft – over 1300 people have provided comments and participated in public meetings, open houses and stakeholder workshops since 2005.

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

Ozark National Scenic Riverways (ONSR) was established as a unit of the national park system in 1964. The first GMP was completed in 1984. However, the 1984 plan is outdated and the Riverways is now facing an increasing array of issues that require guidance through an updated, approved general management plan. A new plan is needed to clearly define resource conditions and visitor experiences to be achieved, to 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 new GMP will guide management of the park for approximately 20 years. The GMP is also needed to meet the requirements of the National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978 and NPS policy, which mandate development of a GMP for every park unit.

How will my comments be used during this round of public input?

The Superintendent and Deputy Superintendent will read and consider every comment. All comments will be analyzed to determine if they present corrected or additional factual information, discuss important new issues, or offer reasonable alternatives or mitigation measures. Those comments that bring corrected or new information to light will be specifically addressed in the final GMP.

What types of changes might we see between this draft and the final GMP, after this comment period?

It is hard to anticipate the types of changes that could be made in the preparation of the final GMP. Changes will be based primarily on the comments received during the comment period for the Draft GMP. It is likely that some changes will consist of correcting inconsistencies in the text that have been discovered since the Draft GMP was released.

Even though the NPS prefers Alternative B, is there any chance one of the other alternatives could be selected for the final GMP?

The current Preferred Alternative has been carefully developed from a review of the many public comments received since planning began. We believe the current Preferred Alternative represents a balance among the wide range of interests held by our neighbors and stakeholders. However, it is possible that a different alternative could be chosen as the NPS Preferred Alternative for the final GMP based on comments received at this point in the process.

What comes next?

After distribution of the Draft GMP there will be a 60-day public review and comment period. Afterward, the NPS planning team will evaluate the comments received, incorporate appropriate changes, and prepare a final GMP. Following distribution of the final GMP and a 30-day no-action period, a record of decision approving the plan will be prepared for signature by the NPS regional director. The plan will then be implemented depending on funding and staffing. A record of decision does not guarantee funds and staffing for implementing the plan. It is anticipated that the final GMP and Record of Decision will be completed in 2014 and the implementation of the measures identified in the plan will then begin.

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

In some cases implementation may begin soon after the final GMP is completed (expected in 2014). 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 we 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. The inclusion of a wilderness evaluation in the current planning effort 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 NPS Preferred Alternative would recommend wilderness designation for 3,430 out of 3,434 acres within the Big Spring Wilderness Study Area. The remaining 4 acres would be recommended for a potential wilderness addition once the buried utility line is decommissioned. The NPS Preferred Alternative recommends wilderness designation, but wilderness designation can only be accomplished through congressional action.

Can you hunt and recreate in the wilderness?

Yes, in some cases. Wilderness is intended specifically 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. Hunting is often allowed in wilderness areas, however 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 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?

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 possibly be restored as hiking trails.

What is the purpose of the wilderness hearings?

The wilderness hearings will provide an opportunity for individuals to present a brief statement, or testimony, related to the wilderness proposal and are not a forum for discussion or debate. A wilderness hearing is a requirement of the Wilderness Act any time land is recommended for wilderness designation. An analysis of the testimony will be incorporated into the final Environmental Impact Statement and Wilderness Study. A copy of the transcript from the hearing will be retained in the administrative record accompanying the wilderness proposal.

The hearing format is structured to take testimony, and the added cost requirements of holding a separate hearing from the general information and comment portion of the public meetings limits the number of hearings that can be held. The public may provide comments on any aspect of the GMP during the public comment period, including wilderness.

When wilderness eligibility and suitability are evaluated as a part of the GMP process, a determination of eligibility or suitability will not necessarily mean that the NPS will seek designation. After the determination is made, a decision concerning whether to seek legislation to designate wilderness may be made only through a general management plan, an amendment to a general management plan, or the legislative review process. Even though the NPS is required to study the suitability of lands within the national park system for preservation as wilderness and to gather public input for that purpose, only Congress can make that designation.

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 almost always include an EIS.

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. Depending on which Alternative is selected and whether the current usage is consistent with that, we will likely close some roads and accesses, and open others. Any **unauthorized** road or access could be closed, regardless of the outcome of the general management planning process.

Will the NPS eliminate unauthorized river crossings?

If a river crossing is currently **unauthorized**, the NPS would evaluate the crossing to determine if it should become an authorized crossing or eliminated, regardless of the outcome of the general management planning process.

Will permits be required for horseback riding?

A permitting system could be established, if necessary, in order to manage overcrowding on designated horse trails. A recreational horse use and trail management plan would consider this option.

Will horse trails be eliminated?

No. There are currently only 23 miles of designated horse trails at Ozark National Scenic Riverways. Those trails may be redesigned and improved to decrease the impacts of horses on sensitive areas. In addition, the NPS hopes to develop a new system of horse trails that would add 25-45 miles of trails and some new stream crossings. All of these improvements would be more specifically addressed in a recreational horse use and trail management plan. **Unauthorized** horse trails would be closed and restored regardless of the outcome of the general management planning process because they are not designated park trails.

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

No. There are no authorized ATV or UTV trails within ONSR. Regardless of the GMP outcome, ATV and UTV use will continue to be allowed on county roads within the park and regulated by state statute.

Does the Draft GMP propose to eliminate all motor vehicle access to gravel bars?

No. There will still be motor vehicle access to gravel bars in many areas. However, 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, which will increase non-motorized recreational opportunities in those areas and may benefit the economy through a potential increase in non-motorized recreational visitors.

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

The NPS preferred alternative proposes some changes to horsepower limits. If the final GMP designates changes to horsepower limits, the National Park Service would have to pursue rulemaking in order to implement those changes. While that process is being completed the current horsepower limits would remain in effect for an indefinite period of time, likely a minimum of two years. One of the horsepower changes that the NPS hopes to pursue is an increase in horsepower along much of the river. Currently, 60/40 horsepower motors are being allowed even though that is in conflict with the Code of Federal Regulations. The NPS will need to go through rulemaking in order to continue to allow the 60/40 horsepower motors.