March 31, 2020

Secretary David L. Bernhardt  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Bernhardt:

We represent the Buffalo National River Park. The trailheads are overrun with vehicles from every state in the country, including states with hot spots of COVID-19. This has caused a tremendous strain on our local citizens, law enforcement, grocery stores, and restaurants who are trying to follow the President’s directives and prevent the virus from spreading in their communities.

There are already limited groceries and supplies in these rural counties for the local citizens. The healthcare system is also very strained and limited in this rural area of Arkansas. There is not enough personal protective equipment for even our healthcare workers, much less our first responders who are responsible for the safety of both citizens and visitors to the park.

During normal circumstances, we would be grateful for the visitors and the economic activity. However, during this unprecedented national emergency, the trails are overcrowded with people who are not maintaining President Trump’s Directives for social distancing. Our Superintendent Mark Foust has been great to work with and is doing all he can to keep people safe and healthy, but he does not have the resources to control the crowds and enforce social distancing in order to prevent the spread of the virus.

It is our understanding that the Department of the Interior is closing parks on a case-by-case basis, depending on the level of local support for closure. Therefore, we respectfully request for you to close the Buffalo National River Park as soon as you can.

Sincerely,

Missy Thomas Irvin  
State Senator  
District 18

Scott Flippo  
Senate Majority Whip  
District 17

Breanne Davis  
State Senator  
District 16

cc: The Honorable Asa Hutchinson - Governor of the State of Arkansas  
The Honorable John Boozman - United States Senator  
The Honorable Tom Cotton - United States Senator  
The Honorable Rick Crawford - United States Representative  
The Honorable Steve Womack - United States Representative
March 31, 2020

The Honorable David Bernhardt  
Secretary of the United States Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Bernhardt:

I am writing this letter to request the closure of the Buffalo National River, located in Arkansas. In this time of crisis, we need leadership and strong actions. Closing the river will deliver a powerful message to all Americans of the severity of the situation and the importance of the simple yet effective tactic of just staying home.

Our single greatest weapon against the spread of coronavirus is to shelter in place and avoid contact with others. Now is not the time for national parks to encourage travel and visitation. You have the power and platform to make an even more impactful statement, and most important, to save lives. Please do this for the safety of our local Arkansans and all others.

Thank you in advance for your careful consideration of closing the Buffalo National River, located in Arkansas. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Keith Slape  
State Representative  
District 83

KS/mjs