

Buffalo River Watershed-Based Management Plan: Arkansas Natural Resources Commission Issues Draft



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The Arkansas Natural Resources Commission (“ANRC”) issued a 622-page draft document titled: Buffalo River Watershed-Based Management Plan (“Management Plan”)

The Management Plan was prepared by FTN Associates, Ltd. for ANRC.

The development of the Management Plan was one of the tasks directed by Governor Asa Hutchinson in forming The Beautiful Buffalo River Action Committee (“Committee”). The stated purpose of the Committee was to establish an Arkansas-led approach to identify and address potential issues of concern in the Buffalo River watershed (a National River). One of those tasks included the development of a non-regulatory, watershed-based management plan.

ANRC received funding from a United States Environmental Protection Agency Multi-Purpose grant to establish a Management Plan.

Members of the Committee included:

- Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality
- Arkansas Department of Health
- Arkansas Agriculture Department
- Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism
- ANRC

The Committee had several meetings in which various stakeholders attended and provided input. The fact that a tributary of the Buffalo River is not achieving state water quality standards for TDS was addressed. In addition, stakeholders are stated to have identified various pollutants of concern and possible sources.

The Management Plan makes the following recommendations for monitoring in the Buffalo River watershed:

- Support existing monitoring and enhance those programs.
- Add total suspended solids as a constituent for analysis in the water quality samples already being collected.
- Add a routine water quality monitoring station at the county road downstream of Dogpatch Springs so that loading from Dogpatch Springs can be assessed.
- Support the Buffalo National River and ADEQ in developing an algae monitoring program to assess algal species and densities in the Buffalo River and its tributaries.
- Develop a trash index and implement a trash monitoring program for tributaries.

In addition, studies are proposed for six recommended subwatersheds, which include:

- Initiate microbial source tracking for *E. coli* using quantitative polymerase chain reaction and host-specific markers.
- Support the Buffalo National River program in its continuous monitoring of dissolved oxygen and evaluation of relationships with nutrient loading in the Buffalo River and its tributaries.
- Conduct analysis of LiDAR data for recommended subwatersheds, starting with Calf Creek, to assess streambank erosion.

As to recommendations for Awareness, Outreach and Education Programs, the following are recommended:

- Support existing Buffalo National River awareness, outreach and education programs,
- Support existing education programs of the Buffalo National River and its partners,
- Support existing education and outreach programs of other organizations active in the Buffalo River watershed
- Initiate outreach program focused on proper maintenance of onsite wastewater treatment systems,
- Quantify ecosystem services in recommended subwatersheds using both market and non-market valuation approaches for better understanding and appreciation of the value of these services and quality of life in the Buffalo River watershed, and
- Regular reporting of trash index results.

Finally, the Management Plan proposes two sets of teams to “help implement the recommended practices and activities”:

- Watershed Implementation Team(s) for each recommended subwatershed to champion implementing recommended practices & activities, monitor progress, and adapt to changing conditions.
- Stream Team(s) to help monitor water quality and promote streambank restoration/stabilization, as well as encourage wildlife habitat initiatives and alternative sources of revenue.

In announcing the draft Management Plan ANRC notes:

The draft Plan will be available for stakeholder review until January 15, 2018, and subsequently submitted to EPA for acceptance. EPA “accepts” the plan as oppose to “approving” it because there are no proposed mandatory regulations in this plan. Following EPA acceptance, the watershed management plan will be available to guide implementation of management practices and activities within the Buffalo River watershed. Please keep in mind that this is not a “formal regulatory comment process” because the Watershed Plan is not a “regulatory” document. The recommendations it contains are strictly voluntary.

[A copy of the Management Plan can be downloaded here.](#)