

Ozark

National Scenic Riverways



Superintendent Bill Black

Monday, April 28, 2014

Riverways Reflections

Things are starting to get busy at Ozark National Scenic Riverways. We've seen more visitors on the river, out hiking and camping, and stopping in to enjoy the spring scenery. We're glad to welcome many of our seasonal employees back to work, preparing for a busy summer season. School groups have been visiting and several will join us on May 9 for Junior Ranger Day at Alley Spring, which will be a great opportunity for the general public to enjoy some fun activities, also. We're planning our annual spring parkwide cleanup for May 7. Employees and concessioners will get out into the park and make a fun and productive day of it. We'd like to invite anyone who's interested in joining us to call park headquarters for more information.

Work continues on my review and consideration of the public comments for the Draft General Management Plan (GMP). Our goal is to have a final GMP completed later this year, which will include a summary of public comments and our responses. In my last column, I discussed the Wilderness Study that was included with the Draft GMP. This week I want to discuss roads and river access, which many of you have mentioned as areas of concern. Admittedly, the Draft GMP had some unclear wording that prompted questions soon after it was released.

Gravel Bar Access: In general, we don't envision much change in the way that gravel bar camping has been enjoyed for years. Currently, gravel bar camping is allowed by float-in or walk-in campers, as long as the locations are one-half mile away from any designated camping area and at least 50 feet away from any river access or landing. Campers wishing to drive onto the gravel bars have been a concern in the past because of overcrowding, blocking access for other visitors, and safety issues caused by vehicle traffic in the midst of families trying to enjoy the river. Therefore, the NPS preferred alternative proposes that camping on gravel bars which are accessed by vehicles be allowed in designated campsites only, to reduce these problems. At these locations, camping would only be allowed in the designated sites, whether you arrive at the gravel bar by river or by road.

Primitive Campsite Access: In an effort to broaden the recreational experience and to help protect resources, the National Park Service (NPS) preferred alternative proposes to limit road access to some – not all – primitive campsites. Established primitive campsites would not be closed, but in some cases the road or parking area would stop slightly short of the site. The road would be rehabilitated into a short hiking trail from the parking area to the campsite. This would allow visitors to enjoy a more primitive camping experience in a few areas, while protecting resources and concealing vehicles from view from the river. We would try to provide space for pop-ups or small campers, though these sites may be located a little further back from the river's edge. No decision has been made about which primitive campsites this would affect.

Undesignated Roads: In some areas, unauthorized roads or "two tracks" have been blazed illegally into the park, resulting in a confusing "cobweb" of undesignated roads. This can create detrimental impacts to wildlife and natural resources, as well as negative visitor experiences for those who inadvertently end up on these unmaintained roads. The NPS preferred alternative recommends that we strive to restore natural conditions on approximately 45 miles of roads. This rehabilitation would primarily apply to undesignated roads, and any associated undesignated river crossings. The proposals in the Draft GMP would have no impact on the use of any county or state roads.

Put-in and Take-out Locations: The NPS preferred alternative would allow us the flexibility to evaluate the river access points currently used by our concessions and other users of nonmotorized watercraft. In response to changing conditions such as river flow or visitor use patterns, we may need to consider better options for distribution of those access points in order to provide quality experiences for our visitors and protect river resources. Our concession operators would be involved

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Ozark National Scenic Riverways preserves the free-flowing Current and Jacks Fork Rivers, the surrounding natural resources, and the unique cultural heritage of the Ozark people. For more information, visit www.nps.gov/ozar or Facebook.

Comments? Write to:

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Riverways Reflections (*continued*)

in helping us with these evaluations and providing input on redistribution. We are proposing that the total number of access points remain about the same, but depending on the need, we could envision relocating approximately 20 nonmotorized access points over the life of the GMP. This recommendation does not apply to designated boat ramps or launches for motorized boats.

I hope this provides a better understanding about the proposals related to roads and river access. I want to emphasize that the GMP is still in draft format. After we analyze all the comments, we fully recognize that there may be compelling reasons to modify the NPS preferred alternative.

For more information about Junior Ranger Day or the parkwide cleanup, call park headquarters at (573)323-4236. To learn more about proposals related to roads and river accesses, you can read the "Summary of Key Excerpts" from the Draft GMP by visiting the park website at www.nps.gov/ozar and clicking on the link to the Draft General Management Plan.

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