

7/17/13 Oversight Hearing on

“A Washington, DC-Based Bureaucratic Invention with Potential Water Conservation and Property Rights Impacts: The National Blueways Order”

My name is Eddy Justice and I am a resident of Butler County in Southeast Missouri. I have been the owner of Eddy Justice State Farm Insurance Agency since 1999. I am an avid user of the Current River, part of the White River Watershed, for recreation, and I boat and camp there many times throughout the spring, summer and fall months. I currently am renting property to use on the river and am looking to purchase property there in the near future. I am representing myself in my testimony today.

I am here today to testify before this committee in regard to the designation of the White River National Blueway by the Department of the Interior. Thankfully, due to pressure from many concerned citizens of the affected area, Congressman from Missouri’s 8th District Jason Smith, U.S. Senator from Missouri Roy Blunt, and other members of Congress from Arkansas, this designation has now been rescinded.

There is a long list of reasons why this step back by the Department of Interior is a positive move, but I will address only two here today.

In a press release issued by the Department of Interior on January 9, 2013, the statement was made that “The initiative is part of President Obama’s America’s Great Outdoors Initiative to establish a community-driven conservation and recreation agenda for the 21st century.” This is just one of many insinuations and statements that have been made to me and others across the affected area that the Blueways Designations was a collaborative effort that included local input.

To the best of my knowledge, not one single townhall meeting was held to gather local input. Not one request was issued for public input regarding this designation. Not one representative or letter was sent to any county commissioner in the affected area, advising them of the plans by the DOI to implement this designation.

The people of the affected areas, whether business owner, recreators, land owners, residents, employees, employers, or farmers, deserve to have a say in whether or not they want their home to be designated one way or the other by a federal agency.

County Commissioners are elected to handle the business of these effected counties. How can they effectively do so when they are not even notified of these actions by the Department of Interior? This is why at least 16 counties in Missouri alone have had commissioners sign letters to Secretary Salazar requesting the designation be rescinded.

The failure of the Department of Interior to bother with obtaining local input while claiming to have issued this designation after having collaborated with local governments and organizations is irresponsible at best and at least hints at dishonesty and possible ulterior motives.

Another issue that I would like to address today is the fact that Federal Agencies that are imposing these designations are doing so without any oversight from elected officials. These designations are being imposed arbitrarily, unilaterally and without representation.

The fact that the Department of Interior can impose these designations without having to get the approval of Congress proves it is arbitrary, as well as the reality that the power they are allowed to wield is unlimited. We have seen this in the past with the Ozark National Scenic Riverways imposing harsh restrictions on access to the Current River and strict guidelines for use of the river while attempting to impose it without the input of the local residents who depend on the river for their very livelihood.

There are very few, if any, industries in the area existing in this watershed that are not affected directly by regulations imposed on our waterways. The Tourism Industry and the Timber Industry alone are dependent on the waterways so drastically, that further regulation on them would be detrimental at best and catastrophic at worst. I have many customers in my insurance agency that, without these industries, would not be able to maintain their businesses and incomes.

We all know of freedom loving folks from our past that were upset about being taxed but having no say in the implementation of those taxes. There are many in Southeast and Southern Missouri that believe we are now being regulated without representation. With this kind of unmitigated regulatory activity by federal agencies in the past, it is very clear why local citizens are opposed to any further designations or groundwork for further regulatory activity without local input and without the oversight of elected officials.

There has been word the Department of Interior is reviewing the idea of Implementation of Blueway Designation in as many as twenty five other locations over the next 5 years throughout the US including the Yellowstone River Watershed. It is my opinion and testimony that any implementation of regulation or designation without local input and consent is inexcusable and further proof of the attitude Federal Agencies have- believing they know better how to manage local business and activity than those who live and work in the areas affected and actually have invested their lives to better themselves and the area they live in.