

Synopsis of Thomas B. Cox's testimony

In the late 1950s my friend Clark and I would float the current river from below "Round Springs" to "Two Rivers" take out. This was before the National Scenic Riverways was even thought of. People used the rivers in the same way as they are used today. What I have seen is not necessarily an improvement of the land involved in the park area but an actual decay due to neglect of farms and homesteads taken over by the park through Eminent Domain. After the late 1800s through the 1920s clear cutting caused a manmade disaster to the rivers of this area that turned the rivers from sand bottom to gravel bottomed rivers. Since this era, we have seen improvement to the water shed area biosphere. Has this improvement been due to plans like the Blue Way Initiative or the Ozark Nation Scenic Riverways general management plan? I say no and there is no true proof they have. The same improvement would have been seen if the land had been left as private and or National Public Lands with no general plan.

I now live in Van Buren, Missouri and own property that is part of the Current River water shed. My brother also owns a farm in Eminence, Missouri that has 65 acres with 500 yards of Jacks Fork river frontage. Unlike the Park Service as a family we maintain our forest and riverfront properties in a way that promotes a healthy biodiversity.

That being said, I would like to talk about what makes up the economies Carter county and the counties that make up the area that forms Missouri's portion of the "White River" water shed. Physically the Ozark area has a base of fractured limestone that feeds springs from sinkholes located from the Mississippi west to Jefferson City, covering a good third of our state. These springs make up the feed water of the "Jacks Fork", "Current" and "Eleven Point" Rivers. The live stock industry of this area relies heavily on the spring fed streams and rivers for a live stock water source. Without this water, live stock farming would cease to exist. The river bottom areas form a large part of the pastures and hay fields for these local farms. These are the areas that have the streams and rivers running through them.

The hilly, almost mountainous, land, made up of rock bluffs and red clay soil is the home of what one would almost call a hardwood jungle. This forest fuels the lumber industry for these counties. The lumber industry, which now manages forests, makes up a second part of this economy.

The third part is tourism that has many faces in the Ozarks.

1. The most obvious is the use of the rivers for recreation and fishing. There are many ways of enjoying the rivers which include boating and floating. The powered boats were on these rivers before floating became a fad.
2. Horseback riding allows riders to enjoy our beautiful Ozarks.
3. ATV and UTV riding has become an important part of the tourist economy.
4. Also in a very small way bicycling and hiking are also parts of the equation.

These counties have delicate economies that rely heavily on all three of these economic factures. Even a small change to the existing rules and regulations, that the people who live in these counties have to live with, will cause an economic tipping point to be reached. Financially the Federal Government, who pay no property taxes, moves in and establishes more draconian rules and regulations that do not enhance the biosphere of this environment but only placates the environmental activist, that as a rule know nothing about our area. Please stop hiding behind artfully worded Blue Way plans, "Scenic Riverways General Management Plan", "Clean Stream Acts", "Wilderness Area" plans, and historical land acts. We have luckily been able to stop some and dread the others. We want you to ask us, the residents of the affected area, what is right for our land.

As an ending, I want talk about how a plan action can have terrible unintended results. Many years ago the "Park Service", "Forrest Service", "Missouri Conservation Department" and "The Nature Conservancy" got together and decided they did not like any vehicles using the fire trail in the forest areas under their jurisdiction. When asked why they were cabling off these fire trails the response was that they were protecting endangered species. When I asked the Park Service project manager what endangered species they were protecting I was informed that they would not know until after a ten year study was done. Ten years has come and gone but the cables are still in place. Three years ago a pine section of the forest caught fire. The local fire department arrived cut the cable across the fire trail but were only able to get their trucks a few yards up the trails. You see in the ten years of no use the trees had grown too large to drive over. Three homes burned to the ground that night and the Van Buren Volunteer fire truck almost was trapped due to the lack of the fire break and access the cleared fire trails afforded. Now the "Nature Conservancy" welcomes us to ride our ATVs and UTVs on their trails and ask only that we take out more trash then we bring in. This is not new but has been in place and working for years. Why can't the "Department of the Interior" do the same! It is our tax dollars after all!