

# #10 Ozark National Scenic Riverways

MISSOURI

**THREAT: OVERUSE AND POOR MANAGEMENT**

**AT RISK: CLEAN WATER AND RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES**

PHOTO: WAYNE GOODE

## Summary

The Ozark National Scenic Riverways feature clear water flowing from abundant springs and provide some of the Midwest's best river recreation to 1.3 million visitors each year. However, poor management has led to motor vehicles and horses approaching and entering the river wherever they can, destroying vegetation, and causing severe erosion and pollution. Unless the National Park Service gives the Riverways the protections afforded to the country's other national parks, the area's clean water and rare remote experience will be lost.

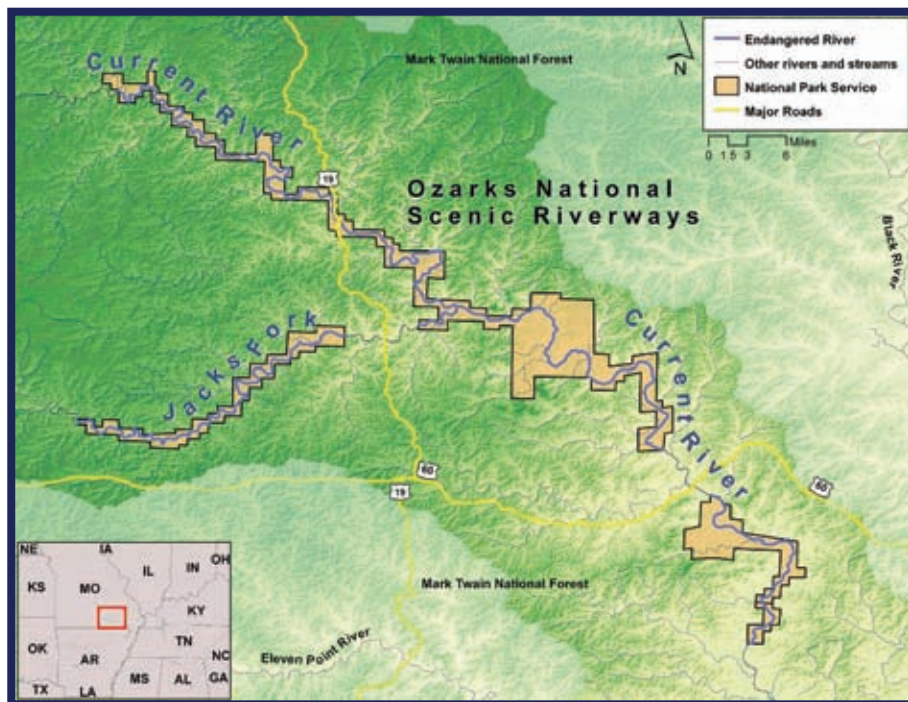
## The River

The sparkling clear, bluff-lined Current and Jacks Fork make up the Ozark National Scenic Riverways, the region's premier rivers for paddling, fishing, and other recreation. These streams annually attract more than 1.3 million visitors and are a mainstay of the region's economy.

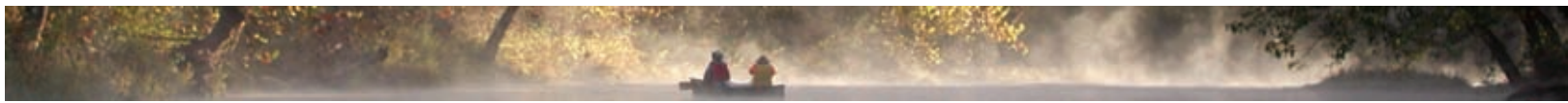
The lands surrounding the Riverways include a world-class spring system that is unparalleled in North America, with more than 350 springs (including the National Park Service's largest spring) and 338 recorded caves. The area is an international center for biodiversity, with more than 200 species found nowhere else in the world; four federally listed endangered species, over 100 state-listed species of conservation concern, and the largest Important Bird Area in Missouri. The 134 miles of the Riverways also feature archaeological sites and historic structures reflecting 12,000 years of human habitation.

## The Threat

The principal threat to the Riverways is inadequate management that is harming the health of the rivers and the unique, remote experiences they offer. National Park Service managers have allowed overdevelopment, proliferation of roads and motorized vehicles, scenic easement violations, and overcrowding. The Riverways are in danger of being loved to death.



2011 America's Most Endangered Rivers™  
www.americanrivers.org  
1101 14<sup>th</sup> Street NW, Suite 1400, Washington, DC 20005  
(202) 347-7550



In 1984, there were 13 developed river access points and public campgrounds. Today, there are more than 130 vehicular river access areas, many characterized by a maze of unmanaged dirt roads that send untold amounts of sediment into the river. Virtually all gravel bars (used for canoe and boat camping) are subject to invasion by all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) and other vehicles. The vehicles destroy vegetation, and contribute to severe erosion and harm water quality. NPS has not prepared an Environmental Impact Statement on the problem.



Horse use is uncontrolled in the Riverways. There are four designated horse trails totaling 23 miles. However, National Park management allows equestrian use on any unpaved roads and trails, and there are now more than 250 miles of horse trails and 80 places where horses cross the rivers in the park, which harm water quality with erosion and manure. One commercial operator alone offers over 3,000 stalls for horses on private land along the lower Jacks Fork. Furthermore, an 8-mile reach of the river was included on Missouri's list of impaired waters in 1998 due to fecal coliform pollution.

### **What Must Be Done**

If future generations are to enjoy the clean water and recreation opportunities offered by the Riverways, the National Park Service must do a better job balancing access and the range of recreation activities with the need to safeguard river health. NPS plans to complete several "capacity" studies prior to issuing a draft General Management Plan (GMP) for public comment in 2011. Prior to issuing the draft GMP, the NPS must complete an updated study of roads, motorized intrusion at the river, primitive camps, and horse trails, with a full Environmental Impact Statement. Top NPS officials must get involved with this Plan to ensure that NPS policies and standards are upheld. With the Obama Administration promoting its America's Great Outdoors initiative to boost conservation and recreation nationwide, the Ozark National Scenic Riverways is the perfect place for the administration to put its words into action.

### **For More Information:**

American Rivers, Fay Augustyn, (202) 347-7550, [faugustyn@americanrivers.org](mailto:faugustyn@americanrivers.org)

Friends of Ozark Riverways, Rindy O'Brien, (202) 247-5290, [rindyob@mac.com](mailto:rindyob@mac.com)

Missouri Coalition for the Environment, Kathleen Logan Smith, (314) 727-0600, [klogansmith@moenviron.org](mailto:klogansmith@moenviron.org)

Missouri Parks Association, Susan Flader, (573) 442-1058, [fladers@missouri.edu](mailto:fladers@missouri.edu)

PHOTO: ABHISHEK CHINCHALKAR

