

SMMBCH MEETS With OZARK NATIONAL SCENIC RIVERWAYS

A trip to Ozark National Scenic Riverways (ONSR) headquarters in Van Buren to meet with Superintendent Reed Detring and Deputy Russ Runge has brought SMMBCH another step forward in planning stages for the long distance trail being planned for Missouri horsemen. (See article on L-A-D Roger Pryor Backcountry)

Board Chair Russell Martin, Tammie Martin, Allison Schottenhaml (Public Lands Chair), Ed and Marsha Copeland made the trip December 23rd. The meeting's topic was to discuss the needed steps to be able to continue on ONSR property, at the end of the Roger Pryor Backcountry, to the national park's southern boundary. The overall scope is for the trail to continue south eventually reaching National Forest land where horse travel is already accepted and in place.

Superintendent Detring was very positive toward horse trails and use within the Park and mentioned several times that horseback riding is an accepted and encouraged use; however, the Park is still in the General Management Plan (GMP) stages and no final commitments can be made until the GMP process is completed. Superintendent Detring was confident that the GMP is on the "fast track" due to support from the Parks regional and national offices. For the changes to be made for horse use to continue on the Ozark Trail (OT) through the Park, the Park by law will have to go through the NEPA process. This is where we as an organization can help.

Very soon, this late winter or early spring, the comment period will again open for our comments. This is our opportunity to influence decisions. We as an organization must comment as to what we would like to see happen for the continuing trail. Not only must SMMBCH as an organization formally comment, but you as individuals must comment to back up your organization. Remember we must make our wishes known; we know there are other opinions out there that will comment against horse use.

Superintendent Detring expressed strongly that they want our participation and horse use within the Park. They are planning for designated horse trails to increase in miles and improved equestrian horse staging areas (parking lots, etc.) But, there is a trade-off for the improvements that will be permanent and guarantee that horse use will be available for at least the next twenty years when a new GMP will take place. Many social trails now exist that will be closed. A social trail is one that riders have made and go to the same location where an acceptable trail already goes. We must be prepared for some trails to close which will not be popular with many riders. We must be able to look at the big picture and do what will not only keep our trails open permanently but be enough trails to not subject a designated trail to deteriorate due to over use. This will be a balancing act not only for the Park but for us also. The positive thing coming out of the meeting is the Park asking that you, as SMMBCH, to partnership with them to make the decisions that can meet our needs and also the mandate the Park faces in resource protection.

This is an ongoing plan and projection. Keep tuned to your website and look for updates in you newsletters. All members need to be aware and participate during the comments periods so our objective of a long distance trail for Missouri horseback riders will come about. This would be, again, a first for Missouri and surrounding states.