

**Questions for the Record to USDA Forest Service**  
**Committee on Natural Resources Subcommittee on Federal Lands**  
**Legislative Hearing**  
**1324 Longworth House Office Building**  
**March 28, 2023**

**Questions from Rep. Westerman** for Mr. Chris French, Deputy Chief for the National Forest System, U.S. Forest Service, Washington, DC

1. I am concerned about the trend of closing campsites across the Ouachita National Forest.
  - a. How many campgrounds and campsites are currently open in the Ouachita National Forest?

**Answer:** In the Ouachita National Forest, the Forest Service operates and maintains 14 campgrounds with 327 campsites, as shown below:

1. Bard Springs – 6 campsites (closed due to May 2020 storm damage)
2. Bear Creek Equestrian Camp – 5 campsites
3. Billy Creek (OK) – 12 campsites
4. Cedar Lake (OK) – 100 campsites
5. Charlton – 48 campsites
6. Crystal – 10 campsites
7. Fourche Mountain – 5 campsites
8. Hickory Nut Mountain – 7 campsites
9. Jack Creek – 5 campsites
10. Lake Sylvia – 23 campsites (operated and maintained by Arkansas State Parks)
11. Little Pines – 10 campsites
12. Shady Lake – 62 campsites
13. South Fourche – 6 campsites
14. Winding Stair (OK) – 28 campsites

In addition to dispersed camping opportunities throughout the Forest, there are over 4,000 campsites operated and maintained by concessioners or state or other federal agencies, including the National Park Service, Arkansas State Parks, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

- b. How does this compare to campgrounds and campsites open on January 1, 2010?

**Answer:** On January 1, 2010, the Forest Service operated and maintained 22 campgrounds with 453 campsites in the Ouachita National Forest, as shown below:

1. Albert Pike – 46 campsites
2. Bard Springs – 9 campsites

3. Big Brushy – 10 campsites
4. Billy Creek (OK) – 12 campsites
5. Cedar Lake (OK) – 111 campsites
6. Charlton – 57 campsites
7. Crystal – 10 campsites
8. Dragover – 7 campsites
9. Fulton Branch – 7 campsites
10. Fourche Mountain – 5 campsites
11. Hickory Nut Mountain – 7 campsites
12. Jack Creek – 5 campsites
13. Knoppers Ford – 8 campsites
14. Lake Sylvia – 28 campsites
15. Little Pines – 10 campsites
16. River Bluff – 7 campsites
17. Rocky Shoals – 5 campsites
18. Shady Lake – 68 campsites
19. Shirley Creek – 7 campsites
20. South Fourche – 6 campsites
21. Winding Stair (OK) – 28 campsites

- c. Does the Forest Service have plans to close or open any campgrounds or campsites in the Ouachita National Forest?

**Answer:** The Forest Service has no plans to open or close any campgrounds or campsites in the Ouachita National Forest. The Forest Service is making investments in existing campgrounds utilizing Great American Outdoor Act funding.

2. This Committee has heard from people across this country about the closure of amenities on National Forest System Land.
  - a. For National Forest System lands, please provide the number of closures since 2000 for campsites, campgrounds, and day use areas. Please provide the number of closures of miles of trails, roads, and routes that served a recreational purpose, such as horseback riding, hiking, or motorized vehicle activities, since 2000 across Forest System lands.

**Answer:** Since 2005, there has been a net gain of managed recreation sites generally in the Forest Service’s national recreation program, with an increase from 18,000 to just over 21,000 sites. In 2005, there were 4,735 campgrounds. In 2023, there are 4,738.

The total net gain of recreation sites reflects disposal as well as addition or replacement of sites. Since 2000, the Forest Service has disposed of approximately 700 recreation sites, roughly 200 of which were campgrounds, and closed approximately 500 recreation sites, including about 150 campgrounds. Sites may be temporarily closed or permanently closed and awaiting disposal. Closures are based

on site-specific concerns, in accordance with national policy. Reasons for temporary closure include fire, flood, or wind damage (either to the site or to the access road), construction work, special events, and public health and safety concerns such as hazard trees or a contaminated water system. Reasons for permanent closure include failure to meet user preferences, lack of social, economic, or environmental sustainability, or inability to operate and maintain a site in accordance with the core national quality standards. For example, a site could be closed permanently because of public safety concerns that cannot be mitigated, such as a known high risk of flooding.

The Forest Service manages its road and trail system to balance several responsibilities: providing public access, protecting natural and cultural resources, addressing public safety of all users, and minimizing conflicts among uses. With over 370,000 miles of National Forest System roads and over 159,000 miles of National Forest System trails, the Forest Service provides a variety of opportunities for access to National Forest System lands. Closures of roads and trails are implemented by local line officers and are not currently tracked nationally. As required by the Modernizing Access to our Public Land Act, the Forest Service is working on posting on its website geographic information system data with respect to the classes of motor vehicles and over-snow vehicles and types of recreational uses that are allowed on National Forest System roads and National Forest System trails.

**Questions from Rep. Tiffany** for Mr. Chris French, Deputy Chief for the National Forest System, U.S. Forest Service, Washington, DC

1. Administrative rules and decisions can make it difficult to recreate outdoors. I have seen this in my district. There have been a number of boat ramp closures in the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest.
  - a. How many have been closed in recent years? Have any reopened and does the Forest Service have plans to reopen closed boat ramps?

**Answer:** While there were campground closures in 2019 in the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest, the boat launches were kept open, and they remain open.

At Sawdust Lake, there were two primitive boat launches. There was an erosion concern with one of the carry-in boat launches, which resulted in two boat launches being combined into one. An adjacent road and boat launch was improved to enhance the public lake access and reduce resource impacts on this small lake.

Increased recreational access is a priority for the Forest Service. Rehabilitation of boat launches in the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest will continue. In 2021, boat launches at Emily Lake and Wabasso Lake were rehabilitated. There are plans to rehabilitate boat launches at Beaver Lake, Cisco Lake, Stock Farm, and Twin Lake with funding from the Great American Outdoors Act. The Picnic Point boat launch on

the Mondeaux Flowage will be rehabilitated with appropriated funds.

- b. Across the National Forest System Land, how many boat ramps have been closed in the last 10 years? Does the Forest Service have plans to reopen these boat ramps?

**Answer:** Nationally, the Forest Service provides a wide variety of boat ramps associated with boating sites, campgrounds, fishing sites, picnic areas, and other types of recreation sites. The Forest Service does not track boat ramps separately from their associated recreation sites. Agency data show that in 2023, there were 1,277 boating sites of various types on National Forest System lands, which represents a significant increase from 949 in 2005.

In recent years, increasing and changing visitation to National Forest System lands has brought increasing and changing impacts on visitor experiences and ecological conditions. Each Forest Service administrative unit implements visitor use management solutions based on local trends, needs, concerns, and opportunities.

- c. What will be done to stop the closure of boat ramps on Forest System Land?

**Answer:** It is not the policy of the Forest Service to close boat ramps unless a local condition such as a safety concern dictates closure. These decisions are made at the local level, not nationally. In some of the western states, for example, boat closures are implemented seasonally; occasionally, the Forest Service bases closures on rising and falling water levels. In extreme drought conditions, a ramp adjacent to a reservoir ceases to be functional when it cannot reach a much lower water level. In some instances, it makes sense to combine nearby access points to reduce operating costs while investing to improve access for the public.

Boating and fishing are a very popular recreational activities on National Forest System lands. The Forest Service operates a variety of boat launches and access points at all levels of development and complexity based on local use patterns, popularity, and user needs. Well-maintained boat launches, regardless of the level of development, are critical for safe access and protection of potentially sensitive water and riparian resources. The agency supports and encourages responsible recreational use of lakes and rivers on National Forest System lands.

- d. How can states partner with the Forest Service to take over management of these boat ramps?

**Answer:** Many Forest Service administrative units have a cooperative agreement, Challenge Cost-Share agreement, special use authorization, or other type of instrument with state and local agencies to build, operate, and maintain boating facilities, especially developed boat launches and docks. The Forest Service

welcomes the opportunity to partner with state and local communities to operate and maintain boat ramps, docks, and water access points.