

**Committee on Natural Resources**  
**Subcommittee on Federal Lands**  
**Legislative Hearing**  
**1324 Longworth House Office Building**  
**January 31, 2024**  
**10:00 AM**

- H.R. 674 (Rep. Newhouse), "*Root and Stem Project Authorization Act of 2023*";
- H.R. 4297 (Rep. Neguse), "*Bolts Ditch Act*";
- H.R. 5443 (Rep. Lee of NV), "*Accelerating Appraisals and Conservation Efforts Act*" or "*AACE Act*";
- H.R. 6994 (Rep. Kim of CA), "*Restoring Our Unopened Trails for Enjoyment and Safety (ROUTES) Act*"; and
- H.R. 7072 (Rep. Tiffany), "*Wabeno Economic Development Act of 2024*".

**Questions from Rep. Westerman** for Mr. Greg Smith, Associate Deputy Chief - National Forest System, U.S. Forest Service, Washington D.C.

- 1. I have heard from various interested stakeholders that there has been a notable delay in processing the National Environmental Policy Act review for the Mount Magazine State Park campground expansion in the Ozark National Forest. This project will expand the state park campground onto U.S. Forest Service land in the Ozark National Forest.**

**Mount Magazine is Arkansas's highest point at 2,753 feet. Mount Magazine State Park is located within the Ozark National Forest and is a destination for outdoor sports, extreme adventures, rock climbing, horseback riding, and more.**

**A categorical exclusion (CE) was applied for in January 2023, and there has been little progress made since that timeframe. I am concerned with how long the review process is taking.**

- a. Will you please provide an update on where the process currently stands?**

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documents associated with establishment of the Mount Magazine State Park in Paris, Arkansas, and its amenities, were prepared under the 1986 version of the Ozark-St. Francis National Forests Land and Resource Management Plan. When these NEPA documents were prepared, some processes, designations, and initiatives that are currently applicable in these areas did not exist.

Proposed projects or changes to existing permits (like the existing permit for Mount Magazine State Park) require reevaluation to ensure compliance with current standards and consistency with the 2005 Land and Resource Management Plan for the Ozark-St. Francis National Forests. Updating the NEPA documents will also involve ensuring compliance with the Endangered Species Act and requirements to protect cultural resources.

To ensure compliance with current laws, employees and volunteers began survey work for the Cameron Bluff campground expansion project proposal in December 2023 with the full expectation that survey work would be completed in January 2024. Various delays, including inclement weather, have stalled survey work and have resulted in an unforeseen extension of the timeline. This project remains a

priority for the Forests. The survey was completed in February 2024, and a report of findings is being developed to prepare for Tribal consultation. Completion of the survey report, and development and commencement of Tribal consultation efforts is expected to take place in spring 2024.

**b. Will you commit to providing the necessary USFS personnel and resources to meet timelines to review this permitting application?**

The proposed Mount Magazine State Park campground expansion is a priority project for the Ozark National Forest and the U.S. Forest Service. We will continue committing the appropriate personnel and resources to complete this project in a timely manner in compliance with applicable law.

**c. Please provide a list of any other special project requests that are currently undergoing a NEPA review within the Ozark National Forest, and the current status of each of those projects.**

The following link is to the Ozark-St. Francis National Forests' Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) webpage: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/sopa/components/reports/sopa-110810-2024-01.html>. The SOPA webpage contains information on all planned projects involving NEPA. The U.S. Forest Service is available to discuss any of these projects if there are any follow-up questions.