



Visitors swim near Skull Rock at Buffalo Point.

August 16, 2024

Greetings from the Planning Team

The National Park Service (NPS) is pleased to announce the development of a river management plan to guide the future of Buffalo National River. The river management plan will provide a framework and guidance for future management of the river. We invite you to participate in the development of this plan now and in the months to come. This newsletter provides general background about this important planning effort and guidance on how you can provide input for consideration in developing this plan. We look forward to hearing from you.

Angela Boyers, Superintendent

Purpose of the Park

The purpose of Buffalo National River is to preserve a free-flowing river and to conserve and interpret the combination of natural, scenic, cultural, and scientific features characterized by deep valleys, towering bluffs, wilderness, and landscapes of the Ozark Mountains.

Buffalo National River was established as a national park system unit on March 1, 1972, to protect one of the last remaining free-flowing rivers in the continental United States and to conserve the unique nature of the Ozark Plateau. The park plays a valuable role in promoting the enjoyment of recreational opportunities, inspiring appreciation for nature, and educating the public about the need to protect the natural and cultural resources of Buffalo National River.

The park's 94,293 acres are divided into three management districts—the upper, middle, and lower districts. In 2022, an estimated 1.3 million people visited Buffalo National River. In addition to water-based activities with multiple launch points along the river, the park offers more than 100 miles of hiking trails and designated trails for horseback riding. Designated wilderness represents over one-third of the park's total acreage.

NPS Role in River Management

The purpose of the river management plan is to ensure the protection of the river's free-flowing character, natural and cultural resources, and wilderness and backcountry values. This planning effort will revisit the 1983 river use plan and provide a management framework for future decisions that will support the protection of the resources while providing a range of river-based recreational opportunities and visitor experiences focused on the river corridor and associated access infrastructure. Sharing your feedback on your river management interests, concerns, and issues is integral to this planning effort.

The purpose of this newsletter is to share awareness of this planning effort and to invite the public and stakeholders to submit input that will be considered in the development of this plan. This is the first of three opportunities to provide input into this planning process.

Key Issues Facing Buffalo National River

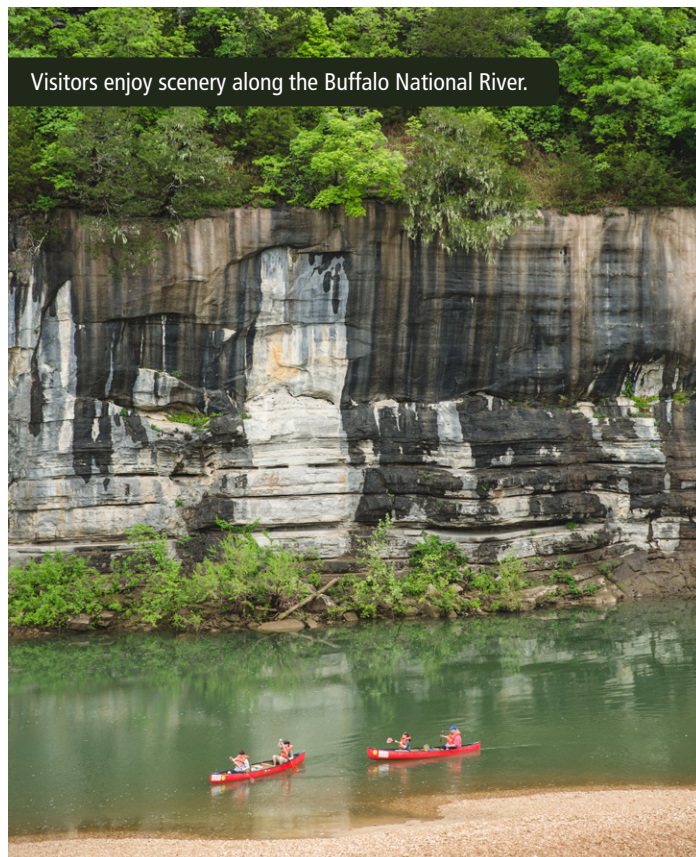
The NPS planning team has preliminarily identified several key issues that will be addressed during this planning process. These issues are expected to continue and intensify if no action is taken.

River Resource Impacts and River Health

Heavy use at launch sites, increased demand for access to water-related activities, changes in precipitation and water temperature due to climate change, agricultural practices, and runoff are impacting river resources and health. Some impacts include improperly disposed trash and human waste, soil compaction and erosion, increased vegetation trampling, cultural resource impacts, degraded water quality, increased run-off and sedimentation, and increased algal blooms.

Diminished Visitor Experience Attributable to Crowding and Safety Concerns

Increased interest in river recreation at Buffalo National River is reflected in increasing visitation levels. Increased visitation leads to challenges with crowding at primary access sites, destination points, and along the river. Wait times at launch sites and safety challenges



Visitors enjoy scenery along the Buffalo National River.

on the water are affecting the visitor experience. The plan will evaluate management strategies to maintain meaningful and enjoyable visitor experiences consistent with desired conditions for resources and visitor experiences.

River Access and Associated Infrastructure

Key facilities and infrastructure related to river use and management need to be evaluated for long-term sustainability and feasibility. Rightsizing and right locating the infrastructure would assist in better management of park resources, support for visitor use, and park operations. In addition, informal access locations need to be addressed to minimize erosion, vegetative loss, and visitor-created trails.

National River Significance and Impacts on Wilderness Character

Buffalo National River has areas of designated wilderness and is required to protect the free-flowing condition, scenery, and values for which the river was originally designated. River management and use need to be consistent with these designations.



You're Invited to Participate

We are asking you to share your thoughts and ideas on the development of the Buffalo National River – River Management Plan. Your input is very important for guiding the planning process and decisions. Please take time to share your thoughts with us.

This review is open for a 30-day comment period, closing on September 15, 2024. While all comments are welcome and appreciated, answering the following questions will best contribute to helping shape the future of the management of Buffalo National River.

Questions

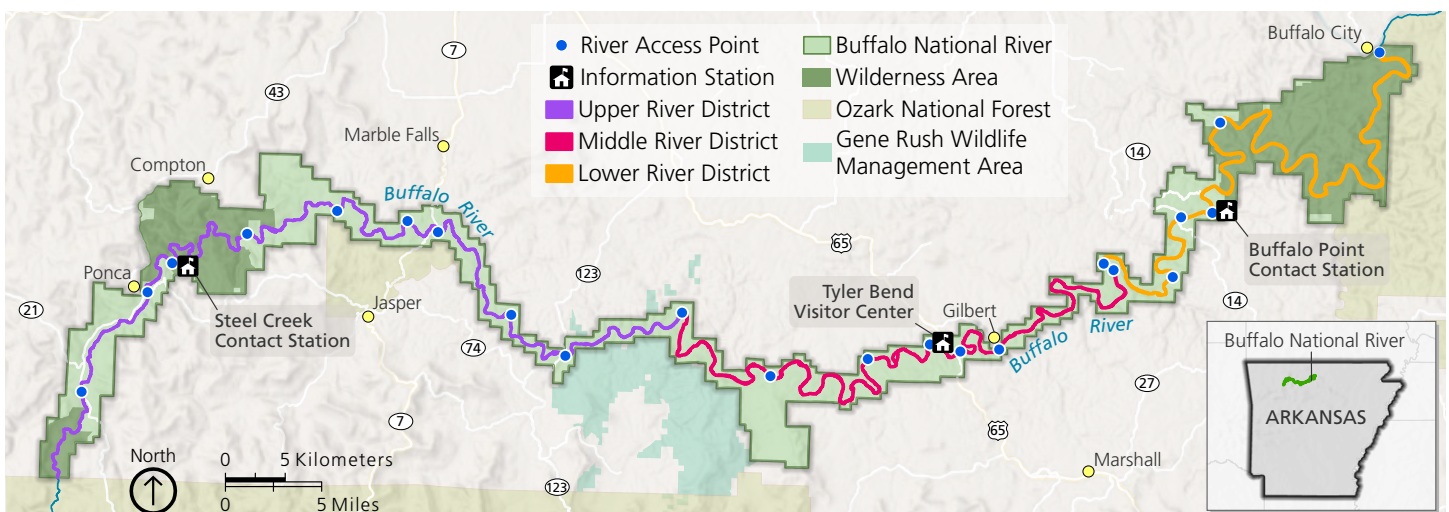
Please be as specific as possible in your responses to the following questions:

1. How do you experience the Buffalo National River? What makes the Buffalo National River special to you and why?
2. Please provide input on the Key Issues described above. What other challenges do you recommend the planning team consider that most interfere with your desired park experience as it relates to river activities and access? What is the park doing well to manage these issues that you would like to see continue?
3. What experiences do you want future river users to have when visiting the Buffalo National River?
4. Please share any additional comments or suggestions.

How to Comment

Write to the address on this newsletter and/or comment through the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment website at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/BUFFrmp>.

NOTE: Comments will not be accepted by fax or any method other than those specified above. Please also note that your entire comment—including personal identifying information such as your address, phone number, and email address—may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so. Comments submitted by individuals or organizations on behalf of other individuals or organizations will not be accepted.



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
BUFFALO NATIONAL RIVER
402 N. WALNUT STREET, SUITE 13
HARRISON, AR 72601

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For more information, please visit
<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/BUFFrmp>.



Buffalo National River is in the early stages of developing a river management plan. The National Park Service is seeking YOUR input to help inform the planning process. Other upcoming opportunities to comment on the development of the plan are listed in the planning schedule below. Scan the QR code to visit the project web page.

Step	Planning Process
August 16 to September 15, 2024	Opportunity for public input
Anticipated Winter 2024/25	Developing draft plan
Anticipated Spring/Summer 2025	Public meeting on plan progress and opportunity for public input
Anticipated Fall 2025	Developing draft plan
Anticipated Winter 2025/26	Public meetings on draft plan and opportunity for public input
Summer 2026	Estimated plan completion

Buffalo National River is an International Dark Sky Park.