

Congress of the United States

Washington, D.C. 20515

August 21, 2013

Mr. Bill Black
Superintendent, Ozark National Scenic Riverways
P.O. Box 490
Van Buren, MO 63965

Mr. Black:

Recently, I have been contacted by several of my constituents regarding traditional baptisms at Sinking Creek within the Ozark National Scenic Riverways (ONSR).

I have serious concerns about the actions taken by The National Park Service to require a special use permit in order to baptize in the riverways. This decision will have a negative and direct impact on the historic activities of the people that live and work along the rivers that make up the ONSR. I am particularly concerned with the idea that an individual or church would have to give 48 hours notice to the Park Service prior to any such event. The idea that a church can predict within two days if they will need to perform a baptism is absurd, and only diminishes these special occasions.

Furthermore, why have traditional baptismal services been singled out? Individuals are free to fish on the river, or float it, without providing two-days notice. Why does the use of the river for a baptism, a simple service that may only take a matter of minutes, require a special use permit? One would hope that the answer is not, "Because the National Park Service wants to limit the number of baptisms performed on the river."

I am very troubled by any federal rule that requires churches to apply for a permit for the purpose of baptism, especially, when these traditional activities have been done in the rivers and streams of this nation since its founding. I worry that forcing churches to acquire permits will discourage baptisms on the river and eventually lead to them being discontinued. I plan to take action on this in Washington DC, but in the meantime I am urging you to find a solution for the churches and communities along the ONSR. It is my hope that you will review this decision and consider any and all alternatives your authority will allow you to make.

Thank you for your consideration on this important matter.

Sincerely,



JASON SMITH
Member of Congress

