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MISSOURI HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ROBERT ROSS

State Representative
District 142

**Testimony of Robert Ross, State Representative – District 142, Missouri House of Representatives
Before the U.S. House of Representatives
Subcommittee on Public Land and Environmental Regulation
June 10, 2014**

Testimony – Statement by Robert Ross in support of HR 4182 To provide that the Ozark National Scenic Riverways shall be administered in accordance with the general management plan for that unit of the National Park System, and for other purposes.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to voice some of my thoughts and concerns regarding the management of Missouri's Ozark National Scenic Riverways.

As the state representative for the 142nd legislative district, I represent approximately 37,000 Missourians, many of whom have their lives and livelihoods directly dependent on the continued success and accessibility of the natural treasures that are the Current and Jacks Fork Rivers. It should go without saying that these waterways are an integral part of our culture and a vital part of our economy, and that the people I am blessed to serve feel very strongly about protecting and preserving this important part of our history and our future.

It is my contention that our scenic riverways must be protected but also managed in a way that will allow for proper stewardship that does not infringe on the rights of Missourians and visitors who wish to enjoy them. For decades now this has not been an issue as my constituents, as well as visitors from all around the state and the world, have camped, boated, hunted, fished and, in general, enjoyed the abundance of activities that are available along these waterways. It is this responsible use of the land that we want to continue.

However, given the latest actions of the National Park Service, it has become quite clear that the goal is to limit access to these natural treasures, which is a decision that will have catastrophic effects on the lives of my constituents, as well as on our local economies. In particular, we have grave concerns with the National Park Service's preferred "Alternative B". This particular plan will lead to increased restrictions on access and the outright elimination of recreational activities in vast portions along the riverways.

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The people of Missouri are far more supportive of what is commonly referred to as the “No Action Alternative”. We believe this management plan will allow users to responsibly experience this area that we agree is special, which was the central idea shared by property owners, the State of Missouri, and the NPS when the ONSR was created. It is this option that we believe is consistent with the way the park has been successfully managed for decades, and that will give us the best opportunity moving forward to protect and preserve this natural treasure without disrupting the way of life for thousands of Missourians.

I feel it is important to note at this time that my colleagues in the Missouri General Assembly moved in overwhelming numbers this year to support this “No Action Alternative”. We approved both SCR 22 and HCR 9 in both the House and Senate this year. These resolutions not only encourage the adoption of the “No Action Alternative”, but also encourage Congress to explore the option of returning control of the park to the State of Missouri. As the resolutions read, we believe “Missouri citizens most impacted in their daily lives are in the best position to formulate policy and regulations to manage and protect Missouri's natural resources as opposed to a federal agency headquartered in Washington, D.C.”

Furthermore, HR 4182 goes beyond simply ensuring that the current general management plan does not become more restrictive, it provides specific protections for recreational activities that have historically been performed within the park, including riding horses and using boats with motors. It seems beyond reason, but the Park Service's proposed alternative for management would close 65 miles of horse trails that are currently in use, and ban motorized vessels from areas of the river where they are currently allowed.

In conclusion, we urge you to honor the original spirit of the agreement that was made when the Ozark National Scenic Riverways were first created. That means allowing Missourians to responsibly use and enjoy these waterways while also preserving and protecting their natural beauty so that they can be enjoyed by future generations as well. For decades we have been successful in this endeavor and we believe we can continue this success in the years to come without the need for overly burdensome regulations handed down by the National Park Service.

Thank you for your consideration. I will do my best to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,



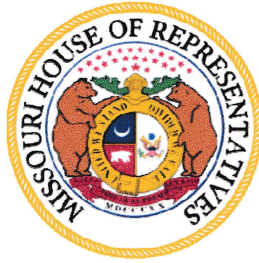
Representative Robert Ross

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Testimony – Statement by Robert Ross in support of legislation to require the Secretary of the Interior to transfer all Federal land, facilities, and any other assets associated with the Ozark National Scenic Riverways to the State of Missouri for the purposes of maintaining a State park, and for other purposes. (H.R. 4029)

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, as we continue our discussion of Missouri's Ozark National Scenic Riverways (ONSR) and the best way to manage this treasure moving forward, I would like to advocate for what we Missourians believe to be the best option in balancing the preservation of the area and the recreational opportunities that it affords.

When Congress acted in 1964 to designate large portions of the Current and Jack's Fork Rivers as a "Scenic Riverway," it did so with the intent and commitment of maintaining and protecting public access to an area that today receives more than 1.3 million visitors annually. In my conversations with some of the families who gave up their property (some land was purchased, while much was taken through Eminent Domain) those many years ago to allow for the creation of the ONSR, the recurring theme is that they did so because the Park Service assured them it would protect the riverways without limiting or restricting their access; and that future generations would be able to utilize and enjoy the area in the same manner that these local families had been able to. While that was the case for a number of years, the latest efforts by the National Park Service to restrict access and curtail recreational opportunity (which is a central theme in the proposed General Management Plan (GMP)) threaten the integrity of the accord that was originally struck between the people of Missouri and the federal government.

As discussed in my previous testimony, our state has come together in supporting the "No Action Alternative" which would not further limit access or increase restrictions. And while we believe this would be the ideal plan for the National Park Service to utilize going forward, the most favorable option to ensure proper management of the park would involve the federal government relinquishing control of the ONSR and returning it to the State of Missouri. For that reason I am fully supportive of Congressman Smith's H.R. 4029 that would empower our state to manage and protect the ONSR as a state park.

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These are Missouri lands and Missouri rivers, and can confidently say that Missourians (as we have for generations) know best how to preserve and protect these resources both today and moving forward. We understand that this park is one of the greatest destinations in our nation for floating, boating, hiking, camping, hunting, fishing and horseback riding, and we want to ensure visitors are able to enjoy these activities just as they have for decades. At the same time we are committed to protecting the ONSR as it represents a vital part of our local economies and an integral part of our way of life, and we are dedicated to ensuring it continues to be the natural treasure we all know it to be today.

As previously mentioned in my testimony on HR 4182, the resolutions passed in the Missouri House and Senate express that we believe “Missouri citizens most impacted in their daily lives are in the best position to formulate policy and regulations to manage and protect Missouri’s natural resources as opposed to a federal agency headquartered in Washington, D.C.”. We emphasized that statement again this session when my colleagues supported my efforts to secure funding for the operation and maintenance of the ONSR by the State of Missouri, within our operating budget. It should be mentioned that our state constitution requires a balanced budget and that we have continued to walk a very fine line in finding funding for many of our most critical needs. To authorize funding for this purpose despite the difficult budget situation we face is a testimony itself to the high level of importance we place on Missouri regaining control of the Ozark National Scenic Riverways.

In conclusion, we urge you to take action to help us preserve access to this undeniably beautiful part of our state and nation. It is possible to allow visitors to responsibly use and enjoy these waterways while also preserving and protecting their natural beauty so that they can be enjoyed by future generations as well. We believe it is not the National Park Service that is most capable of carrying out this mission, but instead our own state and people; which is evident in our conscientious management of the other thousands of acres we currently manage and protect. We hope that you will join us in supporting this effort to allow Missouri to serve as a responsible and proud steward of the Ozark National Scenic Riverways.

Thank you for your consideration. I will do my best to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,



Representative Robert Ross

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