

Jerry King
House Natural Resources Committee Testimony

Thank you to Chairman McClintock and other members of the subcommittee for inviting me to testify today. My name is Jerry King and I live in Shannon County, Missouri.

I am here to testify today on behalf of Voice of the Ozarks, an organization which is designed to protect the rights of the people to access, to use, and to be involved in the management of public lands. This organization seeks to protect the people's rights to make a living from public lands and to protect the rights to use our beautiful resources.

Our organization was founded in October of 2007 after noticing the Park Service and other state and federal agencies were trying to close the roads that locals and tourists alike use for enjoyment in and around the Ozark National Scenic Riverways. After further research, we found that there have been many efforts to limit the local use of the Current and Jacks Fork Rivers for many years now. The belief this riverway system should be protected is not at odds with our views, however, we firmly believe that the people should be able to see, touch, feel, experience, and be a part of nature. We are nature.

Therefore, in order to protect the rights to hunt, to fish, to boat, to ride horseback, to canoe, to camp, to gig fish, to truly experience nature at its best on a personal basis, we formed Voice of the Ozarks. It is also our duty to stick together and to protect all the rights to access and use the public lands. We support the timber and the tourism industries, for this is how we are able to remain in this area and continue to enjoy these beautiful natural resources. The people have a right to live here just like people have a right to live anywhere in the United States of America, the rights for the pursuits of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are cited in our nation's founding documents and this is what we are here to protect.

That is why we were shocked in the January 9, press release from the Department of Interior about a "community-drive" effort to promote a 21st century conservation and recreation agenda. However, along with this announcement was the designation of the White River watershed as a National Blueway. What was shocking is the fact that not one community organization, like Voice of the Ozarks, was asked for input. There were no town halls. No business owner, land owner, resident or recreator was asked for input. How then was this "community-driven"?

The fact that no community stakeholders were sought for input. No country commissioners. Not even our elected officials in Congress. This was a severe overreach by a government agency against many communities who value liberty and freedom. I am thankful that the Interior Department, at the request of our elected officials and the voice of the many communities affected, rescinded the designation. While the government has withdrawn this Blueway initiative we are quite certain that they will regroup and devise a plan by a different name to accomplish their hidden agenda! It is our intent to band together with other groups in Missouri and Arkansas to oppose the continued attacks on our property rights and personal freedoms.

I too am also thankful that the Chairman and the Natural Resources Committee have taken up the mantle in Washington in fighting government land and water grabs. American business owners, land owners and recreators should never have to live in fear that their government will on a whim grab their land. We need stronger protections in the law from this abuse. We need better reform of the regulations to prevent this overreach. We need an approach to public lands that represents the founding principles of our great country. Principles of freedom and liberty.

Again I am thankful for the opportunity to testify today and I look forward to your questions.