

# Ozark

National Scenic Riverways



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## Riverways Reflections

It's starting to look like spring might have actually arrived at Ozark National Scenic Riverways. After an unusually long and bitter winter, the subtle signs of new life around the rivers are a welcome change. It's a wonderful time to get outdoors, get on the river, take a hike on the Ozark Trail, or visit some of the scenic wonders of the Riverways. Special places like Rocky Falls, Klepzig Mill, and our beautiful natural springs are especially captivating while surrounded by the first blooming wildflowers and trees.

I am continuing to read through the public comments that we received for the Draft General Management Plan (GMP). We hope to have a full report summarizing the comments and our responses by mid-summer, with a final GMP completed later this year. It's important to remember that the Draft GMP is truly just a "draft" and we will be using your comments to develop the final plan. In my last column, I addressed some of the proposed changes to motorboat use. This week I'd like to provide some explanation for the proposals related to horseback riding.

One of the questions that has been raised repeatedly is "Why don't you just enforce the 1984 GMP and the laws we have now?" That's a valid question. According to the 1984 GMP and federal regulations, horseback riding is allowed only on designated horse trails in national parks. In Ozark National Scenic Riverways there are only 23 miles of designated horse trails, all of which are located east of Eminence. Riding on trails that have not been designated is technically an illegal activity and the National Park Service (NPS) could be required to enforce that regulation before the new trails are designated.

We realize that well-meaning riders have been using informal, undesignated trails in the park for horseback riding and that there is an interest in continued access to many of these trails. The Draft GMP proposes approximately 35 additional miles of designated horse trails, so that horseback riding can continue in many areas where it already is a popular activity. Unfortunately, the process of designating trails is not as easy as it sounds. We are required by law to undergo a planning process that carefully evaluates the proposed trails and crossings and involves public input. Until new trails are designated our intent is to allow the current use of horse trails and crossings, with no penalties to business owners or trail riders.

After the General Management Plan is finalized, we will begin developing a "Recreational Horse Use Plan" that will help us make informed decisions about where to establish trails and river crossings that will minimize impacts to sensitive areas, while also ensuring that we provide high quality experiences for horseback riders long into the future. We expect this process to involve the owners of local horse camps, horseback riders, and other interested citizens. We hope to develop partnerships with other landowners that might allow for additional miles of trails that would connect to the park horse trails and continue outside the park boundaries.

The Draft GMP also proposes a permit system for horseback riding as an option in the future, if necessary. The permit system could be implemented if trail use increases to a level that causes negative impacts to park resources and desired visitor experiences. Everyone agrees that they want to continue to enjoy the same experiences to which they have become accustomed. When and how the permit system would be implemented will be determined in the "Recreational Horse Use Plan." Funds raised through a permit system would be retained at the park and used for the maintenance and improvement of the horse trails.

I hope this addresses your concerns related to horseback riding at Ozark National Scenic Riverways. In my next column, I will provide some clarification about the wilderness study that was included in the Draft GMP.

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](http://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](http://www.nps.gov/ozar) or Facebook.

### Comments? Write to:

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