

Guest Editorial

By Kally Higgins
Friends of Ozark Riverways

I am writing in response to your May 25th editorial on the Endangered Rivers listing of Ozark Riverways. Because the original quote failed to say who I am, I'll start by telling you a little about myself. My family was one of the first to settle the Current River in Van Buren. My father accompanied Thomas Hart Benton on his 1960 float on the Current, my grandfather floated logs down her in the early 1900's and my great, great grandfather ran the Coleman Ferry at what is now Watercress. I am a former employee of Ozark National Scenic Riverways, as well as a former manager at the largest concessions operation on the Lower Current. I graduated high school in Van Buren, but didn't attend college. I've lived and worked in St. Louis since 1998, yet live part-time in Carter County. I personally understand the economic impact these rivers have on the people struggling to make a living there. I am part of the leadership council for Friends of Ozark Riverways.

Friends of Ozark Riverways is a coalition of individuals, businesses, clubs and organizations from across the state, including many along the Current and Jacks Fork Rivers. We fish, paddle, camp, hike, boat, horseback ride, and support the local economies around ONSR. We've taken the time to look hard at the issues facing the river we love because NPS doesn't seem to care.

Like everyone, I wish Ozark National Scenic Riverways wasn't a candidate for the listing with American Rivers, but I care too much about these rivers to put my head in the gravel bar and pretend the problems aren't there. American Rivers has issued a wake-up call. There are people everywhere who recognize the NPS management problems and there's no denying that the water quality isn't the same as it was a decade ago. Gravel choking the river? You bet! Many of the illegal access points we've documented contribute to the problem by not only eroding silt and gravel into the river when water levels are normal, but they

become major channels for water during flooding situations.

To be clear, we aren't asking to close every road. We aren't saying no horses. We aren't advocating further horsepower restrictions on motors. We're simply asking NPS to do their job and manage horses in our park and to do an honest inventory of roads and trails and close the ones that have a negative impact on the resource.

In the 1940's, the Corps of Engineers wanted to dam the rivers. Thanks to a joint effort of folks from Eminence, Van Buren and St. Louis, that project was stopped and in its place was the first wild river system to be protected by the National Park Service. We entrusted our beloved rivers to the National Park Service and they're falling down on the job. Keeping people away from the river, banning horses, and turning off motors are not the right answers. Turning this into an "insiders vs. outsiders" issue isn't the answer, either. Not every person from other areas who love the rivers are "environmentalists" and not everyone who lives along the rivers wants to destroy the park.

Friends of Ozark Riverways is working hard to spread the message that Ozark National Scenic Riverways is worthy of the same attention as Great Smoky Mountains. What could be better for the local economy than to see ONSR become a true National Park destination for families and outdoor enthusiasts from across the country? Asking users who respect the rivers to stay home isn't good for anyone. However, asking those to stay home who leave behind trash and do real damage to the river system sounds like a pretty good idea to me.

I encourage all of your readers to learn what we're about and participate in the conversations. We want to hear from you, we want to work together. We may not agree on everything, but I think many will be surprised to learn how much we have in common.

Kally Higgins
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152nd District Representative Paul Fitzwater's

State Capitol Report

What a great week it has been about what legislation, actually

CURRENT HAPPENINGS

Volleyball Camp

Coaches Shari Tune and Francie McBride will host a volleyball fundamental skills camp for girls from all schools, 3rd thru 8th grades, Monday thru Wednesday, June 20-22 at the Eminence New Gym starting at 9:30 AM each day. For more information call (417) 331-0319 or (573) 247-6880.

Arts & Crafts Festival

The Eminence Chamber of Commerce will host an arts and crafts festival Friday, Saturday and Sunday, June 17, 18 and 19 at Stewart's Landing. For more information contact Crystal Layman at (573) 226-5217 or (573) 578-5123 or Eminence-craftshow@yahoo.com.

Singing In The Park

The Birch Tree Ministerial Alliance invites you to join us for the 4th annual Singing in the Park at the gazebo in Birch Tree Sunday, June 12. Bring a side dish and a lawn chair. Dinner starts at 5 PM, singing at 6pm

Family Fishing Day

The Twin Pines Conservation Education Center will host a Free Family Fishing Day Sunday, June 5 from 1-3 PM. For more information call 573-325-1381 or visit the web at <http://www.mdc.mo.gov/areas/areas/twinpines/>.

Vacation Bible School

All children ages 3 through the completion of 6th grade are invited to attend Vacation Bible School at County Line Pentecostal Church June 6-10 from 6-8:30 PM, located on Hwy 99, 8 miles south of Birch Tree and 8 miles north of Thomasville. A kickoff event including food and games will take place June 5 at 6 PM. For more information call (417) 331-2604 or 247-5486.

Gospel Singing

The New Testament Church in Winona on Sallee St. will