

Christy Roberts
Subcommittee on Public Lands and Environmental Regulation
Legislative Hearing on HR 4182
June 10, 2014

In lieu of the passage of HR 4029, HR4182 would be very favorably received by the local communities and would allow the current economies to endure, visitors to remain constant, historical structures and locations to remain accessible and local resident traditions to carry on.

As noted in my testimony on HR4029 the historical prevalence of the river and land is what locals believe has been typically forgotten since the creation of the Ozark National Scenic Riverway.. Briefly allow me to highlight;

- Historical structures allowed to decline or be demolished
- Historical farm fields grown up and not remain as “pastoral settings”
- Historic roads, trails and river accesses closed
- Folk lore presentations discontinued
- Primitive camp sites closed
- Cemeteries not maintained

Then, Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall and the original authors who wrote the 1964 legislation to establish the park used the words conservation, preservation and recreation for all. The intention of the word preservation was to preserve the history of the original inhabitants and their activities, as well as preservation of the river and wildlife.

The addition of the wording “preservation of historical activities” to current policy and giving it the same weight in determining management decisions would improve the current policy.

HR 4182 requires the National Park Service personnel to manage the Ozark National Scenic Riverway as it is currently being managed and to abide by the 1984 General Management Plan. The 1984 plan would continue to allow the horseback riders to continue the tradition of riding in the Ozarks, river accesses would remain open for all to enjoy, traditional recreation activities such as fishing, gigging, boating, canoeing, kayaking and swimming would all continue. River baptisms would be allowed to continue without restriction.

The inclusion that the National Park Service prohibit the addition of any land within the Ozark National Scenic Riverway boundary from being included in such initiatives as the recent “National Blueway” or past “Biosphere”, and the requirement that National Park Service personnel not allowed to designate a “wilderness area” without the proper legislation from Congress is appreciated.

If the Ozark National Scenic Riverway and the National Park personnel would abide by the 1984 General Management Plan, implement and move forward the with proposed improvements to the park and allow for the current policy to remain the rule, the Ozark National Scenic Riverway would continue to provide traditional river experiences to the visitors and local residents.

These rivers have truly been the lifeblood of the communities that grew up around them. These people developed a spirit along with a compassionate belief in assisting our neighbors and

welcoming visitors. Personally and professionally Ozark people have attended to the needs of visitors for generations and this return to the original purpose of the creation of the Ozark National Scenic Riverway would free local businesses and organizations to better do so again.

HR4182 Continued – Lack of 1984 GMP Implementation

In the 1984 General Management Plan the NPS included commitments and policy to improvements to the park many of which have yet to be seen proving yet again the NPS is not a friend to the region but is directed by people who do not live in nor care about the communities that it is encompassed by.

1) The farms along the rivers had been allowed to grow up and become brush thickets. The 1984 plan promised to maintain many of the open fields in various stages of succession-for aesthetic benefit and to provide diversification favorable to wildlife; this was promised in the original plan as well, siting “pastoral settings” of the way the land was farmed before it became a park as an important visitor experience, however not until the lower river area was recently developed for the new elk being restored by the Missouri Dept of Conservation was the proposed fields manicured and revitalized. This was done at the expense of the Missouri tax payer.

2) The plan states that cultural resources will be vigilantly maintained and protected, however sites like the Lower Parker School, one of the last one-room school houses in Dent County is allowed to deteriorate. Cardareva School House is demolished and native rock removed, cemeteries are left in disarray, Button Rock School House continues to decline. I would also like to note that cultural experiences refers to camp locations, which often are located on an old family farm, visited by descendants and many of these have been closed off with large boulders prohibiting use. The NPS also attempted to halt river baptisms last year, a 200 year tradition in the Ozarks and I hardly believe that could be considered protecting the cultural resources of the area.

3) The plan encourages and supports efforts to stimulate study of regional folk life. We do not believe this has been done and is proven by the fact that park personnel were willing to allow several events that promote the introduction and exposure of local folk life to expire.

4) Litter was addressed in the plan and noted that existing cleanup program continues to include summer cleaning crews and an annual NPS/Canoe Concessioner cleanup day in March. To our knowledge this does not exist or is not publicized to allow for assistance by the locals. The only cleanup day events currently noted are done by the Missouri Stream Team and the Ozark Heritage Project, without the assistance of NPS personnel. As for summer cleaning crews, trash pickup was discontinued for many camping areas and providing trash bags was eliminated.

6) Campground to be built along with an 200 person amphitheater to be built at Aker’s was never built, nor the improvements at Powder Mill and the living demonstrations Blacksmithing, Horseshoeing and Sorghum Making have ceased; widening of the road to lower access at Log Yard and install concrete boat ramp, were never done. The plan also speaks of improvements at Jerk Tail and now that access is being threatened with closure and a 200 seat amphitheater to be constructed at Big Spring, also not completed.

These are all projects and improvements put forth in the 1984 GMP but have yet to be implemented. These need to be addressed as to why the commitments were not followed through on and the point needs to be made of their negative impact on the economies in the area and the level of accountability the leadership of the NPS has shown.

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One half century of management by neglect. Fifty years of lost cultural and economic opportunity in a region ripe with both and certainly in great need of the latter. From the Park's almost immediate demolition of the Lodge at Round Springs which destroyed both an iconic landmark and a thriving business to the more recently announced closing of the Big Spring Lodge and Cabins for a proposed minimum of three years beginning at the end of this summer. These are just a few of the reasons why the residents in the region I live in applaud Representative Smith for the proposal of HR4029.

I am Christy Roberts, President of the Ellington Chamber of Commerce and business owner in the region. I have witnessed firsthand much of this neglect in the past several decades—trash dumps created on the very sites that were once tourist attractions, access denied to family graveyards as well as gravel bars, timber allowed to rot and waste because of administrative inaction. My family and friends, many of which are business people and all of whom grew up for generations calling Current River home, have seen it all. I am honored to speak on behalf of the proposal to return these parks and riverway to the state of Missouri; and I am saddened by its necessity.

Much like the recent debacle in the VA, what they have on paper and what is actually taking place are far from in agreement. The ONSR can produce records of federally supported river clean-ups, as the present General Management Plan calls for—yet no one working at the canoe rentals or floating the river has seen such an effort for years. Organizations such as Missouri Stream Teams and the Ozark Heritage Project are conducting the clean-ups, along with the local boaters and conservation minded tourists. NPS personnel are no-where to be found.

The ONSR will also allow you to believe that the historical traditions of the local people are of great importance; however their actions speak quite loud when they cancel local festivals created to highlight a way of life of days gone by. This was prevalent when the Haunting of the Hills, a local favorite October event and the Ozark Riverway Heritage Days were cancelled in 2013. Both of these events highlighted important historical demonstrations such as Lye Soap Making, Rope Making, Quilting, Dutch Oven Cooking, Ozark Story Telling, I could go on. Thanks to a local organization, the Ozark Heritage Project, which in part was created just to re-establish these events and make sure the traditions of days gone by does not disappear, the above events will continue with very little assistance by the ONSR and without any funding.

The ONSR promised to be good stewards of the Missouri lands granted them and as Missourians we doubt that promise and offer the following proof:

- 1) Many cemeteries, graveyards and gravesites are now closed and inaccessible to the general public, they are overgrown, un-cared for and access is denied.
- 2) Roads deemed "illegal" are closed or are proposed to be closed. This committee should be made aware that there are no "illegal" roads located in the ONSR, all roads, however remote went

somewhere at one point in history, of which may have been a church, school, cemetery or settler's homestead. It is necessary for locals and visitors to be allowed to experience these locations.

- 3) Historic structures destroyed, allowed to deteriorate, losing forever the historic value to the area and former residents.
- 4) River access closed or proposed closures; river accesses are natural and nearly all accesses are created by the natural occurrences of the rise and fall of the river.
- 5) Boat restrictions applied; Secretary Udall, the first director of the ONSR realized the necessity to have the words recreation included in the original legislation and intended the main reasons for creation of the park to each have equal value; Conservation, preservation and recreation for all. The words "for all" do not limit use of a boat to only canoes, kayaks and rafts. The intention of the park was for all to enjoy. No one group should be singled out for exclusion.
- 6) Primitive camp site closures and proposed closures; primitive camping is a favorite past time of visitors and is a local and regional resident tradition. Campers at these sites are afforded no services for these camping locales even though they are required to pay a fee. Canoeists and guests who arrive by water are welcome to these same locations without having to pay a camp fee. I believe this to be an unjust discrimination to visitors who drive in while the NPS shows preference to preferred groups who float in.
- 7) Resistance to economic growth in the poorest counties in the state. It is integral to the economy of the area that access is kept for the canoe outfitters, horse riders and outboard motor visitors to enjoy in unity. The combined experiences of these groups should be enhanced and improved, not subjected to yet further restrictions and limitations.

My husband and his brothers are a 4th generation family who still visit and utilize the river on a weekly basis. Their grandfather Frank Roberts and great-grandfather John Richman Roberts both owned farms on the banks of the Current River. They watched their family heritage torn apart, burned down and destroyed at the hands of the very people that promised to preserve it and I can express the grief they still feel when we visit those areas. This is only the story of our family and I want to express there are hundreds of families who's heritage was destroyed and I am here today to speak for them as well. We have seen our rights deteriorate and stripped from us without reason and we fear more is about to come. Our hope is that our children, our grandchildren and our great grandchildren will be afforded the same pleasures we enjoy and the same rights we have had, giving the same opportunities to the next generation of the Roberts family. We live here and no one considers it more critical to be good stewards of the land than the residents who call this pristine location in the Ozarks home.

I believe the State of Missouri would be a better steward of the lands located within the boundaries of the Ozark National Scenic Riverway and have proven by the current outstanding park system within the state they we are capable of this undertaking.

I am proud to be here today in support of Representative Jason Smith's proposed bill to support The transfer of the Ozark National Scenic Riverway to the state of Missouri and I invite you to visit with us, get to know the people who truly intend to conserve, preserve and enjoy the recreation our area provides.