

Seth F. Smith
Mayor

Kacie Rose
City Clerk/Treasurer

Patrick C. McDaniel
City Attorney



City of Mena
520 Mena Street
Mena, Arkansas 71953

Council

Andy Brown
Stan Craig
Mary Alice Head
Brooke Hines
Larry Stewart
James Earl Turner

July 25, 2024

Dan Olsen
Forest Supervisor, Ouachita National Forest
Attention: Trails at Mena (63649)
1603 Hwy 71 North
Mena, AR 71953

Mr. Olsen:

As the Mayor of Mena, I have had the unique opportunity to watch this project evolve from a grassroots movement, beginning with a few trails on city-owned land four years ago, into a remarkable collaborative effort involving City, County, State, and Federal Officials as well as private partnerships. Over these four years, countless hours have been dedicated to planning, surveying, holding public meetings, asking and answering questions, and diligently working through an in-depth process to ensure this project is not only exceptional for outdoor enthusiasts but, more importantly, for the community of Mena.

Throughout my life, I have spent many hours in the Ouachita National Forest—whether on early hunting trips, hiking, participating in Search and Rescue Operations, or, more recently, exploring on a mountain bike. While I may never ride the most difficult or extreme downhill trails, cycling has allowed me to see parts of the National Forest I would have otherwise never had the chance to experience. The Ouachita National Forest spans 1.8 million acres, according to USDA.gov, and the project area covers approximately 8,800 acres—a fraction of the total forest, much of which remains unused and inaccessible. This project offers a unique opportunity to enjoy the Ouachita National Forest with minimal environmental impact, but with significant benefits.

As someone who grew up in the area, owns a small business, and spends much of my time engaging with other small business owners, I have witnessed firsthand the changes time has brought to our region. I am acutely aware that our part of rural Arkansas needs an economic driver, and the Trails at Mena project promises much-needed economic growth. By attracting visitors and promoting outdoor tourism, this initiative will bolster local businesses and contribute to the economic vitality of our city and region. The positive ripple effects will be felt across various sectors, creating new opportunities and fostering sustainable growth.

Additionally, by enhancing the quality of life in our area, the Trails at Mena Project will aid in the recruitment and retention of employees, which will be a huge benefit to local employers.

Perhaps what excites me most about the Trails at Mena is the benefit to local families, including my own. Trails and greenways in a community have been proven to promote physical health, increase mental well-being, bring families and friends together in a healthy way, and reduce screen time across generations. We have an extraordinary gift and resource right in our backyard with the Ouachita National Forest. Utilizing a part of it for trails will bring an incredible return on investment with positive impacts that can be enjoyed for generations to come.

In summary, I fully support the Trails at Mena Project and endorse the full implementation of Alternative 2 – Proposed Action without restriction and respectfully ask for your consideration of implementation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Seth Smith", written in a cursive style.

Seth F. Smith
Mayor, City of Mena