



Foundation Document Overview

Ozark National Scenic Riverways

Missouri



Contact Information

For more information about the *Ozark National Scenic Riverways Foundation Document*, contact: ozar_superintendent@nps.gov or (573) 323-4236 or write to:
Superintendent, Ozark National Scenic Riverways, P.O. Box 490, Van Buren, MO 63965

Purpose



The purpose of OZARK NATIONAL SCENIC RIVERWAYS is to:

- *preserve and protect in an unimpaired condition the unique scenic and natural values, processes, and unspoiled setting derived from the clean, free-flowing Current and Jacks Fork Rivers, springs, caves, and their karst origins*
- *provide for and promote opportunities for the scientific and public understanding of the natural and cultural resources*
- *offer opportunities for understanding and appreciating the human experience associated with the Ozark Highlands landscape*
- *provide for uses and enjoyment of the outdoor recreation opportunities consistent with the preservation of the park unit's resources*

Significance

Significance statements express why Ozark National Scenic Riverways resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- The impressive hydrogeologic character of the Ozark National Scenic Riverways' karst landscape supports an amazing variety of natural features, including a spring system that is world-class and unparalleled in North America. The park unit features the largest spring in the national park system, 5 first-magnitude (discharge rate of 100 cubic feet of water per second) springs and spring complexes, and more than 350 springs parkwide. The cave system is equally impressive, with 402 documented caves within the park unit boundary—one of the highest densities of any national park system unit.
- Ozark National Scenic Riverways contains 134 miles of clear, free-flowing, spring-fed rivers. These include the Jacks Fork and Current Rivers, which are two of only three Outstanding National Resource Waters in Missouri.
- The ancient Ozark Highlands is an important center of biodiversity in North America, including numerous endemic species that are found nowhere else in the world. The large variety of species found within Ozark National Scenic Riverways is due to the rich array of aquatic, terrestrial, and subterranean habitats concentrated within its river corridors.
- Ozark National Scenic Riverways features archeological sites, historic structures, objects, and landscapes that reflect more than 12,000 years of people living along, adapting to, and interacting with these Ozark Highlands rivers.
- The complex and dynamic natural resources and systems of the Ozark National Scenic Riverways provide for outstanding, high-quality recreational experiences on and along free-flowing rivers.



Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to warrant primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance. Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to warrant primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Karst-based Hydrogeological System.** The Ozark National Scenic Riverways is situated in a geologically and hydrologically complex area along the Current and Jacks Fork Rivers. The geology of these two watersheds is composed primarily of rock formations of soluble limestone and dolomite, which produced an intricate karst landscape of disappearing streams, underground rivers, sinkholes, caves, and springs. The hydrogeologic processes of this karst landscape have also created an unusually high density of extraordinary caves and springs. Big Spring is the largest freshwater spring in the national park system. At least 90% of the combined flow of the Current and Jacks Fork Rivers is from springs, which account for their year-round, sustained flows.
- **Exceptional Water Quality within a Free-flowing.** Exceptionally high water quality and clarity of the free-flowing Current and Jacks Fork Rivers has led to designation of these rivers as two of only three Outstanding National Resource Waters in Missouri. This designation has national, recreational, and ecological significance. Ozark National Scenic Riverways contains 134 miles of exceptionally clear, free-flowing rivers.
- **High-quality Ecosystems.** The Ozark National Scenic Riverways has a diversity of rare, high-quality ecosystems that support an assemblage of unique plants and animals. This rich biological diversity has evolved in response to the hydrogeologic processes of the area's ancient karst landscape. Simultaneously, the lack of glaciation or inundation of the Ozark physiographic province allowed the region to serve as lasting refuge for species colonization and adaptation. This combination of factors fostered an interconnected system of terrestrial, aquatic, and subterranean microhabitats that contributes to the park unit's high biological diversity and has made the Ozarks an important North American region of endemism where many species occur exclusively.
- **Human Occupation of and Enduring Connection to the Ozark Highlands.** The rich cultural history of the Current and Jacks Fork Rivers is manifested in several ways including the archeological record that documents thousands of years of human presence, surviving historic structures, museum collection items, and the customs

and stories that have been passed on from generation to generation. Throughout this long, interconnected history, the rivers have remained a primary focus of a landscape that has sustained prehistoric and historic populations, and helped shape their cultural identities. Archeological and ethnographic resources, historic structures, cultural landscapes, and museum collections combine to help tell the story of humans' occupation of and enduring connection to the Ozark Highlands. A relatively complete record of prehistoric American Indian occupation is represented in a variety of archeological habitation sites, ranging from simple campsites to more elaborate base camps and villages. These sites reflect changes in the human adaptation, settlement, and subsistence strategies practiced through time. The National Riverways also contains outstanding examples of traditional Ozark domestic and industrial architecture as well as Civilian Conservation Corps-constructed timbered stone structures.

- **Outstanding River Recreation Experiences.** The essence of an Ozark National Scenic Riverways visitor experience includes enjoying clear, free-flowing water in a tree-covered valley with a chance to observe native wildlife, explore along a hiking trail, or ponder the size of a spring flow. It is nationally recognized as one of the most scenic float trips in America, offering an experience that can be both invigorating and reflective. There are few opportunities for such high-quality recreation experiences in a natural river environment.



Description

Ozark National Scenic Riverways (National Riverways) was established by an Act of Congress in 1964 (Public Law 88-492) to conserve and interpret unique scenic and other natural values and objects of historic interest, including preservation of portions of the Current and Jacks Fork Rivers in the Ozark Highlands of southeastern Missouri, in Shannon, Carter, Dent, and Texas counties. Within its boundaries are approximately 80,785 acres of river, forest, open field, and glade environments. Of that, 51,654 acres are federal and 29,131 acres are in nonfederal ownership.

The National Riverways includes portions of the Current and Jacks Fork Rivers, providing 134 miles of clear, free-flowing, spring-fed waterways. Much of the area is underlain by dolomite that has given rise to numerous sinkholes, caves, and springs representative of classical karst topography. Up to 90% of the combined flow of the Current and Jacks Fork Rivers comes from the more than 400 springs in the drainage basin. Big Spring, one of the largest springs in the United States, has an average flow of approximately 287 million gallons of water per day. The impressive hydrogeologic

character of the National Riverways' karst landscape supports an amazing variety of natural features, including a spring system unparalleled in North America. The cave system is equally impressive with one of the highest densities of caves in any national park.

The National Riverways lies within the Ozark Highlands, an important center of biodiversity in North America. The Ozark Highlands is home to a rich array of wildlife and plants, including endemic species that exist nowhere else in the world. The Current and Jacks Fork Rivers have been designated as Outstanding National Resource Waters in Missouri.

The National Riverways also contains a broad range of cultural resources, including prehistoric sites associated with thousands of years of American Indian use and occupation of the area, and later 19th century structures and sites, such as mills and farms that reflect the patterns of settlement and the economic activities of early European American pioneers. The National Riverways features archeological and historic structures, landscapes, and objects that provide insight to early

inhabitants of Ozark Highlands. Significant examples of buildings and structures built by the Civilian Conservation Corps during the 1930s are present, and several of the National Riverways' historic properties are listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

The extraordinary resources of the National Riverways provide outstanding recreational opportunities and experiences on and along free-flowing rivers. The Current and Jacks Fork Rivers provide excellent recreational opportunities that include, but are not limited to, boating, canoeing, tubing, swimming, fishing, and sightseeing. Visitors also enjoy hiking, backpacking, hunting, and horseback riding.

