

October 1, 2008

District Ranger Elrand D. Denson  
Houston/Rolla/Cedar Creek Ranger District  
108 South Sam Houston Blvd.  
Houston, MO 65483

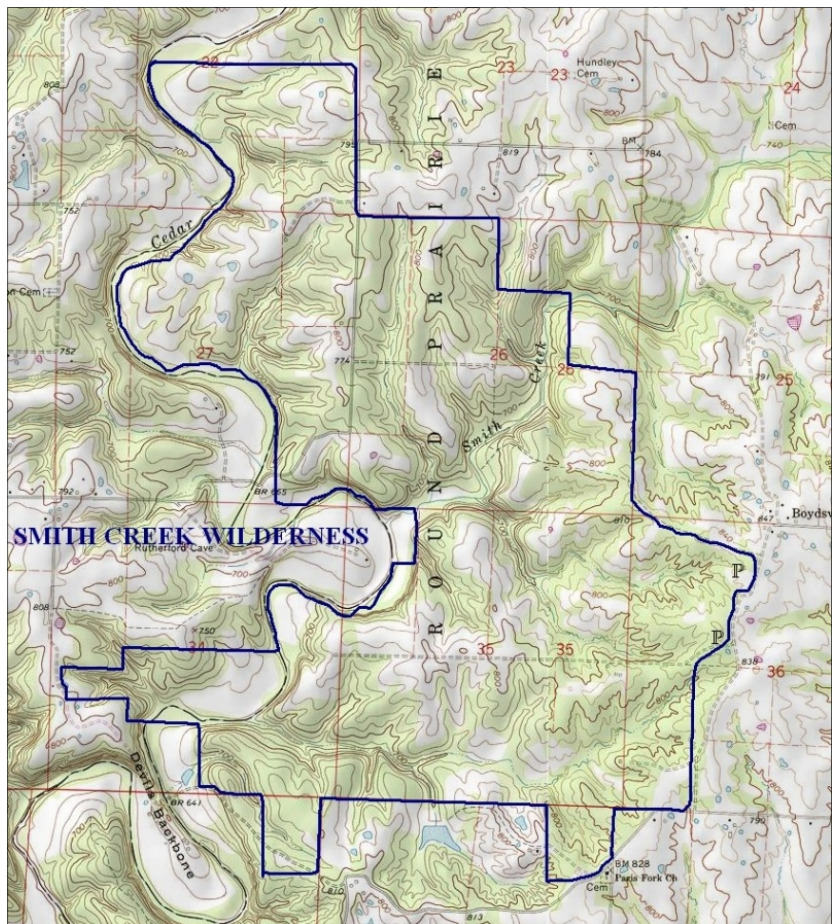
Attn: Southwest Project #21888

Dear Mr. Denson:

We have reviewed the September 11 Southwest project document “Proposed Action and Preliminary Alternatives for 30-Day Comment Period—SOUTHWEST PROJECT”, and offer specific comments with regard to the Smith Creek Wilderness proposal, as it has been identified by the leading conservation organizations in the state of Missouri, and as it would be affected by your planning.

We include the map of this area’s proposed boundaries below. The Smith Creek Wilderness boundary is revised from the Smith Creek Sensitive Area as designated in 1987 by the Forest Service to include adjacent federal lands of the Mark Twain, including a portion of the Epple Tract, noted in your report as ‘Tract A’.

*Boundaries shown here are from the report “Wilderness for Missouri; Completing a Conservation Legacy, Summary and Fact Sheets”, prepared by the Missouri Wilderness Coalition, July 30, 2007. Since that report was prepared, 29 conservation, outdoor, business, and recreation organizations have endorsed the proposal.*



As shown on this map, the Epple Tract provides better landscape integrity for the Smith Creek area, including a much more substantial connection to Cedar Creek, with more than 1.5 miles of creek frontage. This extension also respects and complements the various public uses which have become traditional for this area.

The “preferred” Alternative 2 fails to recognize or protect the public values most important to the largest number of people for this tract. In fact, it would degrade or destroy the rarest and most valuable resources at stake with intrusive developments of roads, fences, ramps, parking lots, and timber cutting.

In contrast, Alternative 4 provides reasonable protection for the area’s primitive and wildland values, while permitting more intensive management of the remaining majority of the Cedar Creek District. This balance is clearly favored by a majority of the public both locally and statewide. Alternative 4 is the only acceptable option and we urge its adoption.

Alternative 4 would enhance the management of this area for existing uses such as hiking, walking, hunting, fishing, canoeing, orienteering, photography, horseback riding, nature study, and backpack camping.

Various non-wilderness uses such as motorized access and mountain bike trails are valid on the general Cedar Creek area, and can be conveniently accommodated outside of the Smith Creek boundaries.

We hope these comments prove helpful. Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on this important matter.

John Karel      Scott Merritt      Greg Iffrig

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