

These notes correspond to the accompanying presentation given to the Beautiful Buffalo River Action Committee on December 5th, 2017, at the headquarters of the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality. Matt McNair, Environmental Review Coordinator for the Arkansas Department of Parks & Tourism, is the author of the presentation and these notes. The notes here recorded do not constitute a transcription; the presentation itself was extemporaneous.

Slide 1

The first slide is a representation of the Buffalo River watershed. The graphic I used for this slide is the same one used by FTN Associates in the Buffalo River Watershed Management Plan, and has cropped up several times in several documents related to the WMP. I chose this slide to introduce the concept of the watershed to people who are already very, very familiar with the watershed, and in so doing point out that, to many—*most*—other folks that have a stake in the watershed, the familiar (to us) picture of the watershed is not necessarily the picture that comes readily to mind.

Slide 2

The second slide is a National Park Service map depicting the Buffalo National River. Following the observation that, outside of BBRAC and BBRAC-adjacent groups, the accepted definition of the watershed isn't a familiar concept, I used this map to illustrate what I suspect most folks think of when they hear the words "Buffalo River watershed". This also illustrates the most relevant portion of the watershed for the Arkansas Department of Parks & Tourism, as the Buffalo National River attracts ~1,000,000 visitors annually, and is therefore a major component of Arkansas's tourism industry (~\$7b/yr). To that end, ADPT heavily promotes the river (along with activities and attractions directly related to it) through our website and other media, and has a vested interest in the health of the river and its watershed.

Slide 3

The third slide is a repeat of the first. In the context of the presentation, the purpose here was to think about other activities that occur in the watershed that not only affect its health, but in which the ADPT would have a direct and ongoing interest.

Slide 4

This slide contains two satellite images, one highlighting the route Arkansas Highway 21 takes through the watershed, and the other Arkansas Highway 7. Each of these highways are designated as Arkansas Scenic Byways, and ASBs are considered by the ADPT to be priority attractions. The ADPT's annual report on tourism's economic impact uses "person-trips" as a primary metric, and "driving for pleasure" ranks

consistently high in our various user-group surveys as an outdoor activity in the state. (For the purposes of ADPT's Economic Impact Study, a "person-trip" is taken "every time one person goes to a place 50 miles or more, each way, from home in one day or is out of town one or more nights in paid or unpaid accommodations and returns to his/her origin". Travel for work--either a commute or as part of a traveling crew—and school are excluded from this definition.) Along with highlighting the varied and, perhaps, unexpected nature of activity in the watershed, this discussion of pleasure-driving was also meant to suggest possible contradictions in watershed activity and the possibility that different user-groups might well find the goals and priorities of other user-groups to be antithetical to their own. This also serves to highlight the sometimes-difficult position of the ADPT, as we are tasked to serve all user-groups equally, and to prioritize both economic growth and environmental conservation simultaneously.

Slide 5

This slide consists of four maps, each illustrating multiple motorcycle touring routes that crisscross the watershed. In the presentation, I noted that these maps were found by performing a simple online search, and used this as anecdotal evidence supporting the idea of motorcycle tourism as a popular, and growing, component of Arkansas's overall tourism industry, and an activity of consequence in the watershed. The ADPT also promotes motorcycle tourism, some of it in the watershed, and along with the official and unofficial highway routes, many more non-highway (off-road and gravel road) routes have been created, published, and popularized. Once again, this points to the variety of users and user-groups in the watershed, many of which might be at odds with one another, but all of which are entitled to the services of the ADPT.

Slide 6

This slide is a crop-cover map of the watershed, with the Tomahawk Creek sub-watershed near the center of the map. For the most part, the Buffalo National River corridor is the only publicly-owned land in the watershed, with the rest under private ownership. Of that private ownership, the lion's share is made up of small farms in the business of small-scale livestock production, hay production, light timbering, and poultry houses. In the presentation, I used my connection to this part of the watershed (I grew up near Tomahawk Creek, and my folks still live there) to help articulate the concerns of the people that live there and, for the most part, feel quite disconnected from the process of developing a WMP and the workings of the BBRAC, and distrustful of new government regulations that might restrict access to water for their stock.

Slide 7

This slide is the same crop-cover map, but zoomed out to take in more of the watershed and annotated. The annotations represent agritourism destinations in the watershed. The ADPT website has an entire page

devote to agritourism, and each business on the map has a live link on the ADPT site. I used this slide to discuss agritourism generally, and to point out the very specific way(s) ADPT can contribute to the work of BBRAC, especially in the context of bridge-building. In particular, I pointed out the possibility of agritourism as a possible revenue stream for younger farm families, and the fact that such a revenue stream might prove a feasible way to keep farming even as the modern agriculture industry makes it almost impossible for small-scale farms—especially those in the watershed—to remain viable economic concerns. One important link in this particular chain is the kind of client agritourism attracts; namely, idealistic urban citizens who desire to see not only a working farm (albeit an example of same that borders on anachronism), but one in a relatively-unspoiled landscape. Further, it can be presumed that visitors to one or more agritourism sites in the watershed will also visit the Buffalo National River proper; at least one outfit illustrated in the slide uses its proximity to the river as a selling point on their own website.

Slide 8

This slide is just a hodgepodge of images I used to illustrate the idea of “perception”, by which I meant the perception that people have of Arkansas. Basically, the idea here is that Arkansas is the kind of place that people imagine more than know, and their decision to visit Arkansas, or not, depends largely upon how they perceive Arkansas. (By the same token, whether locals stay or leave Arkansas, and how they tend to their home, also depends upon the idea(s) of Arkansas they hold.) The health of the watershed can contribute greatly to those perceptions, for good or ill, and as a government agency that tells stories to a wide array of residents and non-residents, the ADPT is uniquely positioned to aid BBRAC in its collective goal of watershed health.