

**STATEMENT OF VICTOR KNOX, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, PARK PLANNING, FACILITIES AND LANDS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATION OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING H.R. 4182, TO PROVIDE THAT THE OZARK NATIONAL SCENIC RIVERWAYS BE ADMINISTERED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR THAT UNIT OF THE NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.**

**June 10, 2014**

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Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before your committee to present the views of the Department of the Interior on H.R. 4182, a bill to require the Secretary of the Interior to administer the Ozark National Scenic Riverways in accordance with the General Management Plan for that unit of the National Park System and for other purposes.

The Department strongly opposes the enactment of H.R. 4182.

H.R. 4182 would amend the purpose of the Ozark National Scenic Riverways to include the preservation of historical recreational activities. The bill would prohibit the park from designating management zones and would require the National Park Service to manage the park, including the use of motorized vessels within the park, in a manner that is not more restrictive than the policies detailed in the park's 1984 General Management Plan. The bill would also require the park to allow horseback riding in areas where that activity has traditionally been conducted and to maximize public access points for traditional recreational activities on the Riverways. It would prohibit the park from requiring a permit for a baptism in the river, or including the Riverways as part of a National Blueway, or managing park lands as wilderness without specific designation. The bill would exclude all lands within the park from eligibility for Congressional wilderness designation.

H.R. 4182 would undermine a public planning process that has been underway since 2005, and deny the opportunity for all Americans, including Missourians, to have a voice in the future management of their national park. The park is concluding the planning process to update its 1984 General Management Plan. Over 2,800 people from across the nation have provided more than 16,000 comments and participated in public meetings, open houses, and stakeholder workshops since the planning process began in 2005. Ozark National Scenic Riverways has published a draft General Management Plan and collected public comments on this draft. The National Park Service is currently considering changes to the plan based on public comments, and anticipates releasing the final plan by early 2015. Enactment of H.R. 4182 would force the park to disregard the input that it has received from park users.

Public participation is at the core of the National Park Service planning process – it ensures that the NPS fully understands and considers the public's interest in the parks. It is NPS policy to actively seek out and consult with existing and potential visitors, neighbors, Federally recognized

Tribes, and other people with traditional cultural ties to park lands, scientists and scholars, concessioners, cooperating associations, and gateway communities. The Department cannot support any bill that would deny the public's opportunity to engage in the planning process and voice their opinions on the future management of the Ozark National Scenic Riverways.

H.R. 4182 includes a number of provisions related to the administration of the Ozarks National Scenic Riverways.

- **Zones:** Management zoning is a standard practice of local and regional planning as well as planning for national parks. Management zones provide direction to managers on the nature and scope of allowable activities within specific areas. Management zones are written broadly enough to allow the flexibility to adapt management strategies according to current and desired conditions.
- **Horseback Riding:** Horseback riding is currently allowed in the park and the NPS is looking to sustain the activity in such a way as to not harm resources, specifically the exceptional waters of the Current and Jacks Fork Rivers.
- **Access to the River:** The National Park Service is committed to providing access to the rivers in a responsible manner. Baptisms do not require a permit. We have reviewed our management policies and determined that the superintendent has the flexibility to continue to allow baptisms without a special use permit. Also, the Secretary of the Interior issued an order ending the Blueways program last year.
- **Use of Motorized Vessels:** The National Park Service is currently undertaking a comprehensive review of motorized vessel use within the Riverways as part of the ongoing planning process. H.R. 4182 would deny the public the opportunity to share their views on appropriate horsepower levels and areas of use and would limit the park manager's ability to make necessary modifications for public safety which could negatively affect tourism.
- **Congressional Wilderness Designation:** The Wilderness Act directs Federal agencies to assess if wilderness characteristics are present and then provides a process for public involvement. This issue is being considered in the ongoing General Management Planning process and we cannot support limiting the public's input during this process. We recognize that only Congress has the authority to designate wilderness.

Additionally, H.R. 4182 effectively eliminates the National Park Service Organic Act as the fundamental law by which the Riverways would be administered. This law is the basis by which all of the other 400 units of the National Park System are managed and eliminating its applicability to the Riverways is a precedent we strongly oppose.

The Ozarks National Scenic Riverways is a powerful economic driver in southeast Missouri. In 2012, Ozarks National Scenic Riverways welcomed 1.4 million visitors and generated approximately \$56 million in economic benefits for the surrounding community. The National Park Service encourages tourism and recreation opportunities, such as canoeing, kayaking,

floating, horseback riding, camping, boating, fishing, trapping, hiking, gigging, swimming, and hunting. By supporting these activities, while conserving the unique natural and cultural resources that inspired Congress to protect these lands as part of the national park system, and with the input of diverse user groups from across the nation, the National Park Service is helping to ensure that the park is responsive to users across America and remains an economic driver for future generations of Missourians and others.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony. I am prepared to answer any questions from members of the Committee.