



## United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
Ozark National Scenic Riverways  
404 Watercress Drive  
P.O. Box 490  
Van Buren, Missouri 63965

IN REPLY REFER TO:

L30 x(A8223)

August 22, 2013

The Honorable Jason Smith  
2230 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Smith:

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to you and your constituents' concerns about baptisms at Sinking Creek within the Ozark National Scenic Riverways. We have closely reviewed the National Park Service Policy and have determined that as Superintendent I have the option to require a special use permit for baptisms and other activities within the park (2006 National Park Service Management Policies, First Amendment Activities, 8.6.3).

Since 2006, three churches have approached the park and requested permits to hold baptisms within the Riverways. Each of these requests has been granted. Last summer, a church requested vehicular access to the Sinking Creek gravel bar so that they could bring their elderly or physically challenged parishioners closer to the water for a baptism. At that time we issued a special use permit application as we had done in the past. Upon receiving your inquiry yesterday, we have reviewed our past practice of issuing special use permits and determined that I have the flexibility within agency policy to allow the baptisms without a permit. However, since the gravel bar at Sinking Creek is closed to all vehicles the Church would still need a special use permit in order to gain vehicular access to this area which we would be happy to provide. It appears there may have been a misunderstanding regarding the 48 hour notice. Churches were free to select the time and place for the baptisms. The requirement to apply for a permit 48 hours in advance is to give the park staff adequate time to prepare the permit.

We also share your concern for the continuation of this traditional use of the rivers. As of today the park's policy has been clarified to state that no permit will be required for baptisms within the Riverways. I can assure you the National Park Service has no intention of limiting the number of baptisms performed within the park. I hope this addresses your constituent's concerns. If I can provide additional information or clarification you may contact me at 573/323-4236. Thank you for your continued interest in the Ozark National Riverways and the National Park Service.

Sincerely,

William N. Black  
Superintendent