

Chairman Hastings, Committee Members, Congressman Griffin:

My name is Pete Day, and I'm with Camp War Eagle and Camp Ozark. Camp Ozark is a residential and educational Christian summer camp in Mt. Ida, Arkansas. We're located along the upper banks of the beautiful Ouachita River.

We are proud to have been operating there for more than three decades now, and we have grown into a world-class facility that every summer draws **5,600 campers from 35 states** and several foreign countries. We have a major economic impact on our part of the state. In fact, we are **one of the top two employers in Montgomery County**, and have an **estimated impact of \$8.2 million** on the Central Arkansas economy every year. In addition to our many summer staffers, we have many year-around employees who all depend on the success of our camp to support their families.

We offer over 120 programs and classes to our campers. As you can imagine, many of them center around the Ouachita River, which we feel blessed to have along our property. Every summer, our campers look forward to fishing, canoeing, and swimming in the river – we think it has truly been a major factor in our camp's success, and it is certainly one of the things that helps draw families to Camp Ozark every year. It's why younger siblings can't wait to follow older ones to camp, and why we now have former campers and staffers bringing *their* children to our facilities. Our picturesque Ouachita River retreat truly has become a family tradition for thousands of people across the country.

We are concerned that the proposed Critical Habitat designation for the rabbitsfoot mussel along the Upper Ouachita will interfere with many of the river activities that have become a major part of our kids' camp experience. In addition, a designation on our portion of the river seems **especially burdensome, since by my understanding, it has not been confirmed that this section actually harbors the species.**

Furthermore, we are disappointed that the **Service is not required to**

**take into consideration the major economic impact that such designation has on an area's businesses and local economy. I**

appreciate and applaud the efforts underway to change that...by requiring the Service to conduct a *true* economic impact study. It only makes sense that when considering Critical Habitat designations, the agency should have an accurate picture of how the proposals will *actually* affect communities and the property owners who live and work there.

As you know, once these designations are in place, they can be extremely rigid and limiting on exactly what kinds of activities are permitted. Even seemingly minor acts like boating could conceivably be found to have an adverse impact.

We are concerned that critical habitat designation would greatly interfere with many of Camp Ozark's river activities. If our campers are unable to enjoy the river as they have for decades, it would be a blow to our recruitment efforts, and a potential blow to our operation AND to our local economy.

We think it's important to preserve our environment, and to take care of our natural resources. We feel fortunate to be along the Ouachita, and we feel a duty to protect it. However, we favor a common-sense approach, and we oppose this Critical Habitat designation.

Again, thank you for coming to Arkansas, and for listening to my concerns regarding this important issue.