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Comments: Jonathan P. Kazmierski

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Submitted via online form

RE:Red River Gorge Management Planning

Dear Mr. Kazmierski:

I appreciate this opportunity to provide comments on the Red River Gorge Management Planning Project.

Background

In 1973 during my freshman year at the University of Cincinnati I joined the University of Cincinnati Mountaineering Club (UCMC) and began going on trips to Red River Gorge. My first overnight backpacking trip in the Gorge was along Copperas Creek. I recall the Copperas Creek canyon being a pristine activity with no signs of human activity. As a UCMC member I became involved with the Miami Group of the Sierra Club in collecting petitions against the proposed damming of the river and went to Frankfort, KY with other UCMC members to attend a protest march against the dam.

After attending the National Outdoor Leadership School during the summer of 1974 I obtained a Mountain Guide Certificate which included education in what would now be considered a Leave No Trace, Master Educator Course. After that, my involvement with the UCMC included leading wilderness skills courses and traditional rock climbing courses in Red River Gorge.

Comments

Red River Comprehensive River Management Plan

On page 29 of the Comprehensive River Management Plan, under the heading of Potential Future Management Actions "discourage off-trail use" and "regulate and enforce restrictions on off trail travel,... camping" are listed. Off trail travel and camping contribute to the experience of remoteness. Within the Wild & Scenic River Corridor regulation and enforcement of off-trail travel and off-trail camping should be removed from consideration in the Plan as management actions. Proposed Forest Supervisor Orders implementing and enforcing restrictions on off-trail travel and off-trail camping would turn responsible outdoor recreationists who follow Leave No Trace principles into criminals. Off-trail travel restrictions would also deny responsible outdoor recreationists the opportunity to seek out the many off-trail arches behind the areas moniker "Land of the Arches". Issuance of permits for limited dispersed camping, in addition to permitting camping at designated sites would provide for a broader range of outdoor experiences in Red River Gorge.

Red River Gorge Management Planning

Limits of Acceptable Change

The Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) process which concluded in 2008 and its recommendations, zones, and proposed management actions are significantly referenced in the Draft Environmental Assessment, Finding of No Significant Impact (Draft EA/FONSI) document. As the Forest Service is well aware I was a regular participant in LAC meetings and participated in determining LAC zones and developing management actions. At the end of the process I provided the Forest Service with a map indicating a number of proposed improvements to accommodate various recreational activities including rock climbing, mountain biking, and horseback riding. Proposed restrictions on these activities are counter to the LAC vision for Red River Gorge that was developed by numerous private citizens who spent many hours in meetings in determining the LAC results.

Parking

The Draft EA/FONSI focuses solely on providing parking internal to the Red River Gorge. The parking approach should be revised to provide additional parking access from road located along the perimeter boundary of the Gorge. Following a strategy of providing parking along the perimeter of the area could divert some traffic away from the scenic byway.

Trail Access

The Draft EA/FONSI as well focuses solely on providing trail access internal to the Red River Gorge. The trail access approach should be revised to provide trail access from surrounding communities such as Slade, from Campton via Swift Creek, and from Frenchburg via Hatton Ridge.

Day Use Areas

For years I have been advocating that access to Chimney Top be limited to day use only by gating Chimney Top Road at some point. The Draft EA/FONSI should be revised to include Chimney Top as a day use area for safety reasons and to allow for the rehabilitation of severe impacts to the area.

Your consideration of the above comments is appreciated.

Respectfully yours,
Bill Strachan