

# Committee on Resources

## Subcommittee on Forests & Forest Health

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### Statement

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US House of Representatives  
Committee on Resources  
Subcommittee on Forests & Forest Health  
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Access to Arkansas National Forests

Dear Subcommittee Members:

My name is Jerry Williams, and my testimony is provided for the Ouachita/Ozark Watch League (OWL). OWL is a coalition of about 60 organizations and 350 individuals who are concerned with management of the national forests in Arkansas and across the country.

Today's hearing is being held to specifically address concerns of access to Arkansas' national forests, but seems to be aimed primarily at concerns over President Clinton's Roadless Area Conservation Plan. We hope to show you that access to national forests in Arkansas and across the nation is not threatened by the President's Roadless Plan. The Forest Service developed a draft Environmental Impact Statement to assess this proposal. Important issues and points which are taken from Forest Service documents, the Roadless Plan Preferred Alternative: <sup>(1)</sup>

- will not result in closing of existing roads;
- will not prohibit timber harvesting on inventoried roadless areas;
- will not change existing access for recreational opportunities;
- will not affect existing rights of access held by landowners;
- will not prevent maintenance of existing roads in inventoried roadless areas;
- will not designate new wilderness areas;
- will not prevent the Forest Service from fighting fires. They can even build roads in an emergency to protect the public from fire; and
- will not eliminate the Forest Service's ability to create early successional wildlife habitat.

Furthermore, the Roadless Plan preferred alternative does not propose any roadless area protection in the Ouachita National Forest and only proposes 22,000 acres for roadless area protection in the Ozark National

Forest. (2)

Considering these facts about the Roadless Plan, we do not see any reason for concern about access to national forests in Arkansas.

The Ouachita and Ozark National Forests in Arkansas are very heavily roaded so public access is not a real concern. For example, if a person were to be in the heart of the largest unroaded area in the Ouachita or Ozark National Forest a passable road would be within 1 ½ or 2 miles at the most. Access to our public lands in Arkansas is not a problem!

The areas in Arkansas that remain as essentially roadless are that way because they are rugged and steep and likely have poor timber. The sensible thing to do is not to construct roads in these areas and destroy their special characteristics. This will not hinder public access to national forest lands in Arkansas.

We respectfully request that your subcommittee support the President's Roadless Plan and direct the Forest Service to give serious consideration to additional protection requested by commenters across the country.

Sincerely,  
Jerry Williams  
Ouachita/Ozark Watch League

(1) Roadless Area Conservation, USDA, Forest Service, FS-670, May 2000

(2) Draft Environmental Impact Statement, Volume 2, May 2000

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