

CELEBRATE THE BUFFALO....*The challenge goes on.*

Highlights of the History of the Buffalo National River

1946 – Glenn Avantus (Bud) Green writes in the *Arkansas Gazette* that parts of the Buffalo River warrant inclusion in the National Park Service (NPS) system.

1958 – Kenneth L. Smith, Crossett, Arkansas, prepares report for the Nature Conservancy, *Natural Area Project Analysis, Clark Creek Watershed, including the natural area known as 'Lost Valley'*.

1960 – Dr. Neil Compton writes to his daughter Ellen: "Nature Conservancy . . . has asked me to become Chairman of the Lost Valley Project. The purpose is to purchase and preserve that scenic feature. . . . I have, in fact, a lot of bigger ideas than just the Lost Valley. I am going to try to sell somebody on the idea of The Buffalo Gorge National Park and include Hemmed in Hollow, Villines Bluff, Rocky Bottom, Marble Falls and many other interesting spots over there."

1961 – Compton and others form the Nature Conservancy - Arkansas Chapter with a goal to create "a national park on the upper and middle reaches of the Buffalo River." U.S. Sen. J. W. Fulbright funds an NPS survey, guided by Compton.

1962 – U.S. Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas states, "You cannot let this river die. The Buffalo River is a national treasure worth fighting to the death to preserve," at a campfire at Big Bluff in Newton County. Dr. Doug James arranges a meeting on May 24 in Waterman Hall at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville to form The Ozark Society TO SAVE THE BUFFALO. Officers are Dr. Neil Compton, Craig Rosborough, George Kinter, and Mrs. Laird (Evangeline) Archer. At its peak some 23 chapters exist in Arkansas, Louisiana, Missouri, and Oklahoma.

1963 – The NPS in its field investigation report, *Suggested Buffalo National River, Arkansas*, recommends a National River administered by the NPS.

1964 – The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers initiates steps toward authorization of a high dam on the Buffalo River near Gilbert that will form a 45-mile-long reservoir backing water to the Hwy. 7 bridge at Pruitt.

1965 – (Apr.) Harry Pearson, in a series of six installments in the *Pine Bluff Commercial* newspaper, gives the BNR effort a voice and a rallying cry, "Battle for the Buffalo." – (July) Arkansas's four members of the U. S. House of Representatives sign a letter urging that a dam be built on the Buffalo River in North Arkansas. – (Dec.) Gov. Orval Faubus writes to Lt. Gen. William F. Cassidy, Chief of the Army Corps of Engineers, that the proposed Gilbert dam is not essential for flood control or hydroelectric power, would have minimal tourist appeal, and would ruin the river's scenic beauty and inundate the land. "I support the National River proposal."

1966 – The Corps of Engineers withdraws its recommendation to construct the Gilbert (and Lone Rock) dams.

1967 – (Jan.) U.S. Senators J.W. Fulbright and John L. McClellan introduce S.B. 704 to create the Buffalo National River (BNR). Newly-elected Rep. John Paul Hammerschmidt introduces a similar bill (H.R. 7020) in the House. Ken Smith publishes *The Buffalo River Country*, with 176 pages, 140 photographs, and 7 guide maps.

1968 – Illustrated with photographs by Ken Smith, the NPS issues a 24-page booklet presenting the case for establishing the Buffalo as a national river. The Ark. Game and Fish Commission and Ark. Parks, Recreation, and Travel Commission endorse the BNR.

1969 – A U.S. Senate Interior Committee hearing on the BNR is held. Conservationists attending outnumber dam proponents ten to one, with testimony from Margaret Hedges, Ozark Society representative, and Harold Alexander, representing Gov. Winthrop Rockefeller.

1971 – (Mar.) Gov. Dale Bumpers announces his support of the BNR. – (May) Senators Fulbright and McClellan steer the BNR bill (S.B. 7) through the U.S. Senate. – (Oct.) Rep. Hammerschmidt's BNR bill (H.R. 8382) is presented to the House Sub-Committee on National Parks and Recreation. The "Jubilee Bus" transports Ozark Society members to Washington, DC, to give testimony. The entire Arkansas congressional delegation supports the legislation.

1972 – The Buffalo National River bill (H.R. 8382), sponsored by Rep. Hammerschmidt, is approved by the House on Feb. 7. On Feb. 9, the Senate accepts the House amendments to the bill. – **ON MARCH 1 PRESIDENT RICHARD M. NIXON SIGNS S.B. 7, 92ND CONGRESS, INTO PUBLIC LAW 92-237.**

1973 – *The Buffalo River Canoeing Guide*, by Harold and Margaret Hedges, is published as a 16-page booklet.

1975 – The Ozark Society Foundation (OSF) is formed from sales of Ken Smith's *Buffalo River Country* and becomes the publishing arm of The Ozark Society.

1979 – Federal Judge Elsijane Trimble Roy dismisses a lawsuit challenging the state's right to give Buffalo River and Lost Valley state parks to the federal government for the establishment of the BNR.

1982 – *The High Ozarks: A Vision of Eden*, by Neil Compton, is published by The OSF.

1986 – Ken Smith accepts coordination of the construction of a trail along the Buffalo National River and asks The Ozark Society to become officially involved in the planning and construction of it.

1987 – The 25th anniversary of The Ozark Society is held at Buffalo Point on the Buffalo National River.

1992 – *The Battle for the Buffalo River: A Twentieth-Century Conservation Crisis in the Ozarks*, by Neil Compton, is published by the University of Arkansas Press. It is re-printed in 2010 with a new subtitle (*The Story of America's First National River*) and a Foreword by Kenneth L. Smith as a joint project of the UA Press and The OSF.

1997 – *The Buffalo River in Black and White*, by Neil Compton, is published by The OSF.

2004 – *Buffalo River Handbook*, by Ken Smith, is published by The OSF. In its first 12 years, more than 10,000 copies are sold. It is the definitive reference guide to the BNR. The second edition is published in 2018.

2008 – Written and produced by Larry Foley, the video "The Buffalo Flows" receives two Mid-America EMMY awards and two other nominations.

2012 – "40-50-100" celebrations take place: the 40th anniversary of the establishment of the Buffalo National River (March 1, 1972), the 50th anniversary of the formation of The Ozark Society (May 24, 1972), and what would have been the 100th birthday of Neil Compton (August 1, 1912). – (Sept.) The Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality grants an operating permit to C&H Hog Farms (a concentrated animal feeding operation, or CAFO) on Big Creek, threatening water quality in the Buffalo River watershed.

2017 – Ken Smith is inducted into the Arkansas Tourism Hall of Fame.

2019 – (June) Gov. Asa Hutchinson announces a joint State of Arkansas and Nature Conservancy \$6.2 million buy-out of the C&H Hog Farms on Big Creek, setting the tone for continued preservation in the Buffalo River watershed.

2021 – A 28-mile extension of the Buffalo River Trail between Hwy. 65 and Hwy. 14 is completed. The BRT totals 80 miles.

2022 – Gov. Asa Hutchinson proclaims the day March 1, 2022, as the "50th Anniversary of the National Park Designation of the Buffalo River." *Save the Buffalo River...Again* is published by Brian Thompson. The documentary video "First River: How Arkansas Saved a National Treasure" is produced. Ken Smith's *Buffalo River Country* is published in a 2022 Commemorative Re-issue.

Additional materials on the history of the establishment of the BNR can be found in collections in the University of Arkansas Libraries Special Collections, Fayetteville: the digital collection "[40-50-100: Milestones in Arkansas's Environmental History](#)"; Neil Compton Papers; Ozark Society Records; Gus Albright Scrapbooks; Kenneth L. Smith Papers; and in collections of elected officials, e.g., U.S. Senators J. William Fulbright, Dale Bumpers, and David Pryor; U.S. Rep. John Paul Hammerschmidt; and Gov. Orval E. Faubus. Ozark Society journals, newsletters, and other publications, including a compilation by Brenda Crites in 1987 for the Ozark Society's 25th anniversary, were used in creating this updated Buffalo National River timeline. Janet Parsch, March 2022.

"The challenge goes on. There are other lands and rivers, other wilderness areas, to save and to share with all. I challenge you to step forward to protect and care for the wild places you love best." — Dr. Neil Compton