

**OZARK MOUNTAIN STATE PARK  
GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN  
PREAMBLE  
2020**

**HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:**

Located in western Taney County, on the north fringe of Branson’s city limits, Ozark Mountain State Park encompasses dolomite glade covered knobs, savanna and woodland landscapes, springs, and streams. Native vegetation including prairie grasses, sedges, and forbs dominate the rolling landscape. Mature post oaks provide a contemporary oak savanna community, while woodlands and contemporary forests occupy the narrow sides of tributary hollows, with riverbank forests lining major creeks. Visitors to the park will experience the magnificence of the Ozarks in the dolomite glades and bald knobs ascending from the Roark Creek valley.

The property for Ozark Mountain State Park was purchased by the State of Missouri, acting on behalf of the public as Trustee for natural resources, in October, 2016. Natural resource damage funds, for the acquisition of the property, were the result of monetary damages recovered by the Missouri Department of Natural Resources (MoDNR).

Through the Statewide Groundwater Restoration Plan, MoDNR seeks to implement restoration projects that directly benefit, restore and/or preserve groundwater resources through the acquisition and protection of groundwater recharge areas, including those containing direct conduits to groundwater such as those found in karst systems. Ozark Mountain State Park is a natural resource compensatory acquisition made through the Statewide Groundwater Restoration Plan, the purpose for which is to restore, rehabilitate and preserve the 1,011-acre watershed for the benefit of surface and groundwater flow into the waters of Roark Creek.

Roark Creek is a Class “C” stream that ceases flow in dry periods and maintains permanent pools that support aquatic life. Its headwaters consolidate and fall steeply off the Springfield Plateau into Roark Creek’s east and west forks, converging within Ozark Mountain State Park, seven stream miles above Lake Taneycomo. Over two miles of upper Roark Creek, including the lower reaches of its East and West forks, flow within Ozark Mountain State Park; plus five tributary hollows. Their rocky channels wind far below Branson’s mountainous skyline of rugged hills and grassy “bald knobs”, encased within the thick dolomite bedrock that geologically distinguishes the White River region. Those same bedrock layers, spanning nearly the entire park and most of the surrounding countryside, are the reason that prairie-like glades and dry, savanna-like woodlands persist as the park’s dominate natural vegetation. This extent of glades across a regional landscape is unique within Missouri, and Ozark Mountain State Park sits at its core.

People have been drawn to the waters of Roark Creek for centuries, with human occupation of the area dating minimally to 6,000 B.C. Taney County was once settled by homesteaders that migrated to the area from 1873 to 1910. One homesteader, Joel Garber, received a land patent in 1895 near Roark Creek. Garber, a preacher, quickly became a leader within the Roark Creek settlement. In 1895, the Garber Post Office was established with Joel Garber serving as postmaster until 1901. William Fronabarger, a homesteader, resumed the role as postmaster,

operated one of the first stores in town, and donated land for the community’s schoolhouse, which exists within the park’s boundaries today. The school was operational in January 1903 and was recognized as the Fronaberger School District until at least 1907, after which it became known as the Garber Schoolhouse. Over the years, the town of Garber moved three times before coming to its final location in 1904, outside of the park’s boundaries. In 1905, the nearby railroad was completed, leading to a slow growth in the community. Agricultural exports from the community included fruit, alfalfa, potatoes, corn, wheat, oats, timber, goats, cattle, pigs, and chickens.

The town of Garber was referenced in the popular 1907 American novel “*The Shepherd of the Hills*” by Harold Bell Wright. The novel exemplified the life, culture, and landscape of the Ozark Mountains in the early 1900’s. Thanks to J.K. Ross, known as “Old Matt” in *The Shepherd of the Hills*, life within the town and much of the state park boundaries were well documented between 1905 and 1919.

**MISSION STATEMENT:**

The Mission of Ozark Mountain State Park is to provide natural resource stewardship that preserves and restores native glades and woodlands; protects the aquatic diversity and water quality of Roark Creek and its groundwater recharge areas; protects cultural elements; and provides outdoor recreation and interpretation opportunities that will enable the appreciation of the natural and cultural resources provided by the area.

**APPROVED BY:**

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**Director, Missouri State Parks**

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Date

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**Planning & Development Director**

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Date

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**Regional Director**

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Date

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**Deputy Regional Director**

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Date

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**Natural Resource Manager**

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Date