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## MISSOURI HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

### ROBERT ROSS

State Representative  
District 142

**Testimony of Robert Ross, State Representative – District 142, Missouri House of Representatives  
Before the U.S. House of Representatives  
Subcommittee on Public Land and Environmental Regulation  
June 10, 2014**

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, as we continue our discussion of Missouri's Ozark National Scenic Riverways (ONSR) and the best way to manage this treasure moving forward, I would like to advocate for what we Missourians believe to be the best option in balancing the preservation of the area and the recreational opportunities that it affords.

When Congress acted in 1964 to designate large portions of the Current and Jack's Fork Rivers as a "Scenic Riverway," it did so with the intent and commitment of maintaining and protecting public access to an area that today receives more than 1.3 million visitors annually. In my conversations with some of the families who gave up their property (some land was purchased, while much was taken through Eminent Domain) those many years ago to allow for the creation of the ONSR, the recurring theme is that they did so because the Park Service assured them it would protect the riverways without limiting or restricting their access; and that future generations would be able to utilize and enjoy the area in the same manner that these local families had been able to. While that was the case for a number of years, the latest efforts by the National Park Service to restrict access and curtail recreational opportunity (which is a central theme in the proposed General Management Plan "GMP") threaten the integrity of the accord that was originally struck between the people of Missouri and the federal government.

As discussed in my previous testimony, our state has come together in supporting the "No Action Alternative" which would not further limit access or increase restrictions. And while we believe this would be the ideal plan for the National Park Service to utilize going forward, the most favorable option to ensure proper management of the park would involve the federal government relinquishing control of the ONSR and returning it to the State of Missouri. For that reason I am fully supportive of Congressman Smith's H.R. 4029 that would empower our state to manage and protect the ONSR as a state park.

These are Missouri lands and Missouri rivers, and I can confidently say that Missourians (as we have for generations) know best how to preserve and protect these resources both today and moving forward. We understand that this park is one of the greatest destinations in our nation for floating, boating, hiking, camping, hunting, fishing and horseback riding, and we want to ensure visitors are able to enjoy these activities just as they have for decades. At the same time we are committed to protecting the ONSR as it

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represents a vital part of our local economies and an integral part of our way of life, and we are dedicated to ensuring it continues to be the natural treasure we all know it to be today.

As previously mentioned in my testimony on HR 4182, the resolutions passed in the Missouri House and Senate express that we believe “Missouri citizens most impacted in their daily lives are in the best position to formulate policy and regulations to manage and protect Missouri's natural resources as opposed to a federal agency headquartered in Washington, D.C.”. We emphasized that statement again this session when my colleagues supported my efforts to secure funding for the operation and maintenance of the ONSR by the State of Missouri, within our operating budget. It should be mentioned that our state constitution requires a balanced budget and that we have continued to walk a very fine line in finding funding for many of our most critical needs. To authorize funding for this purpose despite the difficult budget situation we face is a testimony itself to the high level of importance we place on Missouri regaining control of the Ozark National Scenic Riverways.

In conclusion, we urge you to take action to help us preserve access to this undeniably beautiful part of our state and nation. It is possible to allow visitors to responsibly use and enjoy these waterways while also preserving and protecting their natural beauty so that they can be enjoyed by future generations as well. We believe it is not the National Park Service that is most capable of carrying out this mission, but instead our own state and people; which is evident in our conscientious management of the other thousands of acres we currently manage and protect. We hope that you will join us in supporting this effort to allow Missouri to serve as a responsible and proud steward of the Ozark National Scenic Riverways.

Thank you for your consideration. I will do my best to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,



**Representative Robert Ross**

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Missouri House of Representatives