HOME OR NATIONAL TREASURE: THE STRUGGLE TO STOP NATIONAL PROTECTION OF THE BUFFALO RIVER

By

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Abstract

For two decades the Buffalo River became the subject of a heated conflict over the proper purpose of the river. Three groups of people were involved in the conflict. The first group fought to have two multi-purpose dams constructed on the Buffalo River through the United States Army Corps of Engineers. They were in favor of dam construction because they believed the resulting reservoirs would help the area’s economy by attracting tourists. The second group vehemently opposed the construction of dams on the Buffalo River. They pushed to have the river and the surrounding area placed under federal protection through the National Park Service. The group whose voices were rarely heard during the conflict belonged to the landowners who lived and farmed the land within the Buffalo River watershed. Although the Buffalo only flows through Newton, Searcy, and Marion Counties before it empties into the White River in Baxter County, the participants of the conflict spanned statewide. The conflict would eventually become so heated that it drew nationwide attention. In 1972, the Buffalo River became America’s first national river. The landowners were then forced to leave their homes. They lost land, which in some instances had been in their families for generations.

Although much has been written about the fight over the Buffalo River, the stories of the landowners have remained largely untold. With the creation of the Buffalo National River, the communities and the culture that took a century to develop was forever lost.

Keywords: Arkansas, Ozarks, folk-culture, Buffalo River, conservation
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HOME OR NATIONAL TREASURE: THE STRUGGLE TO STOP NATIONAL PROTECTION OF THE BUFFALO RIVER

Introduction

In his 1987 book, *Rural Worlds Lost: The American South 1920 – 1960*, historian Jack Temple Kirby described the Ozark Mountain region as being “…serenely beyond the modern world, primitive, clannish, violent, and beautiful.”¹ The Buffalo River Valley is the most isolated area in the Arkansas Ozarks, sometimes called the Ozark Highlands. Isolation did not hinder the settlement of the highland communities that sprang to life along the Buffalo River, commonly referred to by many simply as “the Buffalo.” The lifestyle and culture of the residents resulted from the geographic isolation of the Ozark Plateau.²

Approximately 60,000 years ago, the Ozark Plateau was an inland sea with a layer of sedimentary rock, which bulged upward and formed a 3,000-foot high dome. Erosion and streams helped shape the dome over time into four regions including the: Salem Plateau; Francois Mountains; Springfield Plateau; and Boston Mountains. These four areas together constitute the Ozark Mountains found in southern Missouri and northern Arkansas. The Boston Mountains in northwest and north-central Arkansas form the southern boundary of the Ozark Mountain range. Of all four regions, the Boston Mountains have the most rugged and isolated terrain, which are comprised of a heavily, hardwood forested landscape. The Boston Mountain’s highest elevation is in Newton

County at 2,578 feet. The land is steep-sided with deep, narrow valleys known by many in the Ozarks as “hollows.” As the Boston Mountains drop into the Springfield Plateau, the terrain becomes much less rugged.

The Buffalo River flows through the Boston Mountains into the Springfield Plateau. Beginning in the high rugged terrain of Newton County, the Buffalo winds eastward through Searcy and Marion Counties where it empties into the White River at the Baxter County line. From where it begins near Fallsville, Arkansas, to the point where the Buffalo River reaches the White River, it is a total of 148 miles. The water usually flows at a relatively slow pace except following episodes of heavy rainfall, which typically occurs during the spring and fall months. The Buffalo is lined with high, sheer sandstone, and limestone bluffs that exceed five hundred feet in elevation in some areas. Several waterfalls cascade into the streams and tributaries of the river. The terrain surrounding the Buffalo is exceedingly rugged and difficult to traverse. Lining the river are more than 270 caves, sinkholes, and rock formations.

The Appalachia and Ozark Highlands share unique and easily recognizable similarities, as well as marked differences from the Deep South. As land became populated in the eastern United States, many from Appalachia migrated west into the Ozarks. In doing so, they brought the culture of the southeastern highlands with them. Historian Brooks Blevins wrote, the significant movement of frontiersmen who migrated

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4 Pitcaithley, *Let the River Be*, 4-5.
from the Appalachians into the Ozarks chose the area because they were searching for territory similar to what they had left.\textsuperscript{7} For example, many of the migrants, the majority being of Celtic and Scotch-Irish descent, who settled in Newton County, the wildest and most rugged county in the Arkansas Ozarks, originated from the remote and highest regions of Appalachia. These immigrants originally came to America from Northern Ireland, Wales, and Scotland. Very few people who settled in the Ozarks came from non-British stock.\textsuperscript{8}

Unlike the larger Mississippi, Arkansas, and White Rivers which enabled early American settlers to travel for extended distances without struggling through unsettled and challenging terrain, the Buffalo River never provided extensive travel opportunities. As with many smaller bodies of water, the Buffalo River provided an impetus for settlement. The land along the river that featured naturally well-drained and fertile soil was the first to be settled. Mosquitos presented a major problem, especially the closer one settled to the river. Malaria and flooding were key factors to be considered when choosing a home site. These early pioneers cleared twenty acres at a time to cultivate. They usually developed enough cultivated land to meet the needs of their families.\textsuperscript{9}

The settlers brought farming practices with them from the Appalachian Mountains. Many cut the trees from their pastures and burned the scrub brush to clear the land for cultivation. They cultivated a field and used it for several years, and then let it lay fallow for up to twenty years. Farmers in the Ozark Highlands called their fields “patches.” The unused patch would eventually revert to forest. During the patches’s

\textsuperscript{8} Blevins, 20.
“resting,” farmers would run their livestock on the dormant area to help fertilize the soil with manure.\(^{10}\)

Pioneers in the area knew how to use the resources provided by the surrounding Ozark landscape. Timber was used to build homes and barns, as well as provide a heat source during the winter and fuel for cooking. The plentiful wildlife was harvested by the locals to provide food for their families. Small subsistence crops of corn were grown to provide cornmeal and feed for livestock. They made molasses, and some grew wheat for flour. Farmers produced small amounts of tobacco and cotton for personal use, and to supplement their needs by providing small cash revenue.\(^{11}\) In general, the residents of the Buffalo River Valley valued successful independent sustainability and freedom above all. They were self-reliant in almost every way. Women spun cotton on looms to make their material for knitted socks, gloves, and hats for their family’s personal use.\(^{12}\)

Settlers farmed not only the valleys, but they also settled along the tributaries in the deep hollows and along the ridgelines. Some settlers chose the sloping, narrow benches that ran between the valley and the high ridges. Those who chose to live on the benches did not necessarily do so because there was no land left in the valley. Some settlers felt more at home above the more exposed valley floor.\(^{13}\) Because of the marked difference in soil quality, farming practices for the bench farms were entirely different.

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from those used on the farms along the valley floor, and hogs were a mainstay in a bench family’s life.\textsuperscript{14}

Population steadily increased along the Buffalo River before the beginning of the Civil War. Schools and churches were constructed throughout the collection of small communities within the region. During the Civil War, the Union and Confederate Armies, Guerilla Raiders, and conflicting neighboring families left the area in desolation. During the war, many residents were displaced from their homes and fled the area to Southern Missouri. Local caves provided shelter for some of the residents who were forced to leave their homes. Larger towns near the Buffalo River area, such as Yellville (Marion County), were either burned to the ground or devastated by violence. Months after the war ended on May 9, 1865, many of those hardworking, independent members of the Buffalo River Valley, returned and rebuilt their homes and farms.\textsuperscript{15}

Once again, the population along the river valley, tributaries, and many coves grew at a steady rate. Through the late nineteenth century, small communities grew and re-established churches, schools, and small community stores. Communities were often at the mercy of river conditions. Community schools operated by coordinating schedules with the planting season. Schools closed when the river and tributary creeks were too deep to cross. During instances where students were forced to cross a body of water over knee deep, two logs, called “foot logs,” were tied together and small boards were laid

\textsuperscript{15} Pitcaithley, Let the River Be, 48.
across them. This floating bridge allowed small children to cross without the fear of being swept downstream.\textsuperscript{16}

Since the earliest settlements on the Buffalo River in the 1840s, flooding had always been a dangerous element in the daily life of the residents who chose to settle there. Whole settlements would often be forced to move locations following floods. For example, Steven Still owned the Needmore Mill on Tomahawk Creek, (Searcy County) in 1868. Within two years, Still added a cotton gin and a blacksmith shop. Still expanded by opening a store in 1874. Calvin Lockhart decided to open a saloon. Soon after the saloon was complete, a massive flood washed away the entire community. The remains of the mill were bought by John W. Still, who then moved the operation to the other side of Tomahawk Creek. By 1918, Needmore community had been moved several times, and eventually disappeared into present day St. Joe.\textsuperscript{17}

Zinc and lead deposits along the Buffalo, especially along Rush Creek (Marion County), came to the attention of mining companies during the mid-1880s. By 1916, the Buffalo mining district had gone from being a “district of prospects” to a “district of mines.” Rush had become a “full-fledged mining camp with all the trimmings and accessories.”\textsuperscript{18} Mining communities offered amenities that were not common in the Buffalo River Valley. The settlement surrounding the Morning Star Mine featured a


small theater named Rush Movies. Rush had a doctor’s office, cafes, bakery, barber shops, stores, and a sixteen room hotel. In many cases, the mining companies bought the land and built the different business buildings. They then sold or leased the individual businesses to residents, who operated the enterprise. When the mines ceased operation, the settlements were abandoned, and the buildings were left to ruin. The significant demand for zinc during World War I facilitated the growth of mining along the Buffalo River. However, by the end of the war, the demand for minerals had dried up. Much of the remaining zinc was used for miscellaneous purposes such as road maintenance.\textsuperscript{19}

Timber was another industry in the Buffalo River Valley that produced a temporary opportunity for locals to procure a steady income. The Houston, Liggett and Canada Cedar Company, which was eventually acquired by the Eagle Pencil Company, began logging red cedar, oak, and walnut trees in the Buffalo River Valley. The only method available for successful timber removal was via the temperamental Buffalo River.\textsuperscript{20} The practice of clear-cutting whole growths of timber damaged the chances for a consistently sustainable market. By 1920, the area had been cleared of the most valuable timber stands, and vast timber operations ceased.

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, the agrarian lifestyle practiced by traditional families along the Buffalo River helped them to survive. Although the stock market was not the cause of hardship in the Arkansas Ozarks, low market prices on all farm goods were. To further exacerbate the effects of low crop prices, devastating

\textsuperscript{19} Hallie Bell and Bussell Bell, Interview by Suzie Rogers, October 26, Interview 009, Cultural Resource Management Records, Oral History Project, Interview files, Buffalo National River Headquarters, Harrison, AR, 1990.
drought conditions began in 1930, which carried through 1931. Due to high temperatures and the lowest percentage of rainfall on record, Arkansas cotton crops failed. Crops used for food did not have the water they needed to grow. Arkansas experienced an almost “complete crop failure.”

New Deal programs implemented in the United States by the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration provided needed relief to Ozark Mountain families. The Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) provided much-needed aid to the drought-stricken region. Other New Deal programs, such as the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), helped residents of the Ozark Mountains survive by providing work for the unemployed Ozarkers. The CCC employed young men who had been unemployed for six months. They lived in CCC camps throughout the state. The primary objective of the CCC in Arkansas was to develop the forests and state parks for “recreation and conservation purposes.”

Population in the Buffalo River Valley, and the three correlating counties (Newton, Searcy, Marion), fluctuated as people left to seek jobs in urban areas. During the 1930s, those employment opportunities became less plentiful and families stayed in the Ozarks. By 1940, the number of families in the region had grown by a natural

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22 Brooks Blevins, Hill Folks, 110-111.
However, from the early 1940s through the 1960s, as with much of the Arkansas Ozarks, the population declined rapidly along the Buffalo River. Better income possibilities outside the area, as well as exposure to a more modern world, caused a steady flow of outmigration. Many people abandoned the rugged existence along the Buffalo River. The majority of residents who remained were families who had established roots in the area. They owned their land and had firm ties to the area. As the younger generation left the family home, they could not wait to find what modernity had to offer.

The isolation and raw beauty of the picturesque Buffalo River began to draw tourism. In 1938, the Buffalo River State Park was opened mid-river in Marion County. By 1950, canoers were attracted to the cold, clear water of the river, and the beauty of the massive limestone bluffs. Entire families came to the area to float the river and camp. Businesses were opened to supply floaters with food, canoe rentals, cabin rentals, and camping supplies. Floaters came from Arkansas and nearby states. By the time the Lost Valley State Park (Newton County) was established in 1966, canoeing had become a favorite pastime and the free-flowing Buffalo River attracted thousands of floaters.

The homesteads that had existed for over a century in the isolated river valley were still there. Farms and business that had existed for generations still operated in their traditional, small scale manner. Little attention was paid to outsiders unless local

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28 Smith, 105-107.
residents were directly affected by them. Before the landowners within the Buffalo River Valley and environs realized that their quiet lifestyle was possibly threatened by forces far greater than they could control, it would be too late. The Army Corps of Engineers and the National Park Service, aided by individuals who did not live in the area but had particular interests in the outcome, would battle for control of the river. Those caught in the middle were business owners, property holders, and residents of the Buffalo River Valley. At stake was their lifestyle, livelihoods, and the ownership of their private property.

Few instances can more intensely raise the ire of an American citizen than the semblance of the government encroachment on individual rights, particularly the right of a person to own and utilize his private property. Some Americans contend there is no acceptable reason for a person's property to be expropriated from private ownership by the United States government. Landowners along the Buffalo River were opposed to not only governmental interference with their lives, but to all outside interference. For social, cultural, and economic reasons, residents emphatically resisted all efforts made by others to take their land and regulate their businesses.
Part I: Efforts Made to Dam the Buffalo

The Buffalo River Valley offered limited opportunities for large-scale economic development, except for mining and timber resources, which were quickly exhausted. Subsistence farming, trapping, hunting, and fishing were the main staples of life for the residents who inhabited the area. The main resource, the river, offered fish and provided power to run the grist mills, which were scattered throughout the area. The river was neither wide nor deep enough to facilitate commercial water traffic. Rainfall determined the water level, and in periods of dry weather, even small canoes had to be physically dragged across shoals to deeper pools. The United States Army Corps of Engineers, as well as a group of businesspeople, posited that the Buffalo River should be dammed to provide hydroelectric power and relief from flooding.\(^{29}\) As the economic benefits of the dams and reservoirs along the White River became apparent, land speculation and the distant promise of paying tourism became the driving force behind the movement to dam the Buffalo River.\(^{30}\)

Future President George Washington created the Corps during the American Revolution in 1775. In 1802, it became an independent body, and was given the duty of founding and running the West Point Military Academy. Throughout American history, the Corps were responsible for many large engineering projects that aided in the country’s development. Besides designing and maintaining the United States military facilities, the Corps were in charge of mapping, clearing snags from navigational

\(^{29}\) For the purpose of simplicity the Corps of Engineers will heretofore be referred to as the Corps.

\(^{30}\) Heretofore the Buffalo River will be referred to as the Buffalo.
channels, building canals, piers, dams, and jetties on river ports throughout America.\textsuperscript{31}

Section 3 of the Rivers and Harbors Act in 1902 created the Board of Engineers for Rivers and Harbors. Studies for future engineering projects were submitted to the Board of Engineers to determine the feasibility of the project. The members of the Board of Engineers would decide the future of the nation’s waterways.\textsuperscript{32}

In Arkansas, the Buffalo is only one relatively small waterway in a state possessing several large rivers. The most notable being the “Mighty Mississippi,” Arkansas River, White River, St. Francis, and Red River. The Mississippi River is the largest river in the United States. It is 2,340 miles long, and is the most commercially significant river in the country. It begins in Minnesota where it flows southward to the Gulf of Mexico. The drainage system of the Mississippi River is the largest in America, and the world’s third largest.\textsuperscript{33} The Mississippi Basin drains more than forty percent of the water in the United States. Waters flow into the Mississippi River from the Rocky Mountains to the Appalachian Mountains.\textsuperscript{34}

The Arkansas, White, and St. Francis Rivers are all tributaries of the Lower Mississippi River. The Arkansas River begins in Colorado and flows 1,460 miles eastward through Kansas, Oklahoma, and the entire mid-section of Arkansas, before it


drains into the Mississippi River. Both the Mississippi and the Arkansas Rivers are the source of rich soil deposits that cover the surrounding regions, and have created some of the most fertile farmlands in the United States. The White River runs through the Boston Mountains of Northwest Arkansas up to Southern Missouri, and then southeastward to the Mississippi River. Although the White River is only 722 miles long, it deposits comparatively the same amount of water into the Mississippi as the Arkansas River.

The earliest mention by the Corps to possibly control the waters of the Buffalo occurred in 1897. Steamboats heavily traveled the Upper White River during the 1890s. Steamboat captains were increasingly dissatisfied with the lack of improvements made on the Upper White River by the Corps in comparison to the Lower White River below Batesville (Independence County). Lead and zinc mines brought demands for studies of possible improvements to the Buffalo, and to make it a continuously navigable river. In May 1896, the Morning Star Mine on Rush Creek, a tributary of the Buffalo hired Captain Will T. Warner to deliver goods to the mine on the steamboat *Dauntless*. Although incredibly difficult, the *Dauntless* made history by making a successful voyage up the Buffalo as far as Rush Creek. This voyage only helped to encourage possible improvements to the Buffalo. This was the only steamboat in history to make such a trip on the Buffalo.

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A survey was conducted by the State of Arkansas regarding the Buffalo, and all surrounding tributaries to determine a feasible means to make the river suitable for commercial travel. Referring to the river as the “Buffalo Fork” of the White River, the Corps determined that for $750,000 they could construct five locks and dams on the Buffalo, which would in turn make the river continuously navigable.\(^{38}\) The proposition was deemed too costly, and then shelved. In 1911, a private engineer named W.N. Gladson suggested putting a dam at Rush Creek (Marion County), to create hydro-electric power. He also proposed that a tunnel should be blasted through a hill to avoid a natural curve in the river. The proposal by Gladson was also determined to be too costly, and came to no fruition.\(^{39}\)

Due to its many waterways, Arkansas was a key state for works done by the Corps. Flood control was a major issue for the United States during the mid-nineteenth century through the first half of the twentieth. Flooding of the Mississippi River happened frequently. In 1927, the “Great Flood of the Mississippi” inundated approximately 6,600 square miles in Arkansas. It was considered the nation's worst flood with a total of 27,000 square miles underwater. Arkansas was the state with the most devastation from the flood waters, although incredible damage also occurred in Texas, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Mississippi, Louisiana, Missouri, Illinois, Kentucky, and Kansas. The number of human fatalities, human displacement, animal loss, and diseases were

\(^{38}\) Survey of Buffalo Fork of White River, Arkansas, House Doc. 207, 54\(^{th}\) Cong., 2\(^{nd}\) sess., HR Rep., 1897, Serial 3524.

\(^{39}\) Pitcaithley, *Let The River Be*, 95.
catastrophic along the entire length of the river and many of its tributaries.\textsuperscript{40} The Mississippi River levees failed in 120 places, forty-two of which were major breaches.\textsuperscript{41}

Although floods were a matter discussed by Congress since the early 1800s, the Flood Control Act of 1916 was the first legislation specifically designed for flood control. Following the Flood of 1927, Congress expanded federal funding for flood control. Following a series of nationwide floods in 1935, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Flood Control Act of 1936 (Public Law 74-738). The law ended the pre-Progressive Era sentiments that governmental funding and interference of flood control that benefitted one specific region was unconstitutional. This act gave the federal government management responsibility for massive floods. The government delegated that responsibility to the Corps, which was assigned to build levees, reservoirs, and dams.\textsuperscript{42}

The White River was the key reason the possibility of damming the Buffalo River drew the interests of the Corps. The Buffalo flowed into the White River just across the Baxter County line. The Corps originally included dams on the Buffalo as part of the initial White River flood control planning. Land speculators and Ozark business owners also supported the damming of the Buffalo. In 1911, Congress authorized the Ozark Power and Water, a regional electric company to build a dam on the Upper White River.

\textsuperscript{40} Frederick Simpich, “The Great Flood of 1927,” in \textit{A Documentary History of Arkansas, 2\textsuperscript{nd} edition}, ed. C Fred Williams, S. Charles Bolton, Carl H. Moneyhon, and LeRoy T. Williams (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2013), 218-220.


for the purpose of creating hydro-electric power. The Ambussen Hydraulic Construction Company built the dam that in turn created Lake Taneycomo (Taney County, Missouri). Lake Taneycomo provided many long-lasting economic benefits to the area and the people who lived there. The construction project provided employment opportunities for hundreds of residents. The power site dam provided electricity to rural residents who lived in the White River Valley long before it reached more easily accessible areas. An added benefit was the recreational attractions, the reservoir, Lake Taneycomo, presented to vacationers as well as to locals. The creation of such a wonder was a popular tourist attraction since no natural lakes existed in the Ozarks.43

When President Roosevelt signed the Flood Control Act of 1938, he authorized the construction of six additional reservoirs on the White River. This law removed the right to build dams by private individuals, and the Corps assumed that role. Local politicians highly coveted building projects conducted by the Corps. “Pork Barrel” politics was rampant when trying to get dam projects approved for specific areas. During the Big Dam Era of flood control and hydroelectric power (1935-1965), the Corps became increasingly powerful. When the Corps expressed an interest in a project, the project was usually approved. Local constituents appreciated politicians who could procure funds from Congress, and more often than not, these politicians were assured re-election.

The United States had an extensive natural watershed system. Often regarded as untapped resources, many politicians believed that the American rivers were something that needed to be molded to best suit the needs of the nation. A common consensus

developed among many people in the United States in which the best choice for national and local economies was to manipulate rivers in such a way as to best accommodate man.

From 1930 to 1965, as modernity and industrialization increased, the degree to which rivers and waterways were controlled also increased. Historian Theodore Steinberg wrote, a common assumption in America developed that “water should be tapped, controlled and dominated in the name of progress.”

The Big Dam Era brought thirty plus years of steps taken to control and manipulate the flow of the nation’s waterways, as large dams took the place of levees and canals.

With the aid of northwest Arkansas Congressman Claude Fuller (1929-1939), three of six authorized White River dams were slated for construction in the Arkansas Ozarks. The Flood Control Act of 1938 also authorized the Lone Rock Reservoir on the Buffalo. The first project to be built on the White River was Norfork Dam (Baxter County). The North Fork River began in a stream located in Cabool, Missouri, traveled south and flowed into the White River at Calico Rock (Izard County). It was a favorite location among float fishermen. One of the sportsmen who enjoyed fishing and camping along the North Fork River was Tom Shiras. Shiras was the owner of a Mountain Home Arkansas newspaper, the Baxter Bulletin. Shiras knew by building the dam on the North Fork, not only Mountain Home, but all of Baxter County would benefit economically.

Neil Compton, a doctor and conservationist from Bentonville (Benton County), wrote

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45 Billington, 37-38.
that when Shiras testified for the dam before Congress, he told them “Down where I come from there are 100,000 wild horses running loose.” Not only did that statement hold true for the North Fork River, but it also described most of the rivers in Arkansas, and the Corps was capable of harnessing the power of these rivers.

Clyde T. Ellis was elected to the Arkansas House of Representatives in 1933, and served until 1935. He then served in the Arkansas State Senate from 1935-1939. In 1939, Ellis was elected to the United States House of Representatives where he served until 1943. When Congressman Ellis defeated Congressman Claude A. Fuller in his bid for re-election in 1939, he ran on a platform promising the electrification of the rural countryside of Arkansas. By the early 1940s, less than ten percent of Arkansas residents had electricity. Generally, only those Arkansans who lived in the more urban and populated areas enjoyed the luxury of electric power. Representative Ellis became a key force behind building the Norfork Dam, complete with a hydroelectric power plant. Norfork Dam was completely operationally by 1944.

Norfork Lake inundated 400 acres of the most prosperous pieces of land in Baxter County. The initial reason for constructing the dam was for flood control. As the lake filled, it covered the land that would have been prone to the White River’s flood waters. As with all of the Ozark dam projects, the reasons for building dams became more about increased recreation and tourism, than the original promise of flood control and power.

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47 Compton, 12.
50 Compton, 9.
World War II brought planning for the Buffalo River reservoirs to a standstill. However in 1944, upon being given notice of a public hearing, the Corps provided information on the possibility of another reservoir at the middle of the Buffalo near Gilbert (Searcy County). When asked about the dam projects in March of 1945, Colonel Roy Burdick, the Little Rock District Engineer for the Corps, responded that the Gilbert project was only under consideration, and that no official recommendations had been made. No further plans to place dams on the Buffalo were discussed until the 1950s.

New political players began to emerge who would play prominent roles in future efforts to dam the Buffalo. In 1942, John L. McClellan won his election bid to the United States Senate. Clyde Ellis, who was serving in the United States House of Representatives, was a long-term supporter of rural electrification. From 1943 through 1967, he went on to become executive secretary of the Rural Electrification Administration, a division of the Department of Agriculture. Ellis supported McClellan in a subsequent runoff election for a Senate seat only after receiving an assurance from McClellan that, if elected, he would continue to advocate for statewide electrification.

In 1943, J. William Fulbright replaced Ellis in the United States House of Representatives. Fulbright was a Democrat, as well as the youngest man in the United States to serve as president of a university. He was appointed as university president at

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52 Colonel Roy D. Burdick to Mr. William H. Parton, March 31, 1945, Fulbright Papers, BCN71, F28, University of Arkansas Library, Fayetteville, AR.
54 Clyde Ellis, Personal Diary, August 5, 1942, Clyde Taylor Ellis Papers, Box 1, folder 8, Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville, AR.
the University of Arkansas in 1939. He would serve in the United States House of Representatives until 1945, when he was succeeded by James W. Trimble.\(^{55}\)

Circuit Judge James W. Trimble was born and raised in the small community of Possum Trot (Carroll County). Upon receiving a degree from the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, Trimble became a history teacher. He eventually moved to Berryville (Carroll County), where he practiced law. Trimble would serve the county as prosecuting attorney and then as circuit judge.\(^{56}\) When James W. Trimble succeeded J. William Fulbright in 1945, he became the representative of Arkansas’s Third District.\(^{57}\) Trimble was a major supporter of federal water projects.

Senator McClellan also became a key figure in hydroelectric power on the White and Arkansas Rivers. He worked with both rural electric cooperatives and private power companies to see that even the most rural areas in Arkansas received electricity.\(^{58}\) Hydroelectric power was lauded by Arkansas politicians continuously to meet the needs of the rural communities. On December 21, 1948, Clyde Ellis wrote President Harry S. Truman to ask him to compel the Corps to accelerate the use of Arkansas’s rivers to


\(^{56}\) Compton, 20.


\(^{58}\) John McClellan, Senate Speech on Flood Control bills H.R. 3961 and H.R. 4485, November 22, 1944, Box 423, File 7, John McClellan Collection, Ouachita Baptist University, Arkadelphia, AR.
provide much needed electricity. On October 2, 1951, Governor Sydney McMath also wrote President Truman to urge him to press the Corps to take advantage of the state’s rivers for desperately needed power. Many homes along the Buffalo had electricity by the late 1950s. Power poles were seen by residents “flying through the air into Ben Hur” (Newton County), an isolated community and the last in the area to obtain electric service.

In regards to the Upper White River Basin Projects, the Corps began Bull Shoals Dam with great encouragement by Representative Trimble and Senator McClellan in 1947. Bull Shoals was constructed on the White River at the Baxter/ Marion County line. It is 2,256 feet long, and stands 256 feet high. There are eight power generating units capable of producing 361,000 kilowatts. Upon its completion in 1951, Bull Shoals Dam was the fifth largest hydroelectric generating dam in the United States. President Harry Truman attended its dedication ceremony in 1952. The benefits for the area surrounding Bull Shoals were greater than had been for those from the Norfork Dam. The creation of the reservoir resulted in two lakes, which spawned the retirement communities of Lakeview (Baxter County), and Bull Shoals (Marion County).

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59 Clyde T. Ellis to President Harry Truman, December 21, 1941, Sydney Sanders McMath Papers, 1948-1952, Box 30, Folder 898, Arkansas History Commission, Little Rock, AR.
60 Governor Sydney McMath to President Harry Truman, October 8, 1951, Sydney Sanders McMath Papers, 1948-1952, Box 30, Folder 898, Arkansas History Commission, Little Rock, AR.
63 Blevins, 293.
In 1960, James Trimble, John McClellan, and Clyde Ellis were among the dignitaries who attended the groundbreaking for Beaver Dam. It is located near Eureka Springs in the small community of Busch (Carroll County). Beaver Dam is 2,575 feet long, and stands 228 feet high. In 1962, the completion of the Beaver Dam was considered by many as the most stunning of the White River reservoirs.\textsuperscript{64} The Water Supply Act of 1958 provided the Beaver Dam reservoir supply water for both industrial and municipal purposes. Water from the reservoir benefited Fayetteville and Springdale (Washington County), as well as Bentonville and Rogers (Benton County).\textsuperscript{65}

After nearly three decades of dam construction in and around the Ozarks, it was only reasonable to assume that dams were a positive, progressive achievement. Certainly to any resident who lived in surrounding counties, the boom that occurred in Mountain Home (Baxter County), following the creation of Norfork Lake was hard to ignore. Mountain Home quickly became one of the Ozarks’s largest retirement communities. The number of lodges, restaurants, and resorts in the area grew and offered much needed employment opportunities.\textsuperscript{66} Beaver Lake (Carroll County), had the same effect on the tourist destination of Eureka Springs. For some, the possibility for similar opportunities in the counties surrounding the Buffalo River seemed too advantageous to ignore should reservoirs be built.

A fact that was not immediately apparent concerning the construction of the large dams and man-made lakes was that although some of the nearby towns prospered, and a

\textsuperscript{64} Compton, 22.
\textsuperscript{66} Blevins, 293.
small number of local businesspeople benefited monetarily, very few rural farmers did. People who lived on the rural farmland having the richest soil along the White River watched their farms sink below the rising water of the reservoirs. Many rural farmers supported dam projects because they saw the chance to make money from possible employment opportunities. This view proved to be a short-term solution that precluded the option for a long-term improvement for their rural lifestyles. These residents never felt the relief promised to them by dam proponents.67

Historian Brooks Blevins best described the retirement communities that grew from the lakes, as a mirror image to the first resort communities. “Outsiders” or “flatlanders” flocked to them because the cost of living was so much lower than their previous residences. Tax rates in the rural areas were much less than in the major cities. The crime rate compared to the major cities was almost non-existent. The newcomers bought homes grander than the small, wooden homes of the local population. Outside land speculators and a few local businesspeople built the communities around the man-made lakes, and the communities filled with retirees who had no original ties to the area. Some residents did benefit from manual jobs that existed while building the new communities. Merchants who already owned local stores did prosper. However, the retirement villages that grew out of the construction of the dams and the man-made reservoirs, changed the existing culture as drastically as they did the landscape.68 Thus, the effects of these dams were seen by some as highly positive, while others worried at the profound change they created.

68 Blevins, 295.
In the flurry of Corps projects taking place along the White River following World War II, very little had been mentioned regarding the Buffalo until 1954. In that year, the Corps recommended to Congress that both the Gilbert Dam and the Lone Rock Dam should be built. Both dams were originally slated to be constructed to provide hydroelectric power and flood control. During 1956, and again in 1957, Congress passed river and harbor flood control bills, which included two dams on the Buffalo River. President Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953-1961) vetoed each bill. He found them to be fiscally irresponsible and unnecessary, given that such a large number of Arkansas water projects were being funded at that time. President Eisenhower believed that adequate planning for many of the water projects, not just in Arkansas, but around the country had not taken place.

Because Congressman Trimble believed both dams on the Buffalo were necessary for the overall success of the White River Basin Plan, he unsuccessfully tried to force the Bureau of the Budget to change the cost formula so as to allow for the Gilbert and Lone Rock Dam construction. Trimble’s determination to place dams on the entire length of the White River and all its tributaries, lasted throughout his tenure in office. He continued to fight to bring federal funds into his district.

Senator J. William Fulbright was another key figure that worked to bring more water projects to the state of Arkansas. Fulbright’s 1962 re-election campaign brochure

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70 Pitcaithley, Let the River Be, 69-97.
promised that he had “promoted Arkansas’s national resource projects,” had helped procure “81 million dollars for dam projects,” and contributed to passing funding for three federal parks.\textsuperscript{72} When President Eisenhower vetoed the previous budget bills, Fulbright spoke out emphatically against the President’s actions. He reasoned that the denial of funds had been particularly devastating for water development in Arkansas.

In 1961, Congress appropriated $30,000 for the Corps to begin a comprehensive study specifically on the Lone Rock and Gilbert Dams to determine if any modifications needed to be done. The money was part of a budget package of $82.9 million approved by Congress to fund projects specifically on the Arkansas River, and other projects in Arkansas and Oklahoma.\textsuperscript{73}

Many people who expressed high praise for the accomplishments of the Corps and their work on the White River dams, wanted the construction of the Gilbert and Lone Rock Dams. One example of this was an editorial piece appearing in the \textit{Arkansas Gazette}, which stated that the White River system was one in a “series of permanent rebukes” to the people in society that believed that the government should “stand by while the substance of its people washes away.” The piece went on to say, it was criminal for the government to “permit its controllable waters to rush unused to the sea, carrying with them the topsoil that exists in sufficient quantity almost nowhere.”\textsuperscript{74} Congressmen were not the only proponents of the Lone Rock and Gilbert Dams. Business people and community leaders from surrounding towns were vocal champions


\textsuperscript{73} Associated Press, “$82.9 Million Fund for River Okayed,” \textit{Arkansas Gazette}, September 7, 1961.

\textsuperscript{74} “Controlling the Waters,” \textit{Arkansas Gazette}, May 1, 1961.
of the possibilities to expand prosperity in their areas, should the two dams and resulting reservoirs bring similar results as Norfork Dam did for Baxter County.

In 1957, the Buffalo River Dam Association was created to advocate for the two dams on the Buffalo. In 1961, the Buffalo River Improvement Association (BRIA) replaced the prior organization. BRIA was led by James R. Tudor, editor of the local Marshall (Searcy County) newspaper, the Marshall Mountain Wave. He was also an Associated Press reporter for the Arkansas Gazette. Tudor was a man that worked tirelessly to bring commerce to Searcy County. His main objective for the entire time he served as the leader of BRIA, as he fought to get the Gilbert and Lone Rock Dams built on the Buffalo was for the good of his community.75

Tudor held a public meeting in March 1961 at the Searcy County courthouse. In the meeting, he told the attendees that the possibility of the dam construction never looked better. He and the attending members decided that the time had come for action to advocate for the Corps, in regards to the Gilbert and Lone Rock projects. According to Tudor, their mission would be to contact all of the necessary governmental officials to confirm that all of the people who were from the intended areas were definitely in favor of the dams. The group’s ultimate objectives included promoting the construction of the dams; advocating for education and health in North Central Arkansas; enticing industrial and economic development by increased electric potential; and push for the construction of roads in the area.76

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The group was composed of representatives from five counties. Joining James Tudor was the elected chairperson of BRIA, Gibson Walsh, who was the manager of the Searcy County Title Company in Marshall. Kate Ruff was elected treasurer and secretary. Mrs. Ruff was the owner of the Sunset Motel and Restaurant in Marshall. Also in attendance were Luther H. Cavaness (Marion County), Tom Dearmore, who was the grandson of Tom Shiras (Baxter County), Arl Jones (Newton County), and I. C. Sutton (Boone County). For the small fee of one dollar, a citizen could join BRIA for a year. They committed to support Representative James W. Trimble in all efforts to secure the necessary legislation to build the two dams. Congressman Trimble worked tirelessly to get the necessary approval for the projects.

BRIA’s work and message depended on the probability that the newly built reservoirs would create the same prosperous environment for Searcy County, as Lake Norfork had done for Baxter County, and Beaver Lake and Bull Shoals had done for sections of Northwest Arkansas. BRIA promoted the assumption that there were no drawbacks to damming the Buffalo. The dams would help to provide flood control, which in turn would bring about water and soil conservation. The dams would also soon provide electric power for all residents, but most importantly they would facilitate needed economic growth in the area.

BRIA members believed that the dams and the resulting reservoirs would only make the river more beautiful, and in doing so would bring thousands of people to their

towns. According to BRIA, retirees from around the country would flock to Marshall with money to invest in the surrounding countryside by buying homes in future retirement villages. Tom Dearmore told a reporter for the Arkansas Gazette that tourists were “softies.” They would not want to drive their cars down rough gravel roads to get to a river so shallow, that they would have to drag their canoes. According to Dearmore and the other members of BRIA, tourists would be much more motivated to stay in a motel and fish from a beautiful lakeshore. The many motels built along the banks of Lakes Norfork and Bull Shoals on the White River were successful examples used to prove their point.  

Eventually, the Marshall Business and Professional Women’s Club led by Mrs. Millard Mott joined BRIA. Kate Ruff was an active member of the Women’s Club, and also a well-known pro-dam activist and a member of BRIA. Ruff was also a member of the Woman’s Clubs Executive Committee. The members of the Women’s Club traveled the state speaking about the advantages of the future dams. They appeared as guests on radio and television broadcasts, and also engaged in extensive letter writing campaigns.

The members of BRIA believed that building the Lone Rock and Gilbert Dams would facilitate a considerable boost to the local economy. Most land to be inundated, should the Gilbert Dam come to fruition, would have been in Searcy County. However, the people from Searcy County pushing for the construction of the dams were not the residents who lived along the Buffalo. The same individuals in Searcy County whose homes would be at the bottom of the new reservoirs, were not members of BRIA,

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regardless of the BRIA’s frequent use of terms such as “us locals” or “the folks who live here.” The “folks” who lived there, actually lived in nearby towns or owned unused acreage within the Buffalo watershed. They did not have active farms or homesteads, as did the families who had been “down on the Buffalo” for generations.

It was quite clear that Searcy County, as well as Newton County, were two of the poorest counties in Arkansas. In 1960, the total population of Searcy County was 8,124. The per capita income per family was $496, which fell well below the state average of $873. In 1962, thirty percent of Searcy County residents were receiving government assistance.  

Strawberry crops, grown by the Flintlock Strawberry Association, had been a profitable cash resource in the county beginning in the 1940s. By the early 1960s, strawberry crops were decimated by drought and combined with a lack of an available labor force, strawberry farming was no longer a key component of the Searcy County economy.

Successful acquisition of construction projects by the Corps in individual states usually hinged on several factors such as the support of the state’s governor. In 1955, Arkansas citizens elected Orval Faubus governor. Governor Faubus was born in a simple cabin in Madison County. He became governor during one of the most volatile times in Arkansas history. One issue leading to this volatility was the evolving controversy over the damming of the Buffalo. For the first few years of his tenure as governor, Faubus refused to voice his opinion on the future of the Buffalo. He said that he would remain

silent because he did not want to influence the outcome unduly. Meanwhile, projects by the Corps needed to have champions in the House of Representatives and Senate.

Prior to his defeat by John Paul Hammerschmidt in 1966, Congressman J. W. Trimble was an ardent supporter of building dams on the Buffalo. Although Senator Fulbright initially supported the dams, his support would eventually wane as would Senator McClellan’s. Should any of the entities offer resistance to a pending project, the Corps became less likely to continue to pursue the issue.

One of the few measures taken to facilitate construction projects by the Corps was gaining support from the local media. On the local level, Corps projects needed majority support from the residents near the building sites. From the time the Corps revealed its plans for the construction of the two Buffalo River dams, James Tudor used his newspaper (*Marshall Mountain Wave*) as a tool to promote construction. Just as Tom Shiras had utilized the *Baxter Bulletin* to win the favor of locals for the building of Norfork Dam, Tudor used the *Marshall Mountain Wave*, and his access to the *Arkansas Gazette*, as a way to make his voice heard around the state. Tudor joined with the editor of the *Baxter Bulletin*, Pete Shiras, who was the grandson of Tom Shiras, and he worked closely with the editors of papers from the nearby towns such as the *Harrison Daily Times* and *Yellville Mountain Echo*. The power of the local newspapers in the rural Ozark Mountains cannot be understated. In the isolated communities of the Arkansas Ozarks, there was no better way for an individual to let his voice be heard by the entire

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85 Compton, 64.
area, than by writing to the local newspaper. For over a decade, Mr. Tudor and his circle of pro-dam associates utilized journalistic endeavors continuously in their campaign to dam the Buffalo.

In 1961, a group of boat dock operators and outfitters, known as the White River Trout Association wrote to the *Arkansas Gazette*. They revealed the organization’s plans to oppose construction of the Gilbert and Lone Rock Dams because of the uniqueness, untouched wilderness areas, and the scenic beauty surrounding the Buffalo. Elmo Hurst, spokesman and president of the Association wrote in the article, due to the Buffalo not having an adequate water supply, the lakes provided by the dams would be “unsightly and of little economic value.”

Appearing in the “From the People” column in the *Arkansas Gazette*, H.C. Wilmering, a resident of St. Joe and proponent for dam construction, commented that the White River group’s objections to building the dams were “simply preposterous,” considering the White River had been a better floating river then the Buffalo, and there had been multiple dams built on it. Wilmering said, “Have you heard of the ‘land of a thousand lakes’?” There can never be “too many lakes.” and he said, it would not be fair or “sporting” for one area of the state “to try and knock another area out of an opportunity.”

During the first week in December 1961, the Corps held a meeting in Marshall. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss with the public, the new possibilities regarding the Buffalo River projects, which came to the Corps’s attention from the studies ordered by Congress. Attendees of the meeting were assured that the methods of providing

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hydroelectric power were under discussion in order to ensure the most efficient alternative would be utilized when the dams were built. The Corps had been paying considerable attention to a new design for the pumping stations being used on the Black River at the Taum Sauk Mountain Reservoir in Missouri. The alternative method would be turbines. The meeting ended by stating that Representative Trimble favored the pumps because they would be more cost effective.88

On January 3, 1962, the Corps gave notice of another public hearing scheduled for January 30, 1962. This meeting was called to fully discuss the findings of the report authorized in 1958 to conduct a survey of the Buffalo. The report included a study of the feasibility of building a power plant and reservoir at Lone Rock, as well as a “multipurpose” reservoir at Gilbert. By holding a meeting, the Corps believed that a completion of the survey was secured, since survey completion required a meeting with the public.89

According to Neil Compton, founder of the Ozark Society, this notice was followed by an unannounced report from the National Park Service showing interest in placing national protection on the Buffalo River. The meeting of the Corps, and the simultaneous interest demonstrated by the National Park Service (NPS) to consider placing the Buffalo under federal protection, began a decade-long struggle over the fate of the river and the residents who lived along its banks. The residents along that river believed that the dam prospect was just that, a prospect. They could not have fathomed that their lives had just been placed between the proverbial “rock and a hard place.”

89 Compton, 88.
They were caught in circumstances in which two factions who had nothing personal to lose, but had the power of the government behind them that would work diligently to control the Buffalo’s future. The residents who would be the most affected by future decisions would be caught in the conflict between these two factions.
Part II: A Conservation Movement Formed to Save the Buffalo

As proponents for building two dams on the Buffalo River became organized and vocally advocated for their construction, other local residents began to take note. Meanwhile, the people who lived along the Buffalo had remained isolated for decades as they maintained a century old lifestyle. Deep in the recesses of the Ozark Mountains, industry did not exist nor did many of the visages of modernity. Although paved roads such as Highways 21, 7, and 14 served the region as major transportation arteries, the vast majority of secondary roads remained dirt and gravel. For many of the residents of this isolated region, it was difficult to imagine that their “peaceful Mayberry-esque” communities would soon become an object of attention for conservation-minded individuals, who perceived the potential environmental damage posed by damming the Buffalo.90

As a result of this, three groups soon emerged. Each had a different view of damming the Buffalo. The two dominant groups included one advocating for the dams, and one opposing the dams which did not represent the local residents. The third group was the residents that lived along the Buffalo. These individuals were an unrepresented element in what would soon become the battle for control of the Buffalo. Although the Buffalo is relatively small, only 148 miles in length, by the early 1950s people from around the state and beyond were aware of and made frequent visits to the river. The Corps and the people who championed the building of multiple dams on the river during the late 1950s through the 1970s, were not the only ones who had plans for the river. The second group of interested persons centered around people who had developed a fondness

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90 Toinette Lackey Madison, Interview by Author, Harrison, AR, April 28, 2016.
for not only the Buffalo, but the scenic beauty and history of the area. The primary
difference between the second group and those advocating for the dams was their love of
everything about the Buffalo. They fully intended to save it from being dammed. They
wanted to protect it from the further exploitation of its diminishing resources. Just as the
groups from Searcy County were determined to control the waters of the Buffalo for
their purposes regardless of the consequences to the families who lived there, saving it
became the priority of the conservationists (second group), even if saving it meant the
removal of the Buffalo River Valley residents. The three groups consisting of the dam
proponents (first group), the conservationists (second group), and the area’s residents
(third group) would each play a role in the future of the Buffalo.

From the late nineteenth century, measures had been taken in the United States to help preserve national resources. With the Act of 1891, known as the Forest Reserve Act, the President of the United States was given the power to attain public lands covered by timber, wildlife reserves, and wetlands to preserve American natural resources for future generations. President Theodore Roosevelt was a conservationist, who believed that if resources were exhausted, there would be nothing left for the generations to enjoy. His mission was to regulate public lands to avoid complete exploitation and depletion of natural resources. Roosevelt battled with Congress throughout his first term in office, but used an executive order to establish Crater Lake National Park (Oregon).\footnote{Michael McGerr, \textit{A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America 1870-1920}, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) 165-169.} In 1905, Roosevelt placed the forests located on public lands under the stewardship of the
Department of Agriculture. The new division was named the United States Forest Service.92

In 1908, Roosevelt named 917,944 acres of land north of the Arkansas River as the Ozark National Forest, and placed its headquarters in Harrison (Boone County). In 1909, 608,537 additional acres were added to the original allocation. There are sixteen counties in the Ozark National Forest including: Newton, Baxter, Searcy, and Marion. The majority of acreage is in Newton County. The Ozark National Forest is predominantly covered in hardwoods including Walnut and Oak, and was the first federally protected stand of hardwoods in the nation.93 The Buffalo runs through the Ozark National Forest in Newton County.

Conservation was not only a pet project for Roosevelt. President Ulysses S. Grant signed a bill to make Yellowstone (Wyoming), the first National Park in 1872. Groups such as the Sierra Club, National Audubon Society, Wilderness Society, and the National Wildlife Federation were established in 1892, 1905, 1935, and 1936 respectively. They were created to protect animals from being hunted to extinction, and preserve national treasures and antiquities.

In 1916, President Woodrow Wilson signed the “Organic Act” creating the National Park Service (NPS). The act stated, the purpose of the NPS was to protect “parks, monuments, and reservations” by whatever means necessary to “conserve the

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scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife.”

Keeping with President Theodore Roosevelt’s devotion to conservation, the objective of the NPS was to ensure that future generations would still have national resources that had been available to their ancestors. The NPS became part of the Department of the Interior.

The exact terms of what constitutes conservation has changed and evolved over time. President Theodore Roosevelt was an avid big game hunter and hunted for sport. The early meaning of conservation during his lifetime was to ensure there would be future game trophies to hunt by maintaining the animal populations, as well as the habitat needed for animals to thrive. Arkansas lagged behind the majority of states in instituting conservation measures. In fact, Arkansas was one of the last seven states in the nation to establish a conservation agency, which was created in 1915.

Wildlife had previously been in ample supply in Arkansas. In 1818, geologist and explorer Henry R. Schoolcraft traveled on foot from Potosi, Missouri, into Arkansas, and down the White River. Schoolcraft saw abundant wildlife during his time in the Ozarks including white-tail deer, black bear, wild turkey, beaver, eastern elk, otter, and raccoon. Although Schoolcraft did not mention that he had ever seen bison, he did discuss running across a hunter who lived in a log house along the White River. This man had smoked, fresh “Buffaloe meat,” which hung in his smokehouse, and buffalo skins were on his walls.

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96 Henry R. Schoolcraft, Journal of a Tour into the Interior of Missouri and Arkansaw From Potosi, or Mine d Burton, in Missouri Territory, in a South-West Direction,
By 1938, when Arkansas established the Buffalo River State Park (Searcy County) the buffalo and native eastern elk, which had at one time roamed the Buffalo River Valley, had long since become extinct in Arkansas as had the red wolf. Also, the white-tail deer population in the Boston Mountains had declined dramatically. The sightings of mountain lions had also became greatly limited. Beavers had been trapped to dangerously low levels, as had eastern wild turkey. People from the Buffalo River Valley were forced to hunt game in different locations throughout the state for food. Although the wildlife had been thinned to dangerously low numbers, Ozarkers’s continued need for sustenance remained. These people had always used venison and bear meat to feed their families. The permanent loss of those resources, especially during the 1930s, would have been catastrophic to the poor living in the Arkansas Highlands. The residents could not afford to buy food from a store.

Having no regulatory body to control the hunting of game in Arkansas created a growing concern for hunters, trappers, and even fishermen. In 1915, Governor George W. Hayes signed legislation to create the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission (AGFC). They instituted mandatory licensing for hunting and fishing, and created seasons to allow for the optimal hunting and trapping of each animal. The AGFC operated from the fees collected by licensing. They restocked the deer population with deer from various

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98 Toinette Lackey Madison interview.
locations in Arkansas.\textsuperscript{99} The AGFC’s work was a necessity to the sustainability of a healthy game population in the Arkansas Ozarks. The residents of the Ozarks Highlands, who had for decades been free to hunt at will, did not like “outliers” telling them what to do.\textsuperscript{100}

As with animals, it seemed to the early settlers that timber in the vast Arkansas forests would remain plentiful forever. By 1890, the lumber industry had been established in the Ozarks. The biggest and most choice trees were stripped from a forest first. Before the intervention of the United States Forest Service (USFS) in 1909, practicing effective timber management was unheard of. Entire stands of the most choice trees including Walnut, Oak, Cherry, and Cedar were cleared from the most accessible areas. The practice of slash and burn only ensured that the rejuvenation of the forest would take longer to occur because young trees died when burned. In 1930, the USFS leased land in Russellville, Arkansas, at Arkansas Polytechnic College to plant tree seedlings. For a decade, the USFS planted trees grown at Arkansas Tech in an effort to reforest existing fields in the national forest that were not previously capable of producing a desired tree population.\textsuperscript{101}

Unfortunately, the people of the Ozark Highlands had little interest in being told what to do by the forest rangers of the USFS. As with hunting regulations, Ozark


\textsuperscript{100} Fred Bell and Richard Holland, Interview with Suzie Rogers, November 8, Interview 008, Cultural Resource Management Records, Oral History Project, Interview Files, Buffalo National River Headquarters, Harrison, AR., 2007.

\textsuperscript{101} Sharon M. W. Bass, \textit{For the Trees}. 
Highlanders were not receptive to any “outsider’s” directives. For generations, they had enjoyed uncontrolled access to the forests surrounding their lands. Trees were cut at will, and for whatever reason deemed necessary. If they needed the lumber to build or to sell for needed cash, the people along the Buffalo did what was needed in order to survive. With the arrival of the forest rangers, rules for timber usage were put into place. These rules covered every aspect of forest usage on lands claimed by the government including the land in the Ozark National Forest. For many years, forest rangers fought an endless number of protest fires in an attempt to overwhelm the USFS to facilitate their exit from the area.\textsuperscript{102} The continued illegal harvest of the trees within the Ozark National Forest occurred without abatement. By 1940, it was estimated that only about twenty percent of the nation’s original pre-European arrival timber was left untouched.\textsuperscript{103}

Timber harvest was practiced illegally in the National Forest, as it was a commonplace for trees to be cut from land belonging to private citizens without their expressed permission. According to Neil Compton, founder of the Ozark Society and author of the \textit{Battle for the Buffalo}, the original serious call to action to save the Buffalo River and environs came to fruition because of the theft of timber. In 1960, timber was stolen from property belonging to a Mrs. Harry S. Primrose, who lived in the Buffalo River watershed in Lost Valley (Newton County).\textsuperscript{104}

Additional conservation/environmentalist efforts centered around Lost Valley, when it became a pet project of Ken Smith. Ken Smith came to the Buffalo River in

\textsuperscript{104} Compton, 61-62.
1953. He began to learn and document every nook of the Buffalo and all of its tributaries.\textsuperscript{105} Although Smith succeeded in his mission to extensively chart and map the Buffalo, his biography is somewhat vague. In 1953, Smith joined a small hiking club while he was a student at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville. This is how he found Lost Valley, which is an isolated box canyon south of Ponca (Newton County).\textsuperscript{106}

In 1958, Smith wrote two articles which were published in the magazine section of the \textit{Arkansas Gazette}. His articles included details of the immense beauty of the Buffalo, Lost Valley, and Ponca.\textsuperscript{107}

In the late 1950s, Smith began working with the Nature Conservancy, a national non-profit conservation group, to buy acreage in Lost Valley, which would protect and preserve the area. Although Smith had been authorized by the Nature Conservancy to buy Primrose’s land, she refused to sell. Soon after her refusal, a logging road was cut through her property, and while she was away for the day, her timber was cut and hauled away by local loggers. Smith grew discouraged by what the logging crews left behind, and handed all of his information concerning saving Lost Valley over to Neil Compton. Smith then promptly told Compton of his plans to move to California.

Compton said, this was the beginning of his involvement to save the Buffalo. He felt that should the Buffalo and its tributaries be protected, Lost Valley would be afforded the same protection. In 1961, Compton and Evangeline Archer, “an elderly conservation-
minded lady,” began the steps to form a local chapter of the Nature Conservancy, the Arkansas Nature Conservancy. 108

Neil Compton was born in Falling Spring Flats (Benton County) in 1912. In 1935, he received a degree in Zoology and Geology from the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville. He married his wife Laurene that same year, and they had three children. Compton also attended the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, where he received a medical degree. In 1942, he joined the Navy in which he served for four years. When he returned to the United States following World War II, he joined the Ready Reserve. 109 He moved to Bentonville, where he opened an obstetrics and gynecology practice.

Compton first visited the Buffalo River while a student at the University of Arkansas in 1932. He went on a weekend float fishing trip with a friend. While recalling his adventure into the backwoods of the Buffalo, Compton wrote that the one thing he would always remember from his adventure was that “back yonder in the hills some folks didn’t wear shoes.” 110 He developed an interest in his native surroundings from that visit, and soon became an avid hiker and floater.

At approximately the same time the Buffalo River Dam Association was officially formed in Marshall (Searcy County), Harold Alexander, known by many as the “father of Arkansas Conservation,” became aware of the extent to which the Lone Rock and Gilbert

108 Compton, 63-65.
110 Compton, 40.
Dam Projects would affect the Buffalo River should they be built.\textsuperscript{111} Alexander was the Chief Wildlife Biologist for the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission. Virginia Alexander, his wife, would later recall how he went to Neil Compton, and told him how devastating the projects would be to the area should they come to fruition. In 1956, Alexander wrote a series of articles in \textit{Arkansas Gazette} warning that the dams would be a disaster for the Buffalo, and its surrounding environment.\textsuperscript{112}

Alexander’s most loyal supporters, members of the Federation of Garden Clubs of Arkansas and the Arkansas Wildlife Federation, engaged in early efforts to bring awareness to the need to oppose placing dams on the Buffalo.\textsuperscript{113} In February 1957, an article appeared in the \textit{Arkansas Gazette} advising that a letter had been sent to Arkansas congressmen by a group of “Nature Lovers,” regarding their concerns over the construction of the Lone Rock and Gilbert Dams. In the letter, the group voiced their disdain for the trend set by government officials to impound all of the nation’s free-flowing streams and rivers. The letter was signed by the secretary of the Arkansas Audubon Society, Douglas James.\textsuperscript{114} Two months later, the Federation Garden Clubs of Arkansas passed a resolution within their 336 clubs to support permanent protection of the Buffalo. In a letter forwarded by them to Arkansas congressmen, they wrote that by preserving various scenic and unique recreational features throughout the state there

\textsuperscript{112} Ben F. Johnson, III, \textit{Arkansas in Modern America 1930-1999}, (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2000), 176-177.
\textsuperscript{113} Virginia Alexander, Interview with Suzie Rogers, February 6, Interview 002, Cultural Resource Management Records, Oral History Project, Interview Files, Buffalo National River Headquarters, Harrison, AR., 2006.
\textsuperscript{114} Elizabeth Carpenter, “Protests Mount Against Move to Dam Buffalo,” \textit{Arkansas Gazette}, February 24, 1957.
would be an “increase in the value of the Ozarks region as a playground for the Central United States.”

As conservationists/environmentalists rallied in various groups to demand protection of the Buffalo, area residents who were familiar with the north central Arkansas region were beginning to see the consequences of the existing dams on the White River. It was no longer a slim, free-flowing river. No longer could visitors see the high limestone bluffs that had previously loomed above the White River. The deep, lush valleys along the White River were all eventually filled with water. The White River, now dammed, consisted of a series of wide, deep lakes which backed water into the many tributaries. No longer were outfitters needed for the many float trips that had been such a popular past time for fishermen on both the upper and lower White River for decades. Although Lake Taneycomo had done very little to change the fishery of the White River, every subsequent dam constructed would forever alter the sustainability of native fish. The man-made lakes had become popular for recreational purposes, and a few local businesspeople had prospered from their creation.

For several years following the construction of the White River’s multiple dams, the water remained warm enough to allow “hot” fishing, while the reservoirs provided a catchment area. By 1960, carbon-dioxide from the cold depths of the reservoirs had caused the demise of all warm water species of fish and mussels that had once been abundant in the White River. In 1955, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service established the Norfork National Fish Hatchery, which was established to stock the

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tailwaters below White River dams with cold water trout. Although trout would not be capable of spawning, the hatchery implemented a put-and-take trout program to continuously stock the cold streams with Rainbow, Cutthroat, and Brown Trout. Further environmental changes occurred due to the frequently fluctuating water levels, which led to the loss of viable food sources for fish species. The end of frequent flooding caused agricultural areas to move closer to the White River’s banks, which caused contaminants by fertilizer run-off. These factors were all instrumental in ending commercial fishing on the White River.

In January 1961, the Arkansas’s Third District Congressman, James Trimble, introduced a bill in the House of Representatives for the construction of the Lone Rock and Gilbert Dam. He would continue to do this annually until 1966, when John Paul Hammerschmidt defeated him. That same year the Buffalo River Improvement Association (BRIA) replaced the Buffalo River Dam Association in Marshall. For James Tudor and the members of BRIA, it had become apparent that there was a large group of like-minded people from different locations and from all walks of life, who were willing to have their voices heard in opposition to the construction of the Lone Rock and Gilbert Dams.

Newspaper articles began to appear written by people who lived outside the area, but who had known the wonders of the Buffalo for years. One of these was Harold C.

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Hedges, who often visited Arkansas from Kansas City, Kansas, to enjoy the scenic beauty of the Buffalo. He chose the Buffalo over the “large impoundments” available closer to his home, and the many others available in Arkansas. He wrote a letter for the “From the People” column of the Arkansas Gazette entitled “Plea to Save Our Buffalo,” in which he stated that he was drawn to the unique features of the Buffalo. He especially enjoyed the “giant limestone bluffs, clear fishing water, splashing waterfalls, crystal pools reflecting the everlasting hills.” Instead of seeking recreation on “man-made lakes” with “loud motors” and “fast boats,” Hedges preferred the “remoteness” of the hundred plus miles of canoeable water. He was the president of the Ozark Wilderness Waterways Club of Kansas City. His final plea was passionate, “Don’t dam it to death, don’t bury it alive. Preserve it as it is forever.”

Mrs. Joe L. Rector, Girl Scout leader of Mariner Troop 244 from Shawnee Mission, Kansas, also wrote a letter to the Arkansas Gazette to add her voice to the growing conservation movement to save the Buffalo. Mrs. Rector explained that her Girl Scout troop composed of high school seniors had been planning to make their final trip as a member of a Girl Scouts troop to the Buffalo. They had seen a “wonderful article” in Time magazine featuring full page pictures of the sand bars, and high bluffs along the Buffalo. She said they wanted nothing more than to float the river and spend nights camping on those sandbars. Her plea was to preserve the Buffalo in its natural state by “setting it aside as a National Park.”

Interestingly, the article to which Rector referred appeared in the July 14, 1961 issue of *Time* magazine, and it also came to the attention of Neil Compton and Evangeline Archer of the Arkansas Nature Conservancy. According to Compton, when they saw the article featuring outdoor recreation in the United States, they were “dumbfounded.” They were shocked that a club they had never heard of from Kansas, could have contributed such an insightful article on the Buffalo River. The article was written by the secretary of the Ozark Wilderness Waterways Club (OWWC), Harold Hedges. Mr. Hedges was the same “Kansan,” who wrote the “Plea to Save Our Buffalo” article previously mentioned.

Evangeline Archer, immediately began searching for the contact information of Harold Hedges and his wife, Margaret. She found them in Lake Quivira, Kansas. Following World War II, Harold and Margaret Hedges had become adventurers in the Ozark Mountains of Missouri and Arkansas. In Arkansas, they had become frequent floaters of the Buffalo, as well as of the Mulberry River (Newton, Franklin, and Johnson Counties), and Big Piney Creek (Newton, Pope, and Johnson Counties). By the time they had met Ms. Archer and Mr. Compton, the Hedges had traveled every canoeable stream in the Ozark Mountains. Compton was surprised to find out the Hedges, along with a group of fellow floating enthusiasts, often traveled all the way from Kansas just to enjoy an excellent day-long float on the Buffalo. They would become avid supporters of the conservation movement to stop big dam projects on the Buffalo.

From the beginning of his time as a United States Senator, J. William Fulbright, had supported the construction of the Gilbert and Lone Rock Dam on the Buffalo.

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122 Compton, 77.
123 Compton, 78.
Through the 1950s, he supported all legislation designed to attain that end. By 1961, activists against dam construction had written and called Fulbright to try and persuade him that the preservation of the Buffalo was a necessity. They told him that the uniqueness of the Buffalo was too valuable to destroy by building dams which would cover its unique features. These grassroots conservationist efforts were effective. In March 1961, Senator Fulbright wrote to Stewart Udall, Secretary of the Interior (1961-1969), suggesting that the Buffalo would make an excellent candidate for addition to the national parks.  

In September 1961, the NPS announced its intentions to conduct a survey to determine the feasibility of placing federal protection on the land surrounding the Buffalo by adding it into the NPS. Senator Fulbright had received appropriations of $7,000 to fund a survey team, and investigate the area surrounding the Buffalo. Compton and a small group of conservationists acted as their guide. Following the survey, Compton contacted Don Winfrey, a draftsman, to draw the first map of the “Proposed Buffalo River National Recreational Area.”

To the landowners who lived along the Buffalo, the map foretold the future by mapping what was to be included, should the NPS decide to make the Buffalo the first National River.

Although there had been no direct announcement by the Corps, if the land within the Buffalo watershed be inundated by the waters of two reservoirs, the homes in the area would be destroyed. This was generally known, although it was not a topic discussed.

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126 Compton, 85.
publically by landowners in the early years of planning. The notice by the NPS had laid out the facts for all to plainly see. Although there had been several members of BRIA, who had mentioned that they owned land along the Buffalo that would be underwater, they did not live on that land. Public discussions were virtually non-existent by the landowners that lived in the Buffalo River Valley regarding the probability of losing their land, until interest was later shown by the NPS to protect the river and environs.

When learning that the NPS had a growing interest in the Buffalo, the Corps announced a public meeting for January 30, 1962 at the National Guard Armory in Marshall to discuss the dispute over the Buffalo. An article in the *Arkansas Gazette* announced that “a group from Marion County” (BRIA), had offered a compromise to the original proposals for two dams on the Buffalo.\(^{127}\) The compromise consisted of one large dam at the Gilbert location to provide hydroelectricity and flood control, and smaller backup dams along the river’s tributaries. The headwaters above the Gilbert Dam could be added to the NPS, and the area below the dam would be used for trout fishing.\(^{128}\) The January meeting would be the third major study by the Corps involving the Gilbert and Lone Rock Dam Project.

While attending the meeting in Marshall, Neil Compton and his anti-dam proponents received their first insight into the determination and organizational skills of James Tudor and BRIA. A notice appeared in local papers that on the day of the meeting

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the mayor of Marshall, Ralph Treadwell, proclaimed all businesses in downtown Marshall would be closed from 10:00 am until 12:00 noon to allow for all local businesspersons to attend. An announcement was made that any person in favor of dam construction who did not feel they were capable of writing a “presentable” letter could go to any of the local banks, where a secretary would be available to write their statements for them.129

The Ozark Wilderness Waterways Club, Arkansas Audubon Society, Arkansas Wildlife Federation, Great Rivers Outdoor Writers, and Fayetteville Council of Garden Clubs, as well as a variety of individuals from around the state that were not affiliated with a specific group, joined Neil Compton and members of the Arkansas Nature Conservancy, and together presented the views of the conservationists at the Marshall meeting. Also, people from various parts of the country who advocated to preserving the Buffalo, were in attendance at this meeting.130

The individuals who represented pro-dam sentiments were primarily local citizens, business owners, and employees from the closed businesses in Marshall. This group included school children, as local schools were also closed for the meeting.

According to Compton, the meeting first catered to the pro-dam attendees, since the Corps had called the meeting. The first speaker announced by BRIA was Reverend L. R. Winners, who closed his oratory by proclaiming “Let’s all pray for the dams.”131 High school students with tags on their lapels that read “Let’s Dam the Buffalo,” were the next

131 Compton, 93.
group to speak. All those in attendance for the NPS, were the last to speak before the Corps that day. Compton did not speak, but issued a written statement.

The *Arkansas Gazette* reported an account of the gathering in Marshall the following day. It indicated that well before 10:00 am when the meeting convened, more than 500 people filled the available chairs. Members of the conservationists, and 300 Searcy County residents stood around the room’s periphery. A total of twenty-five persons addressed the meeting. Tom Dearmore, the editor of the *Baxter Bulletin* (Baxter County), told the room that he was far more concerned about bettering the economy in a destitute region than about “birds, flowers, and people who like to camp in remote places.” The article said that Reverend Winners vowed that the benefits from the dam being built in Searcy County, would “justify any effort, any pressure, all the co-operation we can obtain, any means to obtain their construction.” William C. Apple, President of the Arkansas Wildlife Federation, spoke against dam construction as did Ray Lockard, Chairperson of the Ozarks Wilderness Waterways Club. Lockard said that “God created it (the Buffalo) free, and man should leave it free.” He told the Corps, “If you destroy a river, you can’t just build another.”

Two pieces of information became apparent to the conservationists in Marshall that day. The first was how volatile and possibly violent the situation in Searcy County could become. Compton said, they initially learned this information because a woman who attended the meeting with him, Doris Larimore, a dam opponent from Rogers had a

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132 Compton, 93.
lawyer friend in Marshall named John Driver who also had anti-dam sentiments. When approached by them to join their efforts to stop the dam construction by starting an opposition group in Searcy County, Driver declined. He told Larimore and Compton that the situation in Marshall had grown extremely hostile as anyone opposed to the dams faced the very real threat of violence. Even if they did not commit physical violence against one of their detractors, social and financial threats by others in the community posed a definite risk.\footnote{Compton, 92.}

Virginia Alexander, the wife of Harold Alexander, would later confirm that people in Marshall were intimidated by BRIA members. A friend who lived in Marshall confided to Alexander, “We’re all too scared to say anything, but we really don’t want a dam here.”\footnote{Virginia Alexander interview.} The friend said they just wanted it left the way it was. One heated exchange took place at the meeting when James Tudor told Mary Virginia Ferguson, a conservationist, “You go to hell.”\footnote{Virginia Alexander interview.} Ferguson’s response to Tudor was, “I’ll meet you there.”\footnote{Virginia Alexander interview.}

The second thing Compton and associates learned as a result of the Marshall meeting was that the conservationists were going to have to consolidate their efforts and become a more organized unit, if they planned to be successful against James Tudor and BRIA. Therefore, Compton and his fellow conservationists of the Arkansas Conservancy began creating an official organization specifically designed to meet the needs of their future efforts to preserve the Buffalo. Thus, the January 30, 1962, meeting at Marshall, was a pivotal movement in the escalation of the conflict over the Buffalo.

\footnote{Compton, 92.}
\footnote{Virginia Alexander interview.}
\footnote{Virginia Alexander interview.}
\footnote{Virginia Alexander interview.}
In March 1962, Neil Compton received welcomed news that United States Supreme Court Associate Justice William O. Douglas planned a visit to float the Buffalo. Compton recalled that Evangeline Archer and Margaret Hedges had been in constant contact with Justice Douglas about his proposed visit to fish and canoe down the Buffalo. The Ozark Wilderness Waterways Club was in charge of the entire three-day float adventure. Compton went on the journey to film and photograph Douglas’s visit.¹⁴¹

They were to float from the low water bridge in Ponca (Newton County), to Erbie (Newton County). The first night the floaters camped on the sandbar under the 500-foot-high Big Bluff. This was the same bluff featured in the Time magazine article written by Hedges, which had initially drawn Douglas’s interest prompting him to make the trip. Compton said the following morning, Justice Douglas climbed the trail to the top of the bluff. During his visit, Douglas’s guides showed him all of the points of interest along the way including the remote Hemmed-in-Hollow, and the awe-inspiring beauty of Buzzard Bluff and Goat Trail Bluff.¹⁴²

Given Douglas’s visit the amount of national publicity gained for the conservation movement was immense. News agencies from around the country covered the trip, and focused attention on the battle for the Buffalo. Justice Douglas, an adventurer and conservationist, had traveled the world enjoying various significant natural wonders. When the trip ended, he said that it was imperative for Arkansans to preserve the Buffalo “at all costs.”¹⁴³ While he urged the conservationists to keep up the fight and supported

¹⁴¹ Compton, 97.
the proposal by the NPS to protect the Buffalo, he warned that trying to defeat a
“bureaucracy like the Corps of Engineers” would be incredibly difficult.\textsuperscript{144}

BRIA members were furious over Douglas’s comments. Tudor devoted the entire
front page of the \textit{Marshall Mountain Wave} to articulate his anger. He wrote that
Douglas’s opinion was biased because he had not heard from the proponents for the
dams. He said that 72 percent of Searcy County residents were without indoor plumbing
of any kind, and that 30 percent of the residents of Searcy County received government
aid.\textsuperscript{145} Tudor then sent a telegram to President John F. Kennedy in which he stated, “Mr.
Douglas had condemned the one avenue open to the people of Searcy and Newton
Counties, Arkansas to gain economic growth through federal help.”\textsuperscript{146} He told the
President that he did not think that an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court should
comment on local issues, as it would promote unfair bias for the “people and
organizations that have definite ulterior motives in opposing those dams.”\textsuperscript{147}

With a “Letter to the Editor” in the \textit{Arkansas Gazette}, Evangeline Archer fired
back at the claims that members of the Arkansas Nature Conservancy had “vested
interests and ulterior motives” for fighting to save the Buffalo. Archer said that the
claims that members of the conservation movement were using fear and selfish motives
to keep the Buffalo in its natural state were untrue. She wrote, “more than a hundred
people” donated time and expenses and gave “unselfishly of their time” to educate the
citizenry that the Buffalo was magnificently unique, and if left as it was, the river would

\textsuperscript{146} Gazette News Service, “Dam Backer Score Douglas Buffalo Views,” \textit{Arkansas
Gazette}, May 2, 1962.
\textsuperscript{147} Gazette News Service, \textit{Arkansas Gazette}, May 2, 1962.
bring people from around the central United States to benefit the region economically. She closed her letter by stating that saving the Buffalo would bring “pride of achievement and benefit for the city, state, or nation.”

On May 24, 1962, Compton and his fellow advocates joined together to form the Ozark Society on the University of Arkansas campus in Fayetteville. Compton was elected as its president, and Evangeline Archer became the secretary. The primary objective of the Ozark Society was to preserve the Buffalo and its environs in their natural state, and promote the “knowledge and enjoyment of the Ozark-Ouachita mountain region.” The members paid dues of one dollar per year. At the organizational meeting for the Ozark Society, Compton showed “home movies” he had taken on the trip with Justice Douglas. Compton later wrote that he immediately went home and wrote a letter of intent to both Congressman James Trimble and Senator William Fulbright. In this correspondence, Compton informed Trimble and Fulbright of the formation of the Ozark Society, which included the scope of their organization and the determination by all to stop dams from being built on the Buffalo. Compton reminded them that Yellville and Marshall were not their sole constituents, as many members of the Ozark Society were also their constituents.

In July 1962, the Ozark Society began a letter writing campaign developed from a compiled list of conservationists and news agencies from around the country. They began to circulate petitions within the state calling for the development of a national park

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149 Pitcaithley, “Buffalo River,” 197.
151 Compton, 111-113.

By April 1963, the NPS once again conducted a survey to evaluate the Buffalo. The new investigation was a more in-depth examination, which included marking archeological sites, native plants and animals, and unique geological features. The resulting report noted that the Buffalo was an excellent example of a pristine, free-flowing waterway, which had immense ecological, historical, and biological value. It would make a highly desirable candidate for inclusion by the NPS. In closing the report, the investigators stated that should any changes be made to the Buffalo even by placing one dam on the river, the effect would be the loss of significance, which made the Buffalo and its environs eligible and desirable for national protection, as it would no longer be free-flowing.\footnote{Catton, 264-265.}

By 1963, the battle lines had been drawn between the two primary players in the fight for the Buffalo, including BRIA and the Ozark Society. Many of the local residents who lived along the river thought both BRIA and the Ozark Society were the “outliers,” or “outsiders” respectively.\footnote{Fred Bell, Richard Holland interview.} Although members of BRIA would often call members of the Ozark Society “outsiders,” actual Buffalo River Valley residents considered them outsiders. Neither group represented the local homeowners in their pursuits, nor did they respect the local homeowner’s personal interests. Both groups were determined to be victorious without compromise. Given this, the people of the Buffalo River Valley,
became a small pebble lost in an enormous and divided pond. The possibility that they would retain their homes appeared increasingly dire indeed.
Part III: Lost Homes Become a Treasured River

Proponents for the Buffalo River Dam Projects, and the counter-actions by conservationists who wanted to save the river, had grown to a fevered pitch by the beginning of 1963. Residents who were in danger of losing their homes also began to organize into groups. However, their voices were not easily heard over the maelstrom of emotional outcries from members of BRIA and the Ozark Society, but their reasons were nonetheless vital. During the next decade, information detailing the fight over the Buffalo would be readily available to the public due to the immense volume of activity in local and state newspapers by all concerned parties. The residents of the Buffalo River Valley organized to save their homes and businesses, while fighting two behemoth departments of the United States government. The Corps and the NPS would prove to be a difficult undertaking, since both groups had the unequivocal support from large special interest groups. The homeowner’s task to save their property must have seemed overwhelming.

The Corps was not oblivious to people’s suffering because of their willingness to build in populated areas. During the thirty years of the Big Dam Era (1935-1965), the Corps’s focus was on harnessing America’s rivers regardless of the population who lived near them. They concentrated on the maximal use of American resources, while maintaining the principles of the Progressive Era.\textsuperscript{155} During each project, the Corps had one objective, and that objective was to build a dam. Human displacement or environmental damage was largely ignored. The people who were displaced by pending

\textsuperscript{155} Billington, 383.
dam projects were usually the least economically capable of fighting victoriously against the Corps.\textsuperscript{156}

The Corps maintained rigid protocols in their patterns of operation, and they had an immense dislike for interlopers who tried to delve into their affairs. In his book \textit{Dams and Other Disasters}, hydraulic engineer Arthur E. Morgan wrote that the military officers who were in charge of the Corps had been educated at the United States Military Academy at West Point.\textsuperscript{157} Given this, they were a tight-knit group who maintained a rigid, unchangeable set of norms. Morgan stated that West Point had created an atmosphere of complete oneness among fellow cadets and a disdain for intruders. He further postulated that strict repetitive memorization systematically trained the cadets at West Point. This continuous pattern of learning had stunted the ability to allow for the growth of creative innovation in generations of West Point cadets. Morgan characterized West Point’s methods as “brainwashing, reconditioning and remaking of personality.”\textsuperscript{158} Cadets entered West Point at a young, impressionable age, and were molded into what West Point described as leaders with excellent character.\textsuperscript{159}

Due to the refusal of the Corps to alter protocol, as well as their general disregard for the human condition before their projects, many Native Americans and poor farmers lost their homes due to dam construction. In 1947, the Three Affiliated Tribes (Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikaras) of the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation in North Dakota, lost 152,360 acres of their most productive bottom land to the United States government for

\textsuperscript{156} Billington, 385.
\textsuperscript{157} Hereafter referred to as West Point for the sake of simplicity.
\textsuperscript{159} Morgan, 8.
the construction of the Garrison Dam on the Missouri River. Not only did the government not assist the tribe’s recovery from the devastating loss of their only farmable land, but 2,000 tribal members would no longer be allowed access the river's shorelines to water their animals, or to fish or hunt. The Three Tribes, who had been a self-sustaining community were forcibly removed to New Town, North Dakota, which in turn destroyed their tribal culture.¹⁶⁰ In 1948, the Native Americas who lived on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation were displaced when construction began for the Oahe Dam on the Missouri River in South Dakota.¹⁶¹ In 1960, the building of the Kinzua Dam on the Allegheny River in Pennsylvania, resulted in the loss of nine thousand acres belonging to the Seneca.¹⁶²

The Corps tried to procure the support of local politicians and people in business in efforts to defray any possible protest to their projects. A good example of how the entire scenario of dam construction evolved within a region is the construction of the Norfork Dam on the White River during the 1940s. United States Congressman Clyde T. Ellis, was determined to bring federal money into the Ozarks by procuring funds for development of large dams. When he acquired funds for the Norfork Dam, he also promised employment for all those in the area who were in need. His vision for Norfork Dam was to provide prosperity for the Ozarks region.¹⁶³

The Corps called a meeting to be held at Harrison in 1940. Local businesspeople and residents chose to attend the meeting. The project had their support, as well as the support of Tom Shiras, editor of the local newspaper *Baxter Bulletin*. When Congress

¹⁶⁰ Morgan, 44-52.
¹⁶¹ Billington, 385.
¹⁶² Billington, 384.
¹⁶³ Perkins, 228.
delayed the passage of Ellis’s bill, those same businessmen with Shiras, who served as
the lead spokesperson, went to Washington to lobby Congress to pass the bill. Just as
BRIA would argue two decades later, Ellis swore that the only opposition to the dam
construction projects was from selfish outside interests. According to Ellis, he had the
backing of every person in his district.\textsuperscript{164}

Unlike the situation that developed on the Buffalo, the White River had no
organization to stand against the dams. While many of the landowners at risk of losing
their land were reticent about the misgivings they had concerning the construction of the
Norfork Dam, the possibility of employment during the construction phase gave them the
incentive to agree to the inevitable without resistance.\textsuperscript{165} They worked temporary jobs
preparing the site for construction, while waiting for the coveted positions of actual dam
construction. They had the site complete within weeks.\textsuperscript{166}

Although the Corps had promised that consideration when hiring construction
laborers would be given to local applicants, the general contractors used by the Corps
would hire labor that was unionized. A specific skill set was needed to acquire the most
lucrative positions, and many locals did not possess those required skills. The
employment discrepancies created an uproar among local businessmen and politicians.
Nine hundred local laborers eventually joined the Union.\textsuperscript{167} Historian Blake Perkins
wrote that Ozarkers began to accept dam projects in the same way that they had the

\textsuperscript{164} Perkins, 232.
\textsuperscript{165} “Looking into Baxter County’s Future,” \textit{Baxter Bulletin}, July 11, 1941.
\textsuperscript{166} “Wilderness Becomes Industrial Scene at the Norfork Dam Site,” \textit{Mountain Echo},
April 2, 1941.
\textsuperscript{167} “900 Men at Work on Norfork Dam,” \textit{Arkansas Gazette}, June 22, 1941.
Civilian Conservation Corps and other New Deal programs. The jobs created by dam construction offered temporary monetary relief to an incredibly poor area.

The obvious difference between the Norfork Dam Project and the possible Lone Rock and Gilbert Dam construction on the Buffalo, was that the homeowners in the Buffalo River Valley were surrounded on all sides by people. Those people wanted their land, and the landowners were unwilling to forfeit it regardless of the possible employment opportunities. The landowners along the Buffalo found it increasingly difficult for their voices to be heard over the growing debate between BRIA and the Ozark Society.

The sentiment of the pro-dam factions was best stated by W. B. O’Neal, who in bombastic style indicated that the Buffalo River was a “wild, restless pony” that was beautiful, but unless tamed it would remain useless. They believed that the Buffalo was Searcy County’s, one great untapped resource. The sentiment of conservationists who wanted the river preserved in its natural state was pointed out by Mrs. Joe Upchurch from Fayetteville. She responded to an article in the Arkansas Gazette that said, unless the river was dammed it could do nothing for the area, and Mrs. Upchurch wondered why the river should have to do anything. She stated, just by mere its existence, the Buffalo did all it needed to do, and it needed to be protected.

In April 1962, the Searcy County Farmers Association was formed as an anti-dam organization, and did not support the possible inclusion of the Buffalo into the NPS. They were actual landowners within the Buffalo watershed who were faced with the loss

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of their land should the dams be built, or should the Buffalo become a National River.\textsuperscript{171} Their only goal was to protect their land holdings and their lives to remain untouched by all outsiders.

Just as the Corps did not hesitate to proceed with construction plans in an area, regardless of the consequences they would have on the region’s population, the same could hold true for the NPS. One of the most eerily similar examples to the circumstances taking place along the Buffalo was the creation of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, which was authorized by Congress in 1926. The park, centered between North Carolina and Tennessee in the Great Smoky Mountains, was part of the Blue Ridge Mountain Range. A group of influential individuals from the Asheville, North Carolina and Knoxville, Tennessee Chambers of Commerce began a movement to create a national park in the Smoky Mountains.\textsuperscript{172} The NPS decided the Great Smoky Mountains would be a perfect addition to the park system, and began to gather funds to acquire the land within the park boundaries.

Cades Cove was a beautiful community in the Smoky Mountains of Tennessee, which was originally homesteaded by European settlers in the 1820s. Similar to the Buffalo River Valley, Cades Cove was a patchwork of generational farms. The families hunted for food, tilled the rich farmland, and their lives centered on the land and community. Small schoolhouses and churches were built, and became the meeting places for all social activities. The people who lived in Cades Cove, developed a distinct mountain culture over the century it existed. According to historian Durwood Dunn,

\textsuperscript{171} Editorial, \textit{Arkansas Democrat}, May 25, 1962.
Cades Cove was progressive in its views to the amenities of the surrounding urban centers, unlike other secluded areas in Southern Appalachia. They did not mind new ideas or new modern inventions developed outside their immediate region, but they did mind outsiders trying to take their land.\footnote{Durwood Dunn, \textit{Cades Cove: The Life and Death of a Southern Appalachian Community 1818-1937}, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988), 223.}

Although the residents of Cades Cove, did not have to worry about fighting two departments of the government, as did the inhabitants of the Buffalo River Valley, they were in direct opposition of the federal government, the Tennessee state government, and very determined businesspersons. Each of these were outsiders were only interested in making lucrative tourist dollars by developing the national park, as compared to the NPS that was solely interested in conservation.\footnote{Dunn, 242.} In 1923, the residents of Cades Cove were lulled into believing that they would be allowed to keep their land within the park. Senator L. D. Tyson from Knoxville, Tennessee, placed an article in the \textit{Knoxville Journal} that stated no resident within the boundary of the park could be forced to move. He promised Cades Cove residents, the bill that authorized the creation of the Great Smoky Mountain National Park forbade the seizure of land by the federal government, and that land within the park boundaries could only be acquired through donations.\footnote{\textit{“Tyson Issues Statement,”} \textit{Knoxville Journal}, May 9, 1929.} The governor of Tennessee, Austin Peay, also met with the residents and assured them their land would not be seized.\footnote{Dunn, 247.}

Given reassurances by the government that they need not fear the loss of their property, the inhabitants of Cades Cove were not prepared to oppose the action when the
government did indeed seize their land. Larger communities such as Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, had initially been within the boundaries of the park until businessmen within Pigeon Forge, voiced sufficient opposition to cause the final law establishing the boundaries to be redrawn and the park boundaries to exclude the town.\footnote{Dunn, 247.}

Although the federal government did not condemn the homesteads of Cades Cove, the state of Tennessee did. By January 1, 1936, residents of Cades Cove were forced to vacate. Some residents sold their land, and a few families entered into “live/lease” agreements, and were allowed to remain until their deaths. The state used eminent domain to seize other farms. Cades Cove residents lost their land and community during the worst years of the Great Depression.\footnote{Dunn, 250-251.} Durwood Dunn contends that regardless of the attempts made by the NPS to preserve knowledge of the community that once thrived in Cades Cove, they only made an ineffectual effort to describe a group of people who were unique and independent in culture and customs, by creating a narrative that describes nothing more than stereotypical “hill folk.”\footnote{Dunn, 256.} Unlike Cades Cove, the residents along the Buffalo knew what they had to lose from the inception of the strife between the Corps, BRIA, NPS, and Ozark Society.

The formation of the Searcy County Farmers Association gave landowners in Searcy County, an opportunity to band together and speak out publically against BRIA. On April 27, 1962, an article appeared in the \textit{Arkansas Gazette} with headlines announcing “Buffalo Dams are Opposed for First Time.” In the article, Charles McRaven, a Buffalo landowner, explained that flooding the land along the Buffalo by
constructing the Gilbert and Lone Rock Dams would not be economically beneficial for any involved. McRaven, spokesmen for the Searcy County Farmers Association, reported that his organization was in the process of obtaining signatures by all other landowners along the Buffalo, who were not willing to sacrifice their timber and farms for the purpose of tourism. He further stated, the landowners did not want the “government buying the land around the proposed lakes” or the “government interfering with their affairs in any way.”

The McRaven article in the *Arkansas Gazette* marked the first time that any citizen of Searcy County had spoken publically against BRIA. James Tudor of BRIA, used the *Marshall Mountain Wave* to lash out against the article, Charles McRaven, and the Searcy County Farmers Association. In his article, Tudor doubted the veracity of the statement that McRaven owned property along the Buffalo, and he scoffed at the title of the *Gazette* article claiming the Searcy County Farmers Association were the first to oppose the construction of the dams. Tudor said that he thought the Arkansas Wildlife Federation and other conservation organizations had beaten them to it. McRaven did in fact own a working farm near the Buffalo in St. Joe (Searcy County), with his brother.

In May 1962, the president of the Buffalo River Landowners Association (Searcy County Farmers Association), W. L. Goggin, reported to the *Arkansas Democrat* that the new organization would represent the first opportunity that landowners had been given to openly express their opposition to dams on the Buffalo. He said that his group had

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182 Ronald McCafferty interview with John Heuston, Part I.
collected four hundred signatures of farmers who owned land on or near the river. Goggin wrote that the people in the Buffalo River watershed owned the most fertile farmland in the country, and they intended to continue farming until their children could take over. Goggin further stated that he felt like the public had been falsely led to believe that all of the landowners wanted the dams. He said, the falsities were spread by a “small group of merchants and land speculators in Marshall.” Individuals were also appointed to positions within the Landowners Association including Lunce Cash, Vice President, and Mrs. Love Hensley, Secretary.

By May 23, 1962, Neil Compton received a letter from Charley McRaven. McRaven wrote to Compton and advised him that in less than a month from the creation of the Buffalo River Landowners Association, BRIA had discovered that he worked at Arkansas Power and Light. They tried to present cause to McRaven’s employer to get his employment terminated. McRaven wrote that he publically excused himself from the Searcy County Farmers Association because of the job threat. He warned Compton that the landowners were just as vehemently opposed to the possibility of the land around the Buffalo becoming part of the NPS. He said that they would fight to keep governmental restrictions from their private property at all costs. McRaven further stated, other than Tudor, the key member of BRIA that the Ozark Society needed to be cautious of was Reverend L. R. Winners.

Reverend L. R. Winners was hired as executive director by BRIA immediately following the public meeting in Marshall, which had been organized by the Corps on

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184 Compton, 106.
Winners became an increasingly public figure as an advocate for the construction of the dams. McRaven described him as a “Northerner,” who “dabbled in Real Estate.” He told Compton that Winners was clever and persuasive enough to have convinced BRIA to not only pay him a salary, but to send him multiple times to Washington to lobby Congress. McRaven warned, Winners used “wanton attacking of personal character” against anyone who dared to speak out against the construction of the dams.

Landowners along the Buffalo, as well as members of the Ozark Society, personally experienced the extent in which leaders of BRIA were willing to go and impede the opposition’s progress to the dam projects. John Heuston, a conservationist and travel editor of the Arkansas Democrat, drew the wrath of BRIA more than once. By May 1962, BRIA began to call the Arkansas Democrat threatening to sue the newspaper because Heuston wrote more favorable articles regarding the actions of the conservation movement, than he had written about BRIA. For the next four years, BRIA continued to send members to the paper to complain to the managing editor about Heuston. When they got no results, L.R. Winners, Kate Ruff, and Mrs. Tudor requested a meeting with the managing editor of the Arkansas Democrat to voice their complaints in person. Heuston said that because none of the BRIA members had ever seen him when he walked into the meeting, he went unrecognized. Heuston recalled when he sat down, Mrs. Ruff leaned over to him and said, “Young man when that dirty John Heuston walks in the

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186 Compton, 106.  
187 Compton, 106.
room I want you to tell me which one he is.”\textsuperscript{188} At the conclusion of the meeting, the managing editor found no cause to dismiss Heuston.

Although members of BRIA had been busy garnering support, landowners not affiliated with an individual group began speaking out against the dams. A Buffalo River farmer wrote to the “Letter to the Editor” column of the \textit{Arkansas Gazette} in which he stated, the fact that he had read that BRIA called all of the opponents to the dams’ outsiders was like the “pot calling the kettle black.”\textsuperscript{189} He further stated that the people who were most opposed to the dams were the farmers who lived and farmed the land. The letter accused the “merchants and land speculators in Marshall” of coveting their land.\textsuperscript{190} The author of the letter wrote that members of BRIA were just trying to put noble-sounding reasons to justify their actions.

In June 1963, landowner H. G. Brady who lived in Pruitt (Newton County), wrote a letter to the \textit{Arkansas Gazette}, which called the proposed Buffalo National River the “world’s longest zoo.” He further wrote that he and his fellow Buffalo River landowners did not want people to fall for the attempted brainwashing by the “preservers, do-gooders, and private power dupes.”\textsuperscript{191} Brady stated that the landowners along the Buffalo did not want to save the river by having an accumulation of broken bottles and trash left by millions of people. His firm opinion was if the homeowners had wanted to save the trees, they would not have cut them down. Brady finished his letter by stating,

\textsuperscript{188} Ronald McCafferty interview with John Heuston, Part 1.
\textsuperscript{189} Name Withheld, “Letter to the Editor,” \textit{Arkansas Gazette}, June 4, 1962.
\textsuperscript{190} Name Withheld, “Letter to the Editor,” \textit{Arkansas Gazette}, June 4, 1962.
the landowners of the Buffalo River Valley had no desire to “donate their farms and homes for the purpose of creating a 130-mile long zoo.”

On May 31, 1963, during a dedication of the Pea Ridge National Military Park, National Park Service director Conrad Worth announced that the NPS had recommended to Congress that the Buffalo become a national park. Director Worth expressed at the gathering, he sincerely hoped the Buffalo would become the nation’s first national river. During his speech, Worth added that should the Lone Rock and Gilbert Dams be built, it would alter the Buffalo in such a way that it would no longer be eligible for preservation. He told the crowd that the creation of the Buffalo National River would be an economic boost that would benefit the entire area. In his announcement, Worth revealed that a study done by the University of Arkansas revealed the possibility of 1,000 non-farm jobs, as well as possible tourist revenue of $13 million annually. Dr. Charles R. McGimsey, director of the museum at the University of Arkansas, reported that the significance of the archaeologic importance in the area could not be understated. He said that by preserving the area around the Buffalo, a critical view into prehistorical Arkansas would remain undamaged for future study.

Worth’s announcement was realistically a death knell to the continuing hope of the proponents for the construction of the Gilbert and Lone Rock Dam projects. BRIA kept fighting to have the dams built nonetheless. Tudor swore that regardless of whether or not the dams were constructed, the people would fight the NPS to stop the park. He

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further claimed that the NPS would never get the approval of the residents along the river, because they did not want a bunch of outsiders drinking beer and trashing the river and the land. Although the existence of the Buffalo River Landowners Association presented proof that the landowners were opponents to the dams being built, Tudor exclaimed that ninety-five percent of them were for the dams.\footnote{195}{Gazette News Service, “Dam Backer Bitter on Buffalo Park: Says Residents Will Fight to the End,” \textit{Arkansas Gazette}, June 2, 1963.}

Steward L. Udall, Secretary of the Interior, publically announced his support of the Buffalo National River at a conference in Little Rock. During this announcement, BRIA members Jim Tudor, Gib Walsh, and Wayne Martin devised a way to prove that the Buffalo was shallow and dry during the summer months.\footnote{196}{Robert Shaw, “Where the Buffalo Isn’t Roaming—Backers of the Buffalo Dam say Float Trips Out Most of the Year; Right now River’s Too Dry.” \textit{Arkansas Gazette}, July 14, 1963. The description in the \textit{Arkansas Gazette} of Wayne Martin stated that he was a “veteran of 40 years of fishing the river.” It is unknown whether this is an accurate descriptor of exactly how he was related to the Buffalo River area. Also see “Udall Prefers Free Flow,” \textit{Arkansas Gazette}, July 10, 1963.} On the front page of the \textit{Arkansas Gazette}, there was a large picture of the three men in a longboat sitting on what appears to be a dry river bed, which inferred that the Buffalo was only floatable for eight weeks per year. Tudor proclaimed that the picture proved that the Buffalo was dry. He further stated that there was no reason to float fish because the fish were all dying, and the only thing the area had to offer any tourist during the summer was “chiggers, ticks and snakes.”\footnote{197}{Shaw, \textit{Arkansas Gazette}, July 14, 1963.}

In an editorial in the \textit{Marshall Mountain Wave}, two separate landowners threatened to spray and kill their timber to keep out the NPS. They threatened to make
their property so unattractive that the government would lose interest in taking it.\textsuperscript{198}

Through the remaining days of 1963, the Ozark Society and BRIA sparred continuously. BRIA used the local press to continue promoting the premise that the Buffalo was a dry wash. They used their influence through the state to stop the Ozark Society at every turn. One example of this occurred at the Arkansas State Fair in Little Rock. After renting a booth within a permanent building on the fairgrounds to house a photography exhibit of the Buffalo, the man in charge of the grounds told Compton the booth had been acquired by giving false information. They were forced to move their exhibit to a tent owned by a private citizen.\textsuperscript{199} The incident was reported by Tudor in the \textit{Marshall Mountain Wave}. In the article, Tudor admitted to placing a few phone calls that resulted in the eviction of the Ozark Society from the booth.\textsuperscript{200}

Neil Compton and the Ozark Society traveled throughout the state exhibiting Compton’s photographs featuring beautiful scenes of the Buffalo. During the early 1960s, Neil Compton and the Ozark Society created thirteen films as promotional tools to bring in new national park supporters. One such film, “Opportunity for Arkansas,” was filmed using an 8mm camera as Compton narrated. In the film, he showed scenes of the landscape devastation around the dam construction along the White River, as well as scenery along the Buffalo.\textsuperscript{201} On June 20, 1964, the American Motors Corporation presented Compton their conservation award for his efforts to save the Buffalo. The

\textsuperscript{199} Compton, 146.
\textsuperscript{200} “Here and There About Town” \textit{Marshall Mountain Wave}, October 3, 1963.
award mentioned Compton’s films, and the founding of the Ozark Society as part of his accomplishments.\textsuperscript{202}

The Corps announced plans for a second public meeting to be held in Marshall on November 18, 1964. The meeting purpose was to publically discuss the plans by the Corps to build a multi-purpose dam at Gilbert. The purpose of the proposed dam would be for hydroelectric power, flood control, and recreation. The Corps announced that the benefits from the Gilbert Dam were found as an economically feasible option for the Buffalo, as well as compatible with future plans for the development of a national park.\textsuperscript{203}

Unlike the first Corps meeting in Marshall, the assistant director of the NPS and the Bureau of Sports Fisheries and Wildlife were present. Both agencies recommended that the Buffalo be preserved as a free-flowing river. The representative for the NPS once again reiterated, should a dam be placed at any location on the Buffalo, it would no longer be considered compatible with plans to protect it. Tudor once again claimed that only three people in Searcy County did not want the dam. Nelson Truitt, a Newton County attorney said that 95 percent of Newton County was in favor of the dam construction. Similar to the first meeting, Tudor and Winners blamed outsiders for trying to dictate what they should do with their own backyards. Tudor also argued that the dams would eventually have to be built on the Buffalo to provide water for residents.\textsuperscript{204}

Last to speak at the meeting was Charles McRaven representing the Buffalo River Landowners Association. McRaven told the assembly that he represented the true

\textsuperscript{202} Gazette Washington Bureau, “Dr. Compton, River Backer, To Get Award,” \textit{Arkansas Gazette}, June 20, 1964.

\textsuperscript{203} “U.S. Offers New Buffalo River Plan; Smoldering Fight Expected to Flare,” \textit{Arkansas Gazette}, September 21, 1964.

\textsuperscript{204} Leroy Donald, “Dam It, Natives Say as Outsiders Argue Buffalo River’s Fate,” \textit{Arkansas Gazette}, November 19, 1963.
landowners. He said he was talking for the people who owned land and lived on the Buffalo, and who would lose everything they owned should the Buffalo Valley be flooded. McRaven said that the Ozark Society was not the only outsider in the conflict. He argued that the members of BRIA, along with the citizens of Marshall were outsiders as well. McRaven told the gathering that the true landowners were vehemently against not only the dam, but the creation of a national park as well.  

In January 1965, the Corps announced that they had approved plans for the construction of the Gilbert Dam. The plan to construct the Lone Rock Dam was overturned. The Corps announced that a massive dam at Gilbert would be the economically satisfactory solution for “developing the water and related resources.” The Corps reasoned by constructing the single large dam at Gilbert, and the Upper Buffalo could be preserved in its natural state. Under the Corps’s plan, forty-seven miles would be flooded on the mid-section of the Buffalo. The lower section would be stocked with trout. The construction of the Gilbert Dam would cost an estimated $55 million, with an annual maintenance cost of $380,000. The building of the Gilbert Dam would have included a smaller “regulating dam” downstream.

The tension between dam proponents, landowners, and conservationists flared following this announcement by the Corps. Neil Compton wrote about an incident when he was stopped by a reporter of the Pine Bluff Commercial, who had come to northern

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205 Compton, 183.
Arkansas to gather information that he needed for an article that he was writing about regarding the growing tensions over the Buffalo. The reporter, whose name was Harry Pearson, told Compton that he had just been to a meeting of BRIA, and that he had been greatly disturbed to find out they were “threatening violence” against all those opposed to the dams. 209

On Memorial Day weekend of 1965, tensions reached a boiling point along the Buffalo. A canoe race had been scheduled under the direction of Charley McRaven for Memorial Day. Members of the Ozark Wilderness Waterways Club had arrived at the Buffalo from Kansas for the weekend, as well as canoers from around the state. According to Compton, BRIA had learned of the race and was determined to “bring it all to a halt.”210 Harassing phone calls and threats of violence leading up to the contest caused a majority of the race participants to withdraw from the competition. However, six teams remained.

Canoers and members of the race were met with unexpected obstacles as they made their way down the Buffalo. Landowners had downed eighteen large trees in strategic places along the Buffalo.211 Shots were fired into the water by people standing on the banks of the river.212 Barb wire had been strung across the river in attempts by landowners to fence off their property. The Sherriff of Newton County deputized two men, one of which was James Tudor’s son, Donnie. They stood on the banks where the

209 Compton, 207.
210 Compton, 212.
212 Ronald McCafferty interview with John Heuston, Part I.
wire crossed the river and threatened to shoot anyone that went through the wire.213 When the barb wire did not stop them, the deputies got verbally abusive and started shaking the wire as canoers went through it cutting the arms of several participants. The winner of the race, James Taylor, docked his canoe and went in search of the deputy. When he found him, he “slapped him down” and “left him for dead.”214 Tudor later told the *Arkansas Gazette, BRIA* had nothing to do with the Memorial Day affair. He said that landowners had stated that they were sick of people trespassing on their property. He further stated that the Buffalo was not a navigable waterway, and therefore he considered landowners had the right to fence their property.215 This incident made the public aware of how highly incendiary the situation surrounding the fight over the Buffalo had become.

In December 1965, Governor Orval Faubus changed his previous neutral stance, and came out publically for the Buffalo River National Park. Governor Faubus wrote to Interior Secretary Udall, urging that he move forward with the plan to make the Buffalo the first national river in America.216 In April 1966, the Corps publically announced that they had withdrawn plans to construct the Gilbert Dam on the Buffalo.217 In January 1967, Senator J. William Fulbright along with Senator John L. McClellan introduced a bill to preserve the Buffalo in its natural state. The Senate bill set a ceiling of 108,000

214 Ronald McCafferty interview with John Heuston, Part I.
acres that could be included in the proposed park. Representative John Paul Hammerschmidt introduced a similar bill in March 1967.

With the introduction of the two bills in the early months of 1967, the fight to stop the NPS changed hands from BRIA to the true landowners, who would feel the consequences if the bills passed. By mid-March, a meeting was held at the Newton County Courthouse to form the Newton County Buffalo River Improvement Association. For the first time, the resolve and possibly even panic of the Buffalo River Landowners were made public. Hillary Jones, a Pruitt resident exclaimed, “We have a way of life here that’s different from any other part of the world.” James Tudor, who had since stepped down as editor of the *Marshall Mountain Wave*, was also in attendance. He told the group, it was “time to take off the kid gloves.”

In January 1968, landowners along the Buffalo publically threatened to close access to the river through the spring and summer. Once again, James Tudor seemed to lead the fight. He said that although they were not going to get the dam, the landowners were going to fight to stop the park. The true landowners had never wanted the dams any more than they wanted inclusion into the NPS. In the words of Joe Barnes, a business and landowner of the Buffalo River Valley, they “mostly jest wanted them all to go home and leave us the hell alone.” He told his daughter Jenny, most locals did not want the

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220 Compton, 302.
“damn gov’ment” coming in, and telling them what to do with their land. In essence, that was the difference between true landowners and all other parties. Landowners did not want their homes and lives uprooted for commercial gain or to “save” a river.

No action was taken on the bills of Senator Fulbright and Representative Hammerschmidt for the next two years. In 1969, the bills were reintroduced for consideration. The Senate bill passed, but Representative Hammerschmidt’s bill remained untouched until 1971. The House of Representatives refused to act until a public hearing could be held before the Subcommittee on National Parks and Recreation. The meeting was held on May 27, 1969 in Washington, D.C. Members of the Ozark Society and additional conservationists, landowners opposed to the NPS, and members of BRIA traveled to Washington, D.C. to attend the meeting. The meeting lasted for four and a half hours. By August 7, 1969, Neil Compton received word from Senator Fulbright that the Senate Interior Committee had found in favor for the creation of the Buffalo National River.

The meeting had secured a victory for the conservationists who had worked so hard to preserve the Buffalo in its most natural state. Their war was won. The citizens of Marshall had accepted that they should find a way to make the best of a bad situation, as they began to advertise the amazing beauty of the Buffalo country. The landowners, whose property resided within the revised 95,730 acres included within the future Buffalo National River, were only at the beginning stage of their personal struggles.

222 Butler, 9.
224 Compton, 398-402.
225 Compton, 398.
In March 1970, G. L. Hutchinson, chairman of the Buffalo River Conservation and Recreation Council stated that the residents along the Buffalo were besieged from every angle, by people who were only interested in their personal causes, and cared nothing for the landowners. He said that outsiders wanted to save the river for future generations, but he questioned, “what about the children and grandchildren of the landowners who will be forced out of providing the same joys for their descendants?” His group proposed the “Pastoral River Plan,” which suggested that there be an extension of the boundaries of the Ozark National Forest, the river would then be donated to the government, and the banks would remain with the landowners.

On February 12, 1971, an article appeared in The Informer, a Jasper newspaper, which described the emotions of the landowners who had started to realize that fighting against the NPS would be monumental, if not an impossible task. The article asked how a river could be preserved with “hordes of people littering and tramping the area.” The author further stated that while the politicians professed to act in the best interest of the people, yet they had not even consulted the landowners before passing legislation that would benefit the citizens the least. Al Hochberger of Jasper warned, by giving a “dictatorial tyrant” such as the NPS power over the Buffalo, all of the citizens would need to be saved from “gangsters, thieves, burglars, muggers, rapists, and narcotic

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228 “Thus’ Own” The informer, February 12, 1971.
229 “Thus’ Own” The Informer, February 12, 1971.
peddlers.”

J. E. Carter proclaimed that the government was planning to “provide a hundred mile hippy colony,” and that Newton County residents were being forced to surrender their birthrights to a “bunch of ecology nuts.”

On December 5, 1971, the House of Representatives unanimously passed H.R. 8382, known as the Buffalo National River Bill. On March 1, 1972, Public Law 92-237 was signed by President Richard M. Nixon establishing the Buffalo National River. The Buffalo National River Headquarters was set up in Harrison, and Donald L. Spalding was appointed as lead superintendent. The Land Acquisition Office, whose headquarters were in Santa Fe, New Mexico, operated as an independent agency from the NPS. They immediately sent members to Harrison and began the process of land acquisition. Their initial goal was to start conducting surveys of the private property within the park boundaries, so that an appraisal could be done to establish a base price for future acquisitions.

In July 1972, the Buffalo River Conservation and Recreation Council filed suit in the United States District Court for the Western District of Arkansas in Fort Smith, against the NPS seeking an injunction to halt the purchase of all property within the boundaries of the Buffalo National River. The organization consisted of 210 landowners, who stated they owned 50,000 of the acres included in the 95,730 acres designated for the park. They argued that the process of acquiring land through eminent domain would be a

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232 Compton, 463.
direct violation of their constitutional rights.\textsuperscript{234} As a result of the suit, the United States District Court for the Western District of Arkansas issued an injunction against any further land acquisition by the NPS. The injunction was not lifted until 1975, by which time, the NPS had exhausted the $16 million originally allotted by Congress for land purchases. In 1976, Congress approved $13,956,000 additional funds to complete the remaining land purchases. The NPS had previously acquired 49,217 acres, which left 41,648 acres to be acquired.\textsuperscript{235}

The priority for NPS acquisition involved land needed for preservation, or protection of park values as a conservation zone. The second tier of acquisitions would include all of the land necessary for the development of facilities as a development zone. The third level priority included all remaining land as a private use zone. The private use zone contained 9,400 acres of farmland, which would remain in private ownership with scenic easements, and allow the NPS access and rights to place restrictions against possible threats to scenic quality. The NPS would agree to life estates in which former landowners could remain on their land for the remainder of their lives, or for twenty-five years. The land eligible for the private use zone life estate was Boxley Valley (Highway 21), Richland Valley (Highway 7), and Camp Orr (Newton County).\textsuperscript{236} Landowners who wanted to sell for hardship reasons or land voluntarily sold to the NPS, were also considered first priority.\textsuperscript{237}

\textsuperscript{236} Jim Liles, \textit{Old Folks Talking}, 286.
\textsuperscript{237} Land Acquisition Memos-Quick Memos, Black Binder, W1823 Buff General, L3027, Buffalo National River Headquarters, Harrison, Arkansas.
In the years before the mid-1970s, owners who desired to remain via life estates were usually allowed that option. Following the mid-1970s, the Land Acquisition Office rarely offered life estates. They assumed an aggressive approach to buying land “in fee” or outright. Out of the 4,500 acres that had been named for private use in Boxley Valley, only 1,100 acres were not purchased by the government. According to Jim Liles, historian for the NPS, during this period the land acquisition policies were so rigid that following the “hostile” condemnation of two landowners in 1978, who had productive farms and refused to have their land appraised, irreparable damage was done to the relationship between landowners and the NPS. He acknowledged that the NPS acquired 84 percent of the lands in the private use zones.238

Whether the NPS condemned property or outright bought their land, for the landowners in the Buffalo River Valley, the takeover was a traumatic event that culminated after more than a decade of disruption and displacement. Family farms were lost to future generations. Businesses were either bought, or as in the case with canoe outfitters, were faced with unrealistic regulations and restrictions.

For Jenny Barnes Butler’s father, Joe Barnes, the regulations did not begin until 1978. The Department of the Interior began sending letters to all outfitters along the river announcing their intentions to take applications for permits to operate on the river. Jenny said while relating to her the events that had taken place during the first meeting, her father told her that the canoe haulers were “like a bunch of grizzly bears smellin’ some sneaky sons of bitches waitin’ to rob her cubs.”239 Barnes related that the NPS handed the outfitters a booklet that contained fifty-nine regulations, ranging from how many

238 Liles, Old Folks Talking, 288.
239 Butler, 164-166.
canoes they could use to how far from the river canoes had to be placed. Barnes told his daughter, the river would never be the same: “the Buffalo River is gone.”

For the landowners, the Buffalo was more than a river, it was their home. It was not an object to monopolize for commercial gain. The Buffalo and the land surrounding it provided sustenance for their families. While the Ozark Society was sending congratulatory salutations to their conservationist partners because they had won their hard fought battle to “save” the river, the tax-paying landowners within the boundaries of that park were left to deal with the ramifications of that victory. If the Ozark Society and the conservationists lost the fight to save the Buffalo, BRIA and interested parties would have led the Corps to the construction of the Gilbert and Lone Rock Dams and flooded the majority of land that surrounded it. Under those insurmountable odds, the residents of the Buffalo River Valley never had a chance to retain what had been their personal property.

240 Butler, 183.
Conclusion

The residents who lived in communities along the Buffalo National River were strong, independent, and determined enough to make one of the most remote and isolated regions in Arkansas their home. They could not have foreseen that the river that they all claimed quasi-ownership over would become the focus of so many people. Although the first authorization to construct a dam on the Buffalo began in 1938, construction never happened. The residents along the river could not have foretold that a group of businessmen and land speculators would seek economic gain with the construction of two dams on the Buffalo, and in the process flood their homes. Also, the notion never occurred to them that their isolated river would become the intense focus of conservationists who believed that by owning land along the Buffalo, residents themselves decreased its intrinsic value. By the time those two groups completed their fight for control over the river’s future, the landowners's lives would never again be the same.

Although it is true that many young men and women left the Buffalo River area in search of employment and an easier lifestyle, the owners of many of the farms along the river had roots forged by hardship, community, and family. Although the youth no longer lived on the family farm, still for many of them the Buffalo was home. Historian Brooks Blevins wrote, a “powerful sense of place” formed within isolated highland communities, which caused them to develop a deep appreciation and pride of culture that had taken the people of the Buffalo River Valley over a century to establish.241

241 Blevins, Hill Folks, 187.
The personalities and determination of the members of the BRIA were so aggressive it is unclear if the landowners would have easily accepted the inundation of their land. To know how they would have reacted if the Ozark Society never stepped in to protest the dams is not only a vague, but a moot point. Members of the Ozark Society and other members of the conservationist movement were just as determined, and at times just as aggressive in their fight to save the Buffalo as BRIA had been. Following the establishment of the Buffalo National River, John Heuston, president of the Pulaski County Chapter of the Ozark Society said that if Neil Compton could place protections on the northern half of Arkansas so that it could be used for study and preservation, Compton would “in a heartbeat.” Heuston admitted that he agreed with Compton. Of course, the probability of that taking place would be highly unlikely, but the statement reveals a distinct lack of concern for the welfare of the citizens that would be affected by such an event. Neil Compton wrote that in the opinion of the Ozark Society, the out migration that had occurred in the Ozarks was a blessing because it created a “natural adjustment to the early day exploitation.” He further stated, it was a “trend that should have been allowed to proceed.”

Many of the homeowners could simply not reconcile their way of life being less important than the resources they used to survive. It was unfathomable for these independent people to understand a philosophy in which saving a tree was more important than using the tree to keep a family warm. Waymon Villines, whose ancestors were among the original settlers in the Boxley Valley said, he failed to understand the

244 Compton, 32.
“playground mentality” of the Ozark Society. He was confused why the NPS felt the need to destroy the pastures that had been farmed by his family for generations.

For many of the elderly, the trauma of losing their land was too difficult of an adjustment to endure. Jera Krakow, the granddaughter of Joe Villines recalled, her uncle, Henry Villines was forced to sell his land to the NPS. She said that Henry and his wife were “so upset their health has consistently gone downhill.”

Eva Henderson was eighty-three years old when a journalist from the National Geographic arrived at her little cabin in 1977. Eva’s mother was the great niece of President James Buchanan. She had lived on Snee Creek for sixty-five years, and people called her “granny.” Eva lived in her cabin alone following the death of her husband, Frank. Her house had no electricity, running water, or telephone. When asked by historian Dwight Pitcaithley if she was bothered by not having any modern amenities, she said, “Never used it, so I don’t miss it.” Eva told him that she would “just soon spend the rest of my days here as anywhere else. It’s Peaceable.”

Eva Henderson’s daughter, Arbie Villines later said, even though Eva lived alone, her family never tried to make her leave her home because she was happy there. She said that the NPS took her land and then told her if she stayed she would have been charged rent. The NPS eventually paid to

have a home built for her near her grandson's home. Arbie stated that she lived in the new house one night, and then moved in with her grandson. Eva did not want to live in the house because it made her mourn the loss of her home. She died six months after she was forced to move.\textsuperscript{249}

Richard Holland was among the first to sell land to the NPS. His land had belonged to the Hollands for five generations. His family built the first store and post office at Pruitt in 1921. They then built a house and a bathhouse in Shady Grove Park (Newton County). In 1931, they added two cabins and installed a pulley style trolley over the water, so swimmers from the surrounding counties could cross the Buffalo and jump from the bluff. Richard said when they moved, his family was never happy at their new home because they missed the place generations of their family had lived for so long. The land is now the present day site of the Pruitt Ranger Station. When the park sold the material from the family store, Holland was in the hospital recovering from a heart attack. He said that he was upset that he could not attend and purchase family keepsakes.\textsuperscript{250}

Except for a select few dwellings, many homes have reverted to the wilderness. Toinette Lackey Madison’s family lived on Steel Creek. Her family lived on land that joined her great-grandparents’ land. Her grandmother lived in a home that had been in their family for six generations. Toinette’s grandmother was moved to a nursing home, and immediately following her departure, the NPS leveled her home. The only thing that

remains is Toinette’s handprints in the concrete slab where the homestead once stood. Her father and grandfather owned and operated a two-man timber operation. Toinette was seven years old when her family sold the property to the government. Toinette said that the atmosphere during that time was filled with volatile anger. She stated that it was general knowledge that nobody was supposed to like the NPS. According to Toinette, the animosity has not lessened. When asked if there were hard feelings toward those who wanted the area dammed, she replied that she had not heard of the efforts to dam the river until much later.\textsuperscript{251}

According to the NPS Master Plan for the Buffalo National River, 350 people lived within the designated park boundaries. The Master Plan listed there were 86 farms, twelve stores, five churches, and 1,122 tracts of land that were within the boundaries. Given this information and current research, it is not possible to determine the exact number of people the national river designation of the Buffalo displaced. Thus, while further research is needed to ascertain this exact number, it is possible to say that approximately 350 persons were displaced.\textsuperscript{252}

For the families who lost their land, the NPS was seen as a villain. They had become the subject of the people’s angst. However, the employees of the NPS were doing what they were tasked to do, and those tasks were largely dependent upon the will and budget of the United States Government. The losses the landowners suffered were not at the hands of one entity. As evidenced by information that has been written and available to the public, the stories of the families who lost their land to the Buffalo National River have remained largely untold. Information regarding the efforts of the

\textsuperscript{251} Toinette Lackey Madison Interview.
Corps, BRIA, NPS, and Ozark Society has been recorded in abundance. In-depth accounts of the adversity and misfortune experienced by the landowners of the Buffalo River Valley remain all, but obscured from the historical record. By forces that were completely out of their control, the formation of the Buffalo National River forever altered the area’s communities, its culture, and the lives of families who lived there. A Highland culture that had taken a century to develop was scattered as families were forced to move from their river. Some conclude that this is a narrative about the glorious saving of the Buffalo. For the landowners, it is a tragic tale of the loss of their place along the Buffalo, and their heritage developed within that place.
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