

State of Arkansas
93rd General Assembly
Regular Session, 2021

A Bill

SENATE BILL 536

By: Senator Irvin

For An Act To Be Entitled

AN ACT TO ESTABLISH THE BUFFALO RIVER CONSERVATION
COMMITTEE; AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

Subtitle

TO ESTABLISH THE BUFFALO RIVER
CONSERVATION COMMITTEE.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ARKANSAS:

SECTION 1. Arkansas Code Title 15, Chapter 23, is amended to add an additional subchapter to read as follows:

Subchapter 10 – Buffalo River Conservation Committee

15-23-1001. Legislative findings.

The General Assembly finds that:

(1) The Buffalo National River holds distinction as the first national river in the United States of America and is a vital landmark to the people of the State of Arkansas and to the nation;

(2) The Buffalo National River is one of the state's and indeed the nation's premier rivers and is a source of scenic beauty, a unique habitat for local biota, an agricultural resource to the state as a whole, and a preeminent tourism destination in the State of Arkansas;

(3) The State of Arkansas is committed to the protection and preservation of this irreplaceable natural and cultural resource for all future generations of Arkansans and for the many tourists the Buffalo National River brings to the state;

(4) The State of Arkansas recognizes the valuable contributions



made by agricultural producers, the tourism industry, and the individual landowners within the Buffalo River Watershed;

(5) There is an ongoing need for the state to partner with local stakeholders to proactively manage the Buffalo River Watershed in order to ensure the Buffalo National River is maintained to the highest level of water quality;

(6) On September 30, 2016, the Beautiful Buffalo River Action Committee was formed by directive from the Governor to more comprehensively address conservation and environmental concerns in the Buffalo River Watershed;

(7) The Beautiful Buffalo River Action Committee successfully developed a watershed management plan and identified areas of need within the watershed, laying the foundation for future partnership with local stakeholders, federal partners, and other partners to leverage funding for projects to improve the Buffalo River Watershed; and

(8) The establishment of the Buffalo River Conservation Committee is necessary to establish measurable objectives and lead partnership projects to benefit water quality and resource management in the Buffalo River Watershed.

15-23-1002. Buffalo River Conservation Committee.

(a) The Buffalo River Conservation Committee is created to establish measurable objectives and lead partnership projects to benefit water quality and resource management in the Buffalo River Watershed.

(b) The committee members shall be appointed by and serve at the pleasure of the Governor.

(c) The committee shall be composed of the:

(1) Secretary of the Department of Energy and Environment or his or her designee;

(2) Secretary of the Department of Agriculture or his or her designee;

(3) Secretary of the Department of Parks, Heritage, and Tourism or his or her designee;

(4) Secretary of the Department of Health or his or her designee;

(5) County judge of Newton County; and

(6) County judge of Searcy County.

(d) The chair of the committee shall be designated by the Governor.

(e) The committee shall:

(1) Work in cooperation with each member to identify opportunities to leverage each member's respective department's unique expertise, relationships, focus areas, and funding mechanisms in support of the vitality of the Buffalo River Watershed;

(2) Conduct an annual review of the Buffalo River Watershed Management Plan and include recommendations for updates of the plan and a report on successes during the year, as identified by the committee, to be submitted to the Governor;

(3)(A) Establish subcommittees to lead various aspects of implementing the Buffalo River Watershed Management Plan.

(B) The subcommittees shall identify opportunities for training, relationship building, and specific projects, all of which shall be in service to preserving and enhancing water quality within the Buffalo River Watershed;

(4) Further develop the concepts from the Buffalo River Watershed Management Plan to incorporate additional tools and strategies as necessary;

(5) Consciously consider and act on the most recent pertinent available data related to water quality concerns and opportunities in the Buffalo River Watershed;

(6) Create an emphasis on action items that engage local stakeholders and landowners that have both a positive impact on water quality and are beneficial for landowners within the Buffalo River Watershed; and

(7) Consider the continued sampling and analysis of water quality data throughout the Buffalo River Watershed as vital for informing the work of the committee and its member agencies and organizations.

(f) In establishing subcommittees under subdivision (e)(3) of this section, the committee shall engage and include the following key stakeholders:

(1) Local landowners;

(2) Conservation organizations;

(3) Environmental and technical experts;

(4) Representatives of the tourism industry;

- (5) Local, county, and municipal officials; and
- (6) Federal partners.

APPROVED: 4/20/21