

Lake Ouachita Citizen Focus Committee



LOCFC

1201 Blakely Dam Road
Royal, AR 71968

Shalonda Guy, District Ranger
1523 Hwy 270 E
Mt. Ida, AR 71957

August 12, 2016

District Ranger:

We are in receipt of your scoping letter for the Gap Creek Project. We appreciate the opportunity to provide public input on this proposed resource management project. Our committee has carefully reviewed the map of the proposed management activities and the nine “Need for Action” proposals.

Our committee, The Lake Ouachita Citizens Focus Committee, was organized in 2001. It is federally chartered support organization to the US Corps of Engineers under the provisions of the Federal Recreational Lakes Act of 2000. It has a long vested interested in the lands surrounding Lake Ouachita and the LOViT Trail along its southern shoreline.

Our Trails Subcommittee, the Traildog Volunteers, is the group that led to the formation of the Denby Bay Coalition. This eleven-member coalition that includes the US Forest Service and the US Corps of Engineers was responsible for the construction of the forty-five-mile-long Lake Ouachita Vista Trail (LOViT).

The Traildogs have received numerous awards and recognition, including awards and recognition from the US Forest Service, The Corps of Engineers, and the Arkansas Wildlife Federation, as well as from the Governor’s Arkansas Park’s & Tourism Commission Volunteer Organization of the Year Award.

This resource management project appears to again negatively impact both the physical and aesthetic features of this popular trail. We are in support of the need for general forest management and support those operations except when they negatively affect the LOViT.

Over the past twelve years the popularity and recognition of the trail has steadily risen, and in 2014, the LOViT received the coveted designation of being declared an “EPIC Trail” by the International Mountain Biking Association.

Due to three previous Forest Service resource management operations and several damaging storms, the critical canopy cover of the trail has been marginalized. This marginalization has resulted in areas of the trail being inundated with weed growth, rendering it unusable for long periods of time each year.

The Coalition's investment of over a million dollars in grants and donations, along with thousands of hours of volunteer and US Forest Service effort, has resulted in a recreational asset that brings significant new tax dollars to two counties and new revenue to local businesses.

We would appreciate an assurance that the planned harvest sections meet the tenants of the 1982 Joint Management Agreement between the US Corps of Engineers and the US Forest Service that states, if it can be seen from any point on the lake all, cutting is prohibited, except "Shade Tree Thinning" or for migration of "Southern pine Bark Beetle Infestation.

We also appreciate the consideration of establishing a significant protective zone along the entire length of the trail that would preclude the cutting of any trees in this zone along the entire forty-five length of the trail.

Our committee would greatly appreciate your consideration of our concerns of maintaining the canopy and beautiful vistas of this trail to support the economic and recreational impact on the two-county area through which the LOViT traverses.

Dan Watson, Chairman
Lake Ouachita Citizen's Focus Committee