

Roads and Trails Management Plan Ozark National Scenic Riverways

AMENDED FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

February 2026

BACKGROUND

Ozark National Scenic Riverways (the park) was established as a unit of the national park system in 1964 to protect over 134 miles of the Current and Jacks Fork rivers in the Ozark Highlands of southeastern Missouri. As a linear park encompassing approximately 80,785 acres along these rivers, an extensive network of roads and trails serve as the primary conduit for visitors accessing the park. The National Park Service (NPS) completed a comprehensive Roads and Trails Management Plan in January 2022 (the plan) and prepared an environmental assessment (EA) and finding of no significant impact (FONSI) in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to document the environmental impact analysis and decision-making process. Accordingly, the park started to implement the 2022 plan while acknowledging the need to resolve several road ownership issues and management challenges with adjoining landowners and local jurisdictions. Revisions and map updates to the amended Roads and Trails Plan (amended plan) are summarized in this amended FONSI (amended FONSI).

While the majority of the changes involve road ownership, the NPS agreed to formally recognize six existing river fords that belong to Shannon County, Missouri. Accordingly, the NPS, L-A-D Foundation, Inc., and Shannon County agreed to final ownership and management terms in a September 2024 legal settlement (see appendix N in the amended plan - NPS Legal Settlement). As a result of this legal settlement, there are several minor road and trail segments that have been removed or modified (see appendix D in the amended plan – Maps of Roads and Trails Revisions). No changes have been made that will significantly impact the environment or substantially change the analysis of the 2022 plan and its FONSI. There are eight revisions that address fords; seven that amend horse crossings and staging areas; and the remainder split roughly among roads and trails modifications, and place name revisions in the 2022 plan and EA and its map set.

This amended FONSI (1) evaluates the record of the environmental impact analysis and decision-making process as required by NEPA associated with the eight aforementioned revisions; (2) evaluates a finding of no effect to federally listed species or their habitat as required by the Endangered Species Act (ESA), Section 7; and (3) evaluates a finding of no potential to affect historic properties under the National Historic Preservation Act, Section 106; all described by the NPS Director's Order #12 and the NPS NEPA Handbook (NPS 2015). This amended FONSI is available on the NPS Planning, Environmental and Public Comment (PEPC) website at [Park Planning - Ozark Roads and Trails Management Plan](#). The amended FONSI

follows the implementing procedures in the U.S. Department of the Interior Handbook National Environmental Policy Act Implementing Procedures (DOI 2025).¹

CHANGES TO THE 2022 SELECTED ALTERNATIVE

The NPS will continue to implement the selected alternative in the 2022 plan, as amended in 2026, to improve the system of park roads and trails to ensure that it provides access to a variety of locations and experiences while also protecting the park's fundamental resources and values. Revisions to the amended plan and potential environmental impacts are further described for the following key areas:

Fords

River fords that recognize the most practical and least impactful alignments, such as Shannon County Highway K and the Akers Ford (map 7), are more accurately depicted in the updated maps. Other fords revisions on map 17 include:

- Update the historical Shannon County road (CR235A) and ford as depicted in the 1981 General Management Plan (GMP), with CR235-A continuing from the Two Rivers Landing, southeast to the Two Rivers Horse Crossing.
- Designate the Moloney Ford / Two Rivers Horse Crossing, connecting CR235-A to CR235, owned by Shannon County.

Horse Crossings and Staging Areas

Similar to fords, adjustments to horse crossings and staging areas include map revisions indicating more practical or less impactful alignments that extend to or connect with designated trails. Examples include:

- Move a horse staging area from the south side (planned) to the north side of the Upper Current River (amended), near Susie Nichols Road (see map 2).
- Connect the horse trail from the Shawnee Staging Area to Powell Spring Horse Crossing (see map 19).

Roads

In general, road revisions include the primary changes in ownership, as well as short extensions (e.g., less than 0.25 miles, such as Shannon County road segments, K-W and 385A, from the

¹ *The Department of the Interior (DOI) published an interim final rule, NEPA Implementing Regulations, on July 3, 2025, "rescinding and making necessary targeted updates to its remaining regulations implementing" NEPA. 90 Fed. Reg. 29498 (July 3, 2025), as well as a DOI NEPA Handbook at 516 Departmental Manual 1. The park published a plan/EA on June 17, 2021, relying upon preexisting NEPA procedures that predate July 3, 2025, because the plan's NEPA review was sufficiently advanced at the time DOI issued the NEPA rule. Nonetheless, NPS will rely upon existing procedures to issue this FONSI, completing the NEPA review for the plan. The EA and FONSI are consistent with DOI's July 3, 2025, NEPA Implementing Regulations and DOI NEPA Handbook.*

Flying W ford and horse crossing to the Bluff School). Many of the extensions are for NPS administrative use only. Other examples of road segment revisions include:

- Additional administrative road mileage near Ozro Riley Horse Trail (see map 4).
- Additional administrative road mileage near horse staging area on Susie Nichols Road (see map 2).

Trails

Trail revisions include short trail segment extensions or connections (often referred to as “planned trails” in the updated maps in appendix B). Similar to road revisions noted above, trail extensions are typically less than 0.25 miles long. Most trail updates in the amended maps (outside of ownership changes) involve slight adjustments to alignments and crossings (i.e., Banks Ford on map 8). Other examples of trail updates in the amended plan include:

- Add a trail from the Chilton Creek River Access parking lot to the boat ramp and river access point in Carter County (see map 31).

In addition to the above revisions, the following mileage updates and revisions have been made to the NPS Selected Alternative in the 2022 plan and its FONSI:

Road Mileage

- **NPS Public Use**

With the updates, the total miles of designated NPS public use, county, and state roads is approximately 215 miles (versus 218 miles in the 2022 plan and FONSI). Total road mileage includes 52 miles of NPS public use roads (versus 60 miles of NPS public roads in the 2022 plan and FONSI).

- **County and State Public Use (Including Removed Public Use)**

In addition to the updates noted above, total road mileage updates include approximately 162 miles of public county and state roads (versus 170 miles of public county and state roads, respectively, in the 2022 plan and FONSI).

- **NPS Administrative Use (No Public Use)**

Updates to nonpublic NPS roads include seven additional miles, totaling 18 miles of nonpublic NPS roads (versus 11 miles of nonpublic NPS roads in the 2022 plan and FONSI).

- **Private Roads (No Public Use, Including Removed Private Roads)**

Updates to private roads include four fewer miles, totaling 12 miles of private roads (versus 16 miles of private roads in the 2022 plan and FONSI).

In addition to the total road mileage updates summarized above, 16 miles of public use roads and four miles of private roads have been removed in the amended FONSI.

Trail Mileage: New Hiking; Horse and Hiking; Bike and Hiking Trails

- With the updates, approximately 152 total miles (compared to 153 miles in the 2022 plan and FONSI) would be designated as hiking trails.
- Updates include 23 miles of new horse and hiking trails, with eight miles outside park boundaries (compared to 25 miles of new horse and hiking trails, with 10 miles outside park boundaries in the 2022 plan and FONSI).
- New bike and hiking trails total nine miles (compared to 11 miles in the 2022 plan and FONSI).

Biking and E-Bikes

- There are no changes to allowed uses on designated trails (see mileage update in previous section).

Designated Recreation Areas Along the River

- With the updates, there would be 101 total designated recreation areas (compared to 93 designated recreation areas in the 2022 plan and FONSI). Note the map updates in the amended plan that includes two seasonal recreation areas and two planned recreation areas.

Trailhead

- Updates omit the single trailhead proposed in the 2022 plan and FONSI.

MITIGATION MEASURES

None of the roads and trails revisions affect mitigation measures in the 2022 plan and FONSI. The same mitigation measures will continue to be implemented and will have no potential for significant impacts.

SELECTED ALTERNATIVE AND RATIONALE FOR THE DECISION

As noted, the NPS is revising the 2022 plan and FONSI as a result of a legal settlement addressing road ownership between the NPS and Shannon County, Missouri (see Appendix C: Shannon County v. L-A-D Foundation Inc. [Eastern District of Missouri 2024]). These parties agreed to final ownership and management terms in September 2024, resulting in several minor road and trail segments that have been removed or modified. No changes have been made that will significantly impact the environment or substantially change the analysis of the 2022 plan and its FONSI, which are reflected in the significance criteria review below.

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA REVIEW

Potentially Affected Environment

The 2022 plan and FONSI analyzed several impact topics related to roads and trails management. Environmental impacts that could occur are limited in context, with generally beneficial impacts on visitor use and experience and opportunities, fish and wildlife habitat, and resource conditions. The revisions to this FONSI will not significantly impact the resources outlined below or substantially change the 2022 plan and FONSI.

Impact topics and conclusions about why the selected alternative and revisions included in the amended plan do not constitute a major federal action having a significant effect on the human environment, are summarized below:

- **Visitor Use and Experience**

Increased trail connectivity throughout the park will continue to have beneficial impacts on visitor use and experience. The increase of overall trail mileage and diversity of visitor opportunities will positively impact visitor use and experience, for example. In some cases, however, such as the plan's increase of designated horse trail river crossings, implementing the selected alternative will positively benefit some user groups and adversely impact other river users. Visitor use management strategies for indicators, thresholds, and visitor capacity will help reduce crowding at popular areas and enhance visitors' overall experience.

- **Vegetation and Soils**

The addition of new trails will have a long-term adverse impact on vegetation and soils. However, restoration of non-designated trails will result in a long-term benefit to vegetation and soils. Additional river fords and horse trail river crossings under the selected alternative will have a small adverse impact on vegetation and soils, for example, but this impact will be localized and negligible in the context of the entire park. Restoring a subset of the designated recreation areas will result in a benefit to vegetation and soils.

- **Fish and Wildlife**

Restoring roads and trails to natural conditions will continue to result in long-term benefits to fish and wildlife. Increasing trail mileage will result in adverse impacts to fish and wildlife, but the new trails will be aligned to avoid impacts on sensitive resources.

- **Federally Listed Threatened and Endangered Species**

Similar to fish and wildlife resources, restoring roads and trails to natural conditions will result in long-term benefits to threatened, endangered, and sensitive species. Increasing trail mileage will result in adverse impacts to threatened, endangered, and sensitive

species. However, managing visitor access to sensitive areas like gravel bars will continue to result in overall benefits to threatened, endangered, and sensitive species.

- **Archeological Resources**

The increase of overall trail mileage will result in a small adverse impact on historic buildings, sites, and cultural landscapes. However, these resources would be avoided in new trail development to reduce adverse impacts. Restoring roads and trails and managing visitor access to gravel bars will result in benefits to cultural landscapes, historic sites, and structures.

- **Historic Buildings, Sites, and Cultural Landscapes**

The increase of overall trail mileage will result in a small adverse impact on historic buildings, sites, and cultural landscapes. These resources would be avoided in new trail development to reduce adverse impacts. Equestrian permitting, restoring roads and trails, and managing visitor access to gravel bars will result in a benefit to cultural landscapes, historic sites, and structures. Impacts on cultural landscapes, historic sites, and structures under the selected alternative will not cause impairment.

- **Socioeconomics**

The expansion of visitor opportunities through increased trail mileage will result in a benefit to socioeconomics and the regional economy. Road closures will affect local populations but will not affect nonlocal populations of visitors. Equestrian permitting may deter some users from recreating, and commercial use providers may have to adjust to the permit requirements. However, construction activities associated with the selected alternative will provide opportunities for more jobs, resulting in a benefit to the regional economy.

The roads and trails updates outlined in this amended FONSI will not significantly impact visitor use and experience or substantially change the analysis of the 2022 plan and its FONSI.

Degree of Effects of the Action

The National Park Service considered the following actual or potential project effects in evaluating the degree of the effects per the implementing procedures in the U.S. Department of the Interior Handbook National Environmental Policy Act Implementing Procedures (DOI 2025) for the selected alternative and the roads and trails updates outlined in this amended FONSI:

- i. Short- and long-term effects
- ii. Beneficial and adverse effects
- iii. Effects on public health and safety
 - Effects that would violate federal, state, Tribal, or local law protecting the environment

Mitigation measures as mentioned above (and described in detail in Appendix G of the 2022 plan and EA) will further minimize any potential adverse impacts:

- **Visitor use and Experience**

As discussed in chapter 3 of the EA, the selected alternative will increase trail connectivity throughout the park that will have beneficial impacts on visitor use and experience. The increase of overall trail mileage and diversity of visitor opportunities will positively impact visitor use and experience. In some cases, however, such as the plan's increase of designated horse trail river crossings, implementing the selection alternative will positively benefit some user groups, such as equestrian trail users and adversely impact other river users. Visitor use management strategies for indicators, thresholds, and visitor capacity will help reduce crowding at popular areas and enhance visitors' overall experience.

- **Vegetation and Soils**

The addition of new trails will have a long-term adverse impact on vegetation and soils. However, restoration of non-designated trails will result in a long-term benefit to vegetation and soils. Additional river fords and horse trail river crossings under the selected alternative will have a small adverse impact on vegetation and soils, for example, but this impact will be localized and negligible in the context of the entire park. Restoring a subset of the designated recreation areas will result in a benefit to vegetation and soils.

- **Fish and Wildlife**

Restoring roads and trails to natural conditions will continue to result in long-term benefits to fish and wildlife. Increasing trail mileage will result in adverse impacts to fish and wildlife due to additional vegetation compaction near river resources, especially at river crossing points that will likely widen over time. However, the new trails will be aligned to avoid impacts on sensitive resources. Existing trails and areas for new trails will be temporarily closed for survey and rehabilitation activities and opened when determined suitable for use to ensure resource protection for fish and wildlife species and habitat. With implementation of mitigation measures, the impacts to fish and wildlife are expected to be negligible and therefore not significant.

- **Federally Listed Threatened and Endangered Species**

Similar to fish and wildlife resources, restoring roads and trails to natural conditions will result in long-term benefits to threatened, endangered, and sensitive species. Increasing trail mileage will result in adverse impacts to threatened, endangered, and sensitive species, however, managing visitor access to sensitive areas like gravel bars will continue to result in overall benefits to threatened, endangered, and sensitive species. The additional trail crossings will also provide direct, beneficial impacts to federally listed species and their habitat by directing visitor use away from dozens of informal, unauthorized crossings. These actions will improve fish and wildlife habitat in these

areas. Similarly, roads, trails, recreation areas, and river crossings that are not part of the designated system will be restored over time to natural conditions, which will have long-term benefits to fish and wildlife habitat. With implementation of mitigation measures, the impacts to federally listed threatened and endangered species, including designated critical habitat are expected to be negligible and therefore not significant.

- **Archeological Resources**

The increase of overall trail mileage will result in a small adverse impact on historic buildings, sites, and cultural landscapes. However, these resources will be avoided in new trail development to reduce adverse impacts. Restoring roads and trails and managing visitor access to gravel bars will result in a benefit to cultural landscapes, historic sites, and structures.

- **Historic Buildings, Sites, and Cultural Landscapes**

The increase of overall trail mileage will result in a small adverse impact on historic buildings, sites, and cultural landscapes. These resources will be avoided in new trail development to reduce adverse impacts. Equestrian permitting, restoring roads and trails, and managing visitor access to gravel bars will result in a benefit to cultural landscapes, historic sites, and structures.

- **Socioeconomics**

The expansion of visitor opportunities through increased trail mileage will result in a benefit to socioeconomics and the regional economy. Road closures will affect local populations but will not affect nonlocal populations of visitors. Equestrian permitting may deter some users from recreating, and commercial use providers may have to adjust to the permit requirements. However, construction activities associated with the selected alternative will provide opportunities for more jobs, resulting in a benefit to the regional economy.

Degree to Which the Selected Alternative Affects Public Health and Safety

Providing safe access to the park and circulation within the park to connect visitors with park resources and experiences meets the need for the plan. Similarly, addressing public safety requirements by providing quality visitor uses and experiences meets the plan's purpose. The selected alternative will prioritize public health and safety by improving the park's roads, trails, and circulation network and providing facilities to meet basic visitor needs—including health and safety priorities. The selected alternative will provide safer access to roads, trails, and other park facilities and resources that are currently substandard and inadequate to accommodate current use and projected increase in visitor use. The selected alternative will provide necessary visitor services not currently available to people with disabilities, some of which are not currently available. For these reasons and their beneficial impacts, the selected alternative meets DOI guidance stated in section 6, part 3 of appendix 3 in the 2025 DOI NEPA Handbook regarding considering public health and safety when determining the significance of the selected alternative.

Degree to Which the Selected Alternative Affects Economic Activity

In the context of meeting recreational demand to experience the park’s resources, the selected alternative will support and increase economic benefits throughout the Ozark National Scenic Riverways region. As mentioned above, substantial pressure to access outdoor recreation and leisure activities exists in the Ozark region. As indicated in the socioeconomic environmental analysis for the selected alternative in chapter 3 of the EA, expanded recreational opportunities at the park due to proposed improvements may result in small increases in visitation associated with these activities, resulting in slightly higher regional economic benefits. Additional formal access for horseback riding in the Upper Current River, for example, and new hiking and biking trails, will likely increase visitation associated with these activities, resulting in small increases in visitor spending, regional economic benefits. For these reasons, the selected alternative meets DOI guidance stated in section 6, part 4 of appendix 3 in the 2025 DOI NEPA Handbook regarding considering economic effects when determining the significance of the selected alternative.

Degree to Which the Selected Alternative Affects the Quality of Life of the American People

Similar to the benefits the selected alternative will provide for public health and safety and economic activity, the selected alternative proposes clearly defined access to a variety of opportunities and locations in the park. As part of those activities—and the purpose and need for the plan—the selected alternative will enhance visitor enjoyment by expanding the park’s roads and trails network, improving public access, circulation, and basic, necessary visitor services. The selected alternative will provide safer overall circulation within and around the park, as well as improve interpretation and education for roads, trails, and related recreational activities. As discussed in rationale supporting the selected alternative above, this alternative will improve the system of park roads and trails to ensure that it provides access to a variety of locations and experiences while also protecting the park’s fundamental resources and values. Each of these objectives supports the high degree to which the plan benefits the quality of life of the American people, in context with DOI NEPA Handbook guidance stated in section 6, part 5 of appendix 3 in the 2025 *DOI NEPA Handbook* regarding considering effects on the quality of life of the American people when determining the significance of the selected alternative.

GOVERNMENT TO GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION

Previous consultation covered all of the revisions in this amended FONSI. The selected alternative was chosen after careful analysis of resource and visitor impacts, consultation with eight affiliated tribes, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the Missouri State Historic Preservation Office (Missouri SHPO), and review of public comments. Nothing in the selected alternative would affect the overall cultural landscape, or resources having specific cultural importance to affiliated tribes or their ability to access traditionally important resources and places. The NPS remains committed to ongoing and future government-to-government consultation with the tribes as appropriate. Further consultation with the SHPO and associated

tribes will occur in the event that cultural resources are identified that require mitigation (e.g., avoidance or possible data recovery if avoidance cannot be achieved through project redesign). Similarly, the NPS will continue ongoing informal consultation and reinstate consultation in the future, as appropriate, with the USFWS for their concurrence on elements of the plan that may require further compliance. See appendix I for correspondence with the USFWS indicating concurrence with roads and trails plan revisions on 12/18/2025.

AMENDED FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Based on the information contained in the 2022 plan and FONSI, and inclusive of the roads and trails updates outlined in the amended plan and this amended FONSI, we have determined these revisions to the selected alternative do not constitute a major federal action having a significant effect on the human environment. This finding is based on consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality and NPS guidance, in place at the time NPS initiated NEPA review, on the criteria for significance per the 2025 *DOI Handbook of NEPA Implementing Procedures* regarding the potentially affected environment and degrees of effects of the impacts described in the EA (which is hereby incorporated by reference) and as summarized above.

The finding is further supported by detailed revisions, maps, and the legal settlement between NPS, L-A-D Foundation, Inc. and Shannon County, Missouri.

Recommended:

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Stacey Griffin, Acting Superintendent Ozark
National Scenic Riverways

Date

Approved: **STEPHANIE STEPHENS** Digitally signed by
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Stephanie Stephens, Acting Regional Director
National Park Service, Midwest Region

Date