

Shawn Rhoads

Natural Resources Committee Testimony

I would like to thank the House Natural Resources Committee for inviting me here today. My name is Shawn Rhoads and I have been proud to call Howell County and West Plains home my entire life. Last November I was elected to represent the 154th District in the Missouri General Assembly.

To my knowledge this is the first time a congressional committee has hosted a field hearing in Howell County or the surrounding areas. I want to thank the committee for being here to hear our concerns over the Blueways System. I also want to thank Congressman Jason Smith and Congressman Billy Long for requesting a hearing to discuss the process that led to the Blueways designation and how we can all work together to prevent future assaults from faceless Washington bureaucrats.

For my constituents and for my own family, the protection of private property rights is paramount. Somewhere along the line, officials in Washington and environmental groups from around the country have decided that local people either do not care about our land and its natural resources, or they think we are not smart enough to know what is best for our land. Let me tell you, I do not believe there is a single person in this room, or a single land owner in this area who does not cherish our natural resources. We depend on our rivers and streams for recreation, business and farming operation. Water for livestock and crops come from our rivers. Generations of families have fished and floated these rivers and countless small businesses depend of the people who travel here to enjoy our abundant resources.

The Department of the Interior is trying to sell the National Blueways System as a conservation program that will bring recognition to the White River Watershed in Missouri and Arkansas. Interior is also trying to sell the Blueways designation as a locally driven project that will not have any impact on how land owners can use their land. Forgive me if I do not believe everything coming from President Obama's administration. To me, and to the families I represent, the Blueways project is just the latest example of the Obama Administration not understanding or respecting the will of rural Americans. It's interesting to me that the

Department of the Interior waited to announce rescinding the Blueways designation in Missouri and Arkansas until just before the July 4th holiday. The Department was trying to save face and avoid embarrassment for overreaching their authority.

With the support of grassroots activists and the Missouri and Arkansas Congressional Delegations, the Blueways designation was rescinded for the White River Watershed. While I am happy the Blueways designation will not be imposed on our region, I am concerned about the program in other areas of the country and about future plans and designations here at home. In the coming months the National Park Service will be releasing their General Management Plan. Although I have not yet seen a copy of the plan I have been told that it contains proposals that would limit access points on rivers, close horse trails and make wilderness designations. Blueways is gone, but the threat to our property rights remains. The Interior Department is basically rearranging chairs on the deck of the Titanic. Some of the same threats that caused concerns with the Blueways designation now have the potential to come to life through the General Management Plan from the Parks Service.

In closing, I would like to ask for the continued support of grassroots leaders and our congressional delegation to fight any plan or idea, under the Blueways name, or any other name, that would harm our private property rights. Congressman Smith has been representing us in Washington for less than two months but I think I speak for everyone here Congressman when I thank you for establishing yourself as a strong defender of private property rights.

Thank you again for the opportunity to be here today and I look forward to answering any questions you all might have.