



**STATE OF ARKANSAS**

ASA HUTCHINSON  
GOVERNOR

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Directors of the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality, Arkansas Department of Health, Arkansas Agriculture Department, Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism, and Arkansas Natural Resources Commission

**FROM:** Governor Asa Hutchinson

**DATE:** September 30, 2016

**SUBJECT:** Beautiful Buffalo River Action Committee

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As Governor of the State of Arkansas, it is my position that Arkansans best understand the value of the state's natural resources and, as a result, must lead in protecting them now and for future generations. The Buffalo National River is a source of great scenic beauty, a unique habitat, an agricultural resource, and a preeminent tourism destination. This landmark is vitally important to the state and nation. The Buffalo River water quality is monitored and continues to meet the extraordinary resource water quality standards. In recent years, concerns have been raised about possible water quality issues in tributaries to the river within the watershed. In response to these concerns, my administration will be proactive, as I am committed to protecting and supporting the vitality of the Buffalo National River.

I have therefore decided to direct the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ), Arkansas Department of Health (ADH), Arkansas Agriculture Department (AAD), Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism (APT), and Arkansas Natural Resources Commission (ANRC) to develop an Arkansas-led approach to identify and to address potential issues of common concern in the Buffalo River Watershed. These Directors and their agencies have pledged their commitment to create the Beautiful Buffalo River Action Committee (the "Committee"). The Committee will consist of these state agencies and other state partners of interest. The Arkansas Game and Fish Commission has committed such interest in joining as the first state partner in this effort.

In light of the foregoing, I hereby direct the Committee to establish measurable objectives, set achievable action items, establish durable partnerships, share agency resources, and inform policymakers and the general public of relevant progress. The

Committee will begin this work immediately and it will hold, at a minimum, quarterly meetings to establish, review, and revise their cooperative efforts. The Committee will provide recommendations to me on actions addressing priority issues in the Watershed, and it will report annually to me on the status of the Committee's progress, with the first annual report due by January 31, 2018.

For the first year, the Committee shall pursue four key priorities:

First, the Committee is directed to create an open and effective forum for interested stakeholders to engage with each other, share relevant information regarding potential issues, and work collaboratively to improve or maintain the water quality of the Buffalo River. This forum and framework shall offer opportunities for other state and federal agencies as well as community organizations to join as partners in support of the effort. The goal is to develop a durable organization able to carry out this work to achieve both short term and lasting outcomes.

Second, the Committee is directed to initiate the development of a Buffalo River Watershed Management Plan (WMP). This process will be funded through a one-time federal EPA Grant that was approved for use on this important state priority. The WMP process will provide an opportunity for stakeholder involvement and will result in a roadmap for future actions and research opportunities. By developing a WMP, the state will be able to leverage this federal grant to take advantage of future funding availability.

Third, the Committee is directed to identify early action and effective projects able to be implemented immediately that are expected to "jump-start" improvements or maintain the sustained vitality of the Buffalo River Watershed. The Committee meetings will serve as a venue to share best management practices that have demonstrated water quality benefits. Such early actions are the core to the Committee's work and will provide benefits during the development of the WMP and other long-term actions.

Finally, the Committee is directed to consider the state of current scientific investigation in the watershed and prioritize future research needs. Partners will have the opportunity to provide updates on their on-going research efforts and to consider resource-sharing opportunities. While this effort will also be informed by the WMP process, partners should consider immediate research needs and opportunities to begin work today. Sound, science-driven decision making is key to achieving the Committee's goal of improved or maintained water quality.

The Buffalo River is a national treasure and a significant agricultural, recreational, and natural resource. I am directing this Arkansas-led collaborative to proactively engage in protecting and supporting the protection and enhancement of the Buffalo River Watershed through partnership, research, and action.



Asa Hutchinson