



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Boston Mountain
Ranger District

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File Code: 1950-1

Date: June 24, 2013

Subject: Mulberry River Watershed Improvement
and Access Project

Dear Reader:

The Boston Mountain Ranger District is proposing to develop managed access on the Mulberry River and conduct watershed improvement activities within the Wild and Scenic River Corridor on National Forest lands in Franklin County, Arkansas (see vicinity map). This letter serves as notification of the project to local landowners and others who have an interest in these types of activities. If you do not have an interest in this project, you do not need to respond.

INTRODUCTION

In April 1992, Congress designated six Wild and Scenic Rivers on the Ozark National Forest, including the Mulberry River. The Mulberry River received this designation to ensure that it will be preserved in a free-flowing condition for the benefit, use, and enjoyment of present and future generations. Recreation and Fisheries are the two outstandingly remarkable values identified for the Mulberry River. The upper section of the Mulberry (section 13 T11N R 23W) to Big Eddy Hollow is classified as recreational. The section below this to the Forest boundary is classified as scenic. The Forest Service is mandated to manage the public lands encompassing the Mulberry River Corridor to enhance and protect the outstandingly remarkable values and unique qualities of the river and its surroundings.

Over the past twenty years recreational use of the river has steadily grown. This has been reflected in the proliferation of unauthorized or otherwise illegal roads, trails, camping and parking areas created by river users over the years. These unmanaged features can be unsafe and have led to resource damage such as erosion and sedimentation, water quality and wildlife and fisheries habitat degradation, and vegetation loss (Figure 1). There is a need to provide regulated safe access and perform management activities to improve the watershed conditions in the project area.





Figure 1. Example of resource damage caused by vehicles driving in the Wild and Scenic Corridor. Note rutting and accelerated erosion (top photo) leading directly to excess sediment being delivered to the river (bottom photo).

Recreational uses include canoeing, kayaking, swimming, camping, fishing, hunting, hiking, off-highway vehicle driving, bird watching, and scenic driving. Most water-related use occurs between canoe launch points Little Mulberry, Wolf Pen, High Bank, Redding, Big Eddy, and Campbell Cemetery on National Forest lands; and Byrd's, Turner Bend, and Wayfarer's on private land. The Forest currently provides public canoe access at Redding, Wolf Pen, and Campbell Cemetery.

Over the past three years the Forest Service has developed a set of actions to meet the great need in this area for managed access to this valuable resource in order that many different and diverse publics may continue to enjoy it. We have identified key points along the river where management actions would do the most good in achieving recreational access while protecting resources and providing for public safety. The project is referred to as the **Mulberry River Watershed Improvement and Access Project**.

The actions proposed were developed from field reviews that determined management needs for this area based on the goals established by the Revised Ozark-St. Francis National Forests Land and Resource Management Plan (hereafter referred to as the Forest Plan), and conditions encountered on the land. In addition, the Mulberry River Wild and Scenic River Plan (1996) (available at <http://www.rivers.gov/rivers/documents/plans/mulberry-plan.pdf>) and the Mulberry River Assessment (2010) provide Forest Service direction for managing the forest lands within corridor boundaries.

Healthy forests and watersheds, diversity of plant and animal species, safe and suitable access to the forest, a balance of traditional and emerging recreational opportunities, and continued local economic support are the desired future conditions for the project area. The Wild and Scenic Rivers (WSR) Act requires that the corridor sufficiently protect the outstandingly remarkable values which caused the stream to be included in the wild and scenic river system.

The project proposal includes five potential put-in locations listed in order from upstream to most downstream: Big Eddy, Jethro, Anvil, Black Gold, and Wilson Lane Access.

PROPOSED ACTIONS

See map at the end of this document for locations of proposed actions.

Big Eddy

- Develop a road, parking lot, and canoe access.
- Develop picnic sites with picnic tables and grills at appropriate locations.
- Designate area as a Day-Use Only Site

- Reconstruct and pave as much as 2.5 miles of Shores Lake Road #1501 from Highway 23 west to Big Eddy site.
- Eliminate user-created roads and trails in this area to control access and reduce resource damage.
- Install vault style restroom as funding allows outside the perimeter of the 100 year flood prone area.

Jethro and Anvil

- Convert three old landings (existing user-made parking) into graveled parking areas lined with rock barriers.
- Designate roads leading to parking areas for vehicle and OHV use to discourage users from creating their own roads.
- Rehabilitate and armor existing pathways leading to the river.
- Install vault style restroom as funding allows outside the perimeter of the 100 year flood prone area.

Black Gold

- Convert old landing (existing user-created parking area) into graveled parking area lined with rock barriers.
- Perform road maintenance on roads leading to parking areas.
- Designate roads leading to parking areas for vehicle and OHV use to discourage users from creating their own roads.
- Rehabilitate and armor existing pathways leading to river.
- Signage to inform and prohibit parking in the channel during low flows.
- Obliterate user-created roads in riparian areas and restore areas to historic (pre-OHV) conditions
- Install vault style restroom as funding allows outside the perimeter of the 100 year flood prone area.

Wilson Lane

- Convert old landing (existing user-created parking area) into graveled parking area lined with rock barriers.
- Develop loop road and trails for drop off areas.
- Perform road maintenance on roads leading to parking areas.
- Designate roads leading to parking areas for vehicle and OHV use to discourage users from creating their own roads.
- Rehabilitate and armor existing pathways leading to river
- Install vault style rest room outside the 100 year flood prone area as funding becomes available.

Native Grassland Restoration: Turner Bend Fields (Turner Bend Small Game Area): Eradicate seresia lespedeza, fescue and Bermuda grass on 72 acres of existing fields through herbicide treatments. The herbicide treatments would be applied in approximately 10 to 20 acre increments every other year until all fields have been

treated. Following herbicide treatments, the fields would be planted in native grasses wildflowers and a quail forb mix. The fields would be disked and drilled in the native grass/forb mix. Approximately 3 to 5 years following establishment of the grasses, the area would need to be maintained through mowing or haying on an annual or bi-annual rotation. Other activities may include burning, strip disking, planting of shrub thickets or maintenance of existing thickets left around edges of the fields for quail habitat. This activity would improve wildlife habitat for quail, turkey, neotropical migratory birds, deer, small mammals and monarch butterflies.

Wildlife area improvement: Along perimeter of Turner Bend Fields, establish orchard of hardwoods as seed source with tree species such as white oaks and hickories.

Mobility Impaired Hunting Blinds/Access: Two areas within the Turner Bend Small Game Area would have portable wheelchair accessible ground hunting blinds during hunting seasons which would be removed after the season ends.

Bank stabilization/watershed improvement: Unauthorized motorized use in the Mulberry River Wild and Scenic Corridor is a major contributor to accelerated erosion and sediment production causing turbidity of the lower river areas. Watershed improvements to counter this would include closure and/or rehabilitation of unauthorized trails and roads by blocking off with boulders, gates or decommissioning; hardening of stream crossings; revegetation of disturbed soils in the riparian area with suitable trees and herbaceous vegetation; stream bank stabilization utilizing natural materials or geotextile/rip rap material; and mulching if sufficient topsoil does not remain on disturbed sites in the riparian areas. The miles of illegal road closure/rehabilitation work would depend on funding available and may be as much as ten miles per year throughout the life of this project as a rough estimate. Any soil disturbance work such as tree-removal would be required to be surveyed by the appropriate specialist for any potential impact to Forest Resources prior to proceeding.

HOW TO COMMENT

We are planning a public meeting to communicate with and include as stakeholders the communities most interested in the particulars of this project.

This project is subject to administrative review under 36 CFR 218 Project-Level Pre-decisional Administrative Review Process, Parts A and B. Specific written comments as defined by 36 CFR 218.2 should be within the scope of the proposed action, have a direct relationship to the proposed action, and must include supporting reasons for me to consider. It is the responsibility of all individuals and organizations to ensure that their comments are received in a timely manner. Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however we will not be able

to provide the respondent with subsequent environmental documents. A 30-day Notice and Comment period will be provided at a future date (36 CFR 218.24).

An objection period, if required, will follow the regulation found in 36 CFR 218.7. For objection eligibility (36 CFR 218.5), only those who have submitted timely, specific written comments during any designated opportunity for public comment may file an objection. Issues to be raised in objections must be based on previously submitted specific written comments regarding the proposed project and attributed to the objector, unless the issue is based on new information that arose after a designated opportunity to comment (36CFR 218.8(c)).

I invite your comments on the proposed action. The Interdisciplinary Team will use your comments as they identify issues and develop alternatives to the proposal for my consideration. The team will summarize the disclosure of environmental effects in an environmental document which will be available to the general public on our website. The environmental document will be mailed to those who have commented on this proposal and to those who request a paper copy.

For your convenience you may use the enclosed comment form. Our mailing address is: U.S. Forest Service, 1803 N 18th Street, Ozark, AR 72949. You may also call, or email your comments to: comments-southern-ozark-stfrancis-bostonmtn@fs.fed.us. Please state "*Mulberry River Watershed Improvement and Access Project*" in the subject line when providing electronic comments, or on the envelope when replying by mail. If you have questions on this proposal or the analysis decision process, please call me at 479-667-2191.

Sincerely,



WILLIAM DUNK

District Ranger

***Mulberry River Watershed Improvement and Access Project
Boston Mountain Ranger District, Ozark National Forest***

Name: _____

Address: _____

Date: _____ Phone: _____

Email: _____

Comments:

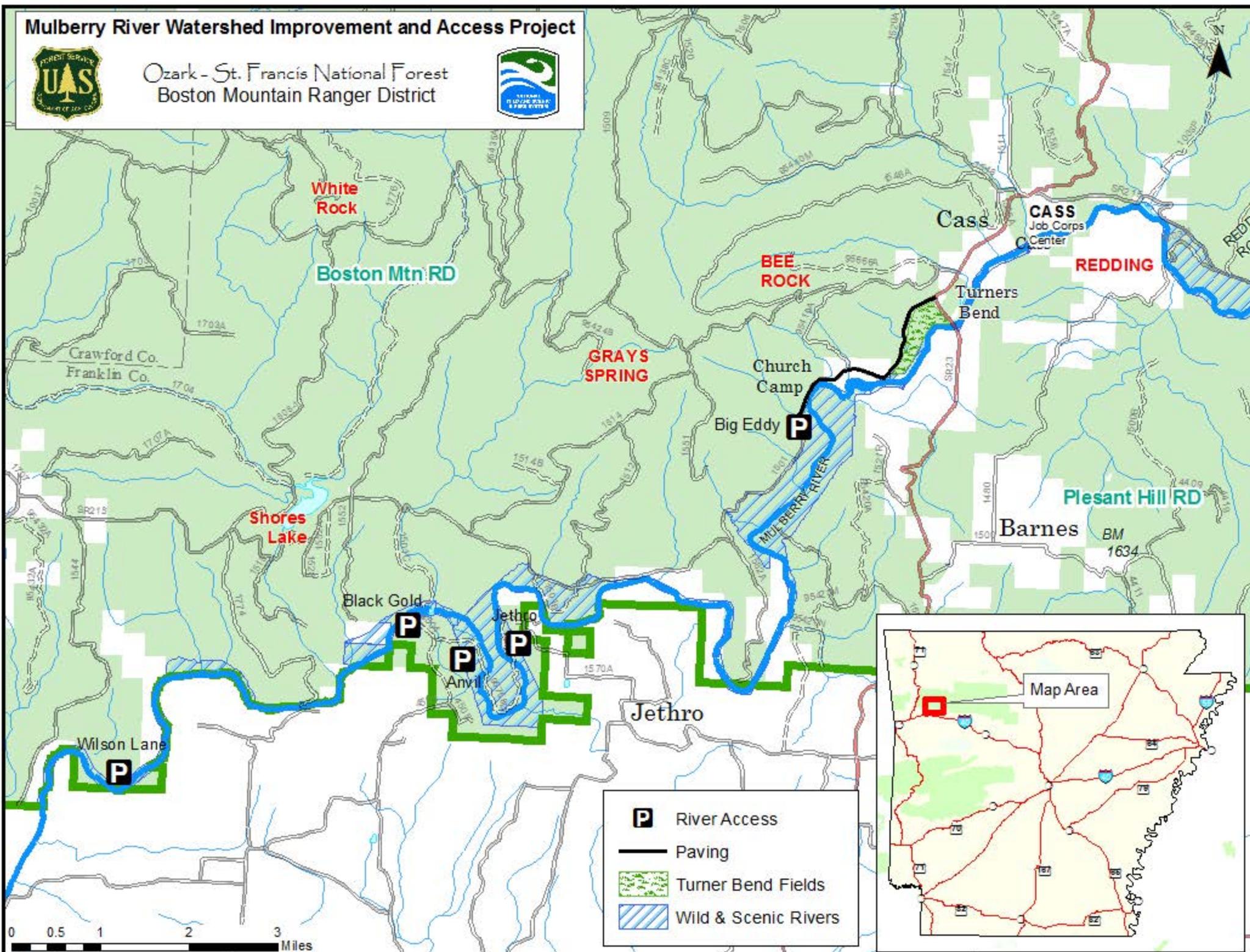
Would you like us to contact you about your comments? _____

Please mail your completed comment form to Jobi Brown at 1803 North 18th Street, Ozark, AR 72949. Comments are also accepted verbally at 479-667-2191 or TTY 479-667-1931, or by email at comments-southern-ozark-stfrancis-bostonmtn@fs.fed.us. Your input is important.

Mulberry River Watershed Improvement and Access Project



Ozark - St. Francis National Forest
Boston Mountain Ranger District



	River Access
	Paving
	Turner Bend Fields
	Wild & Scenic Rivers

