



Missouri Wilderness Coalition

Newsletter #9

Spring 2008

Late Breaking Alert! Smith Creek Wilderness Threatened By Forest Service Project

As this newsletter is being prepared, MWC has become aware of a new Forest Service Proposal termed the "Southwest Project" on the Cedar Creek District, that would have a devastating impact on the most important public resources of the Smith Creek Wilderness - it's wild and undeveloped condition.



Please see for yourself at: [MTNF Southwest Project](#) and note that public comments must be sent in by May 16. This plan is a direct assault on the wilderness values of Smith Creek, and contains not even a reference to the proposal for the area's designation as a protected Wilderness Area. We must respond in strength and have the damaging aspects of this ill-advised project laid to the side. We will provide more information very soon when we have had a chance to study it more carefully, but it is obvious it is a bad project, and that we will only find a stable solution when Smith Creek and all the other six areas in the MWC proposal are designated as official Wilderness. Without this guidance the Forest Service clearly is not prepared to properly protect these Missouri treasures.



Staying Focused

Spring is one of the favorite times of the year for people to get out and enjoy Missouri's wildlands. We must also, somehow, focus on the task at hand - the work it takes to preserve these lands is perhaps less exciting than actually being out there watching everything come alive. As volunteers, we do not have unlimited time, and as a true coalition, we must define our scope. With this newsletter, we can remind ourselves that our immediate focus is on a Wilderness Bill that will bring our seven identified areas into the National Wilderness system. To get this Bill we need support, and to get support we need to continue to engage the public, educating them and inspiring them.

Missouri Wilderness In the News

The Missouri Wilderness proposal continues to make news around the state. We've picked a few here to show the trends.

As announced last newsletter, Missouri Republicans for Environmental Protection (MO REP) has endorsed the proposal, and has set to work on getting the word out. Roy Gerdel and some other MO REP folks took the time to get the Wilderness Proposal some attention in a recent [Kirkwood Times](#) article. You can read the full article [here](#).

Missouri Coalition for the Environment's (MCE) Winter 2008 newsletter had a good article about the Proposal written by MCE staffer Dan Sherburne, and a terrific interview with Smith Creek Wilderness neighbor Carrie Yonley. Carrie has been a key player in the the campaign to save Smith Creek. The MCE newsletter containing both articles is available [here](#). Carrie's interview is on page 8 and Dan's article in on page 9.

Finally, Forest Magazine, a publication of Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics, had a friendly article about the proposal and the Forest Service's take on it entitled: "Is Missouri Wild Enough For Wilderness?". We can't provide a link to the article itself, but the website is [here](#). The article had nice color photos from Lower Rock Creek (though one is inaccurately credited), and some notable lines from Mark Twain National Forest (MTNF) employees about the seven areas, including: "The agency claims that the new plan maintains the status quo..."; and "These are managed very close to how wildernesses are managed." This is clearly not the case, as we have seen on multiple occasions already, including changing the management prescription in part of Lower Rock Creek to allow motorized use. Such a prescription does not maintain the status quo, nor does it maintain wilderness.

New Endorsements

Since our last newsletter, one new organization has endorsed the proposal, bringing our total number now to 27, as per [this linked list](#). Thanks to the efforts of Larry Ruff, we are very happy to say "welcome aboard" to the **Greenway Network!**

We'd also like to thank Terry Whaley, Terry's friends, and Missouri Coalition for the Environment for financial contributions made since the last newsletter.

Missouri Wilderness Outreach

On a Saturday in February, Scott Merritt was down in Nixa, Missouri talking Wilderness at the Annual Nixa Outdoor Swap Meet. Scott Parson contacted MWC about setting up a table at this event, and it was a great success. A lot of people stopped by to talk about wilderness, ask questions, pick up papers and handouts, and find out what the Missouri proposal is all about. It was especially satisfying to talk directly with people who live around and use some of the areas (specifically Swan Creek), and clarify some misconceptions that surround the proposal. A number of folks signed up for the MWC mailing list, and most showed great enthusiasm for seeing the areas protected. Many thanks to Scott Parson for giving MWC this opportunity!



In February John Karel and Greg Iffrig attended the annual meeting of the Conservation Federation of Missouri at Lake of the Ozarks. Both are members of that group, and reported continued strong support for the Wilderness proposal from Federation staff, board, and rank and file. The Federation has been a key supporter of wilderness and will play a critical role in this campaign.

Frank Wentz of the **Missouri Whitewater Association** (MWA) really hit the campaign trail in March. At the MWA meeting, with his encouragement, fifty members filled out post cards to send to the MO Congressional delegation in support of the proposal. Frank reported that interest was high, and many of the MWA members wrote more than just a generic response.

Shortly after that, Frank set up a table at the annual Whitewater Races down at Silver Mines, which is not only a beautiful area in and of itself, but is an ideal entry point into the northernmost reaches of the Lower Rock Creek wilderness. Frank and his wife fielded questions and handed out a lot of the Wilderness proposal tabloids and fact sheets. And the event wasn't limited just to people from the southeast part of the state: "I also had several very positive responses from persons from Columbia who love Smith Creek. One beamed when he saw it right there on the state map in the paper." Great job Frank!

Scott Merritt taped an interview with the St. Louis cable television show "Green Time" in

early April. Look for the show to be on air in June or July. The show was done as part of an effort to share information about Wilderness designation efforts for 9 million acres of Utah land. Really makes you realize just how modest our Missouri proposal is, at less than 50,000 acres!

Also in April, Jim Scheff gave a Missouri Wilderness presentation at Southern Illinois University in Edwardsville. Our neighbors on the east side are big users of Missouri's wilderness areas, so this was a great chance to educate some of them about the Proposal.

Missouri Wilderness Summit - September

Please make note of this! Planning is underway for a statewide Wilderness Summit to be held in September, probably on the 13th. Volunteers have already started on the effort, and by next newsletter we'll have more details pinned down. But tentatively mark your calendars now, and keep your eyes and ears open - you aren't going to want to miss this one!

Lower Rock Creek Prescribed Burn and ATV Use

Lower Rock Creek (LRC) is for many the crowning jewel of the Wilderness Proposal, and yet seems to be the most threatened. It was a change in MTNF's management prescription for LRC that really brought to the public's attention the need to campaign for federal Wilderness designation for all seven "Sensitive Areas".



Some of us have been following the issues surrounding a prescribed burn project in the western half of the area. Back in February, Jim Scheff and Jim Bensman visited with Forest Service personnel at the project site to get an on-the-ground view of the project activities. Jim and Jim credited the Forest Service personnel for using a relatively light touch with their bulldozers. There is no news on a burn date(s) yet, but we'll look to Jim and Jim to keep us posted.

As reported already, and shared with the MWC mailing list, an MWC member had a firsthand encounter with rampant ATV destruction in LRC on a snowy day in February. MWC sent a letter to MTNF acting Supervisor Paul Strong about the incident, and also had a follow-up phone call with him. The Forest Service acknowledged the problem, and Mr. Strong agreed to bring this to the attention of MTNF law enforcement. Since then, MTNF has reported to Jim Scheff that they did send officers out two weekends in a row but made no arrests. Jim and some other people are attempting to meet with MTNF to see what else can be done to stop this illegal use.

Until next time....

Have a great spring, and enjoy all this water we're getting. All the little headwater streams have been flowing gloriously for weeks now. Buds are popping out, and turkey season is upon us. Missouri's wilderness areas hold infinite possibilities for discovery, study, and just pure enjoyment. Ensuring they stay that way for a long time is a challenge, but we are all doing our part to see this through. Please take satisfaction in the efforts you have made so far, and keep up the good work!

Missouri Wilderness Coalition

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Photos: Along the North Fork River in Devils Backbones Wilderness (banner); bluff view from Smith Creek Proposed Wilderness; azalea in Lower Rock Creek Proposed Wilderness; MWC Table at Nixa Outdoor Swap Meet; prescribed burn area on Kelley Mountain in the Lower Rock Creek Proposed Wilderness.