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Organization:

Title:

Comments: I am writing to express my enthusiastic support for the development of the Mena Bike Trails project, which will utilize a portion of the Ouachita National Forest. As the Superintendent of Mena Public Schools, I see this project as an exceptional opportunity that aligns with our mission and vision, providing substantial benefits to our students, staff, and the broader community.

Our vision at Mena Public Schools is to ensure that "Our students are prepared, our staff is supported, and our community is confident." We exist to serve our community by instilling an individualized purpose in our students and staff, fostering a better community for all generations to live and work. The Mena Bike Trails project will significantly contribute to realizing this vision in several key ways:

**Physical Health:** The trails will provide students, staff, and families with access to outdoor activities, promoting physical fitness and a healthy lifestyle. Encouraging regular exercise is vital for the physical well-being of our community, and the trails offer a safe and enjoyable environment for such activities.

**Mental Well-being:** Numerous studies have shown that spending time in nature reduces stress, improves mood, and enhances overall mental health. By providing a natural space for our community to enjoy, the bike trails will contribute to the mental well-being of our students and staff.

**Educational Opportunities:** The trails can serve as an outdoor classroom, offering unique learning experiences in environmental science, biology, and physical education. This hands-on approach to learning will enrich our curriculum and foster a deeper appreciation for the natural world among our students.

**Community Engagement:** The trails will be a space for families and community members to engage in recreational activities together, strengthening community bonds and fostering a sense of unity. This aligns with our value of exemplifying personal accountability and celebrating successes within the community.

**Youth Engagement:** Providing a constructive outlet for youth is essential in promoting positive behaviors and reducing the likelihood of engaging in harmful activities. The trails offer a safe and healthy environment for young people to explore and enjoy.

**Economic Growth:** The increased revenue through property taxes and the attraction of tourists and new residents will boost local businesses and support the economic growth of Mena. A thriving local economy directly benefits our school system by providing more resources and opportunities for our students and staff.

**Environmental Stewardship:** By promoting conservation efforts and a deeper appreciation for the natural environment, the trails will help instill values of environmental stewardship in our students. This aligns with our mission to create a better community for all generations.

**Job Growth:** The development and maintenance of the bike trails and equipment will create new job opportunities in Mena. This influx of employment will not only stimulate the local economy but also inspire us to enhance our curriculum to include vocational training and career-focused programs. By aligning our educational offerings with emerging job markets, we can better prepare our students for future employment and contribute to the overall economic stability of our community.

Our mission and vision emphasize determination, perseverance, and personal growth. The Mena Bike Trails project embodies these values by offering opportunities for physical, mental, and educational development. It is a

source of pride for our community, and no dream is diminished or demeaned by another.

I urge the U.S. Forest Service to consider the profound positive impact this project will have on our school system and community. The Mena Bike Trails will not only enhance the quality of life for our residents but also help us achieve our mission and vision for Mena Public Schools.

Thank you for your time and consideration.