

Ozark

National Scenic Riverways



Superintendent Bill Black

Monday, March 17, 2014

Riverways Reflections

I want to take this opportunity to thank all of you for your interest in the future of Ozark National Scenic Riverways. I appreciate that the park is important and relevant to so many people. I enjoyed meeting many local residents and park users during the public meetings that were held in January. I am impressed and pleased with the volume of comments, as well as the tremendous level of involvement at those meetings. One thing that's very clear is that passion for the special places and experiences of the Riverways runs deep.

I realize there are lots of questions about the proposals in the Draft General Management Plan (GMP) for Ozark National Scenic Riverways and the next steps toward finalizing the GMP. I have decided to write a bi-weekly column to try to answer some of the questions raised about the Draft GMP, and to keep you updated on our progress as we read through all of your comments. In addition to giving you a status update, this week's column will address some questions about proposed changes to motorboat use.

Approximately 4000 comments were submitted on the Draft GMP. Right now we are reading through them and hope to have a full report summarizing the comments and our responses by mid-summer. We hope to have a final GMP completed later this year. It's important to remember that the Draft GMP is truly just a "draft". The management proposals in it were developed after listening to feedback from thousands of people about their vision for enjoying the Riverways in the future. This latest round of public comment will help us understand where it makes sense to make changes to those proposals.

One of the concerns I've heard often relates to the proposed changes to motorboat use on the rivers. We have heard from a number of folks asking "Why is the NPS trying to reduce the size of the boat motors below Big Spring?" or "What is the purpose of having non-motorized zones on the upper reaches of the rivers?" I'd like to provide some insight into why we proposed those changes.

Thirty years ago, when the last GMP was developed, it would have been hard to imagine what "unlimited" horsepower for boat motors could eventually mean. Looking ahead 20 years, it is again difficult to predict what advances in jet motors might be made. In the interest of public safety and prudent management of our rivers, we recognize that "unlimited" horsepower might not be best for the park or the public. During the scoping phase of this process, and again when the alternatives were first presented, many of the public comments suggested we adjust the "unlimited" motor size below Big Spring.

The proposal to designate non-motorized zones on the upper stretches of both rivers has also raised some questions. The idea stems from concerns raised by park users about congestion in some areas, where large numbers of floaters and boaters are trying to navigate the same stretches of the rivers. Many previous comments expressed the desire to have a recreational experience on the rivers that did not include motorized vessels and suggested that non-motorized zones in the upper reaches of the rivers might provide those opportunities. During the recent public comment period we heard concerns about how the non-motorized zones might impact traditional cultural activities such as gigging and trapping. As we move forward with comment analysis, we plan to make appropriate adjustments in the final GMP.

I hope this answers a few of your questions about the proposals related to motor boats at Ozark National Scenic Riverways. Next time, I will provide an update on where we are in the comment analysis process and address questions we have heard about the potential impacts of the plan on horseback riding.

To learn more, you can read the "Summary of Key Excerpts" from the Draft GMP by visiting the park website at www.nps.gov/ozar and clicking on the link to the Draft General Management Plan.

Ozark National Scenic Riverways preserves the free-flowing Current and Jacks Fork Rivers, the surrounding natural resources, and the unique cultural heritage of the Ozark people. For more information, visit www.nps.gov/ozar or Facebook.

Comments? Write to:

Superintendent
Ozark National Scenic Riverways
P. O. Box 490
Van Buren, Missouri 63965

Phone

573-323-4236

E-mail

ozar_superintendent@nps.gov

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