



July 25, 2024

Dan Olsen
Forest Supervisor, Ouachita National Forest
c/o: Mena/Oden District Ranger
Attention: Mena Trails
1603 Hwy 71 North
Mena, AR 71935

Mr. Olsen,

Thank you for considering and evaluating the proposed Special Use Permit application for the Trails at Mena project. In preparing the draft Environmental Assessment, your expert staff and project partners have examined every possible outcome of the project thoroughly, so that the public can weigh the options and comment accordingly. We know that your staff's time is valuable, and greatly appreciate your efforts.

At the Arkansas Parks & Recreation Foundation it is our mission to support, protect, enhance and add value to places that provide exceptional recreational experiences. The Trails at Mena project is an opportunity to engage a broader audience with positive recreation experiences and immerse them in what makes the Ouachita National Forest and Arkansas such a special place. Opportunities for interpretation and interactions with wild and special landscapes throughout the project area are endless. Quality experiences on our Forest and conservation lands, especially as youth, are important for building a constituency for public lands and wild places, and as populations become more urban, that support is needed now more than ever. The Foundation believes this project will help foster long-term support for the Forest.

The Trails at Mena project started as a grassroots effort by residents of Mena, and the town's support and partnership throughout the planning process has been one of the most important pieces of the puzzle. Mena's willingness to rally around projects that bring tourism dollars and support for local businesses is second to none, and will surely be one of the reasons this project succeeds if permitted. I look forward to seeing the positive changes in the community that projects like this can create, and watching a new generation of local youth spending more time outside and interacting with the Forest through cycling and hiking.

The Arkansas Parks & Recreation Foundation is in full support of the Alternative 2 – Proposed Action, as described in the Draft Environmental Assessment. If permitted, this project will create a truly exceptional and unique recreational experience on the Ouachita National Forest that will attract national and global attention, adding to the broad list of outdoor experiences that The Natural State is already known for.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Mitchell", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Mitchell Allen
Interim Executive Director
Arkansas Parks & Recreation Foundation