



4/16/2023

Comments on U.S. Forest Service Project: *Trails at Mena (63649)*

We request that no bike trails, chairlifts, parking lots, or other developments be built in the Ouachita National Forest in area to the north and northeast of Highway 88. This area is an important black bear habitat and corridor all the way to Black Fork Mountain Wilderness and beyond to the north, northeast and east. It also contains the Rich Mountain Botanical Area.

We also request that no bike trails or other developments be built in the Ouachita National Forest to the west, south, and southwest of Queen Wilhelmina State Park. This area is largely roadless, is important black bear habitat, and serves as a wildlife corridor for black bears and other wildlife. This area includes the upper 5 miles of Mill Creek and Bufram Creek, as well as Self Mountain, Weehunt Mountain, Quentin Mountain, all the way to the Upper Kiamichi Wilderness in Oklahoma.

We ask that all environmental studies that are required by NEPA, the U. S. Forest Service, and the state of Arkansas be done before the project is started, so that any endangered species, bear denning areas, aquatic habitats in streams, and other important native plant and animal communities or important wildlife corridors are not lost or diminished by new bike trails or other developments associated with this project.

We also support keeping the overall footprint of this project as small as possible to prevent the loss of wildlife habitats, and also to not unnecessarily eliminate or impact hunting, birding, camping, and other uses of the Ouachita National Forest in this area.

We request that the parties financing this project provide individual surety bonds for each of the four phases, so that if any single phase becomes economically unsupportable, there will be financing available to remove constructed lifts, supporting infrastructure, and provide for any necessary restoration work.

Queen Wilhelmina State Park, the lodge, and the surrounding hiking trails have been a favorite place to go for many people from Arkansas, Oklahoma, and other states for decades. We ask that this new bike development be done in a way, that keeps these traditional uses and does not diminish them.

For example, we ask that the hiking only trails in Queen Wilhelmina State Park, remain as hiking only. We also request that the Ouachita Trail, which is now hiking only from Highway 88 in Arkansas to Highway 259 in Oklahoma, remain as hiking only.

We also support any efforts to minimize the impacts on the Lodge and its immediate surroundings from any new construction or developments associated with this project. It seems that reducing noise, lights, and traffic, as well as protecting the unobstructed, views of a natural landscape from the lodge area, would be desirable.

We recognize that the new bike trails will add an exciting new dimension to Queen Wilhelmina State Park. We just ask that the traditional uses of the Park and the surrounding area be retained as well.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this project.

Brian Thompson
President - The Ozark Society
3428 E. Wyman Rd.
Fayetteville, AR. 72701
479 879-0688