

Statement of Michael J. Westerfield in Support of Banning New Medium and Large Confined Swine Operations in the Buffalo River Watershed.

I am an environmental scientist with a Master's Degree in Fisheries Biology and a number of years' experience evaluating the effects of changes in water quality upon aquatic systems. I also own a house and eighty wooded acres immediately adjacent to the Boston National River property on South Woolum Road near St. Joe, Arkansas. Geologically, the land is limestone karst. Behind the house the land drops away to a hollow with a small stream. The stream flows into Jameson Creek which in turn joins the Buffalo River south of the Woolum access point. Most of the year the stream flows underground for much of its length, and joins Jameson Creek, which also flows underground most of the time. The creek emerges from a large spring a short distance from the River, into which it flows. It also emerges as a series of springs in the river bed. The entire Buffalo River itself often sinks completely underground in summer, at a point near the Woolum camp grounds, and re-emerges about a mile south near Margaret White Bluff. There is also a dug pond on my property which has never held water. Any rain that falls upon it quickly disappears into the ground.

The point of all of this is that the land in the Buffalo River watershed is limestone karst, which is porous and riddled with cracks, caverns and underground watercourses, all of which route any liquid that falls or is poured or spread upon the surface of the land to the River very quickly and directly. So rapid and direct is the transit of liquids from the surface to the River that very little filtration or purification takes place en route. A very large proportion of the contaminants in the liquids placed on the surface of the land will reach the National River unaltered. In the case of large hog raising operations which typically include very large waste ponds, this means that many thousand or tens of thousands of gallons of liquid fecal material will daily enter the Buffalo River watershed system even without a failure in the waste pond system. The water quality will inevitably be degraded with a resulting loss of aquatic life, including sports fish, throughout the Buffalo and ultimately the White River systems. In the event of a catastrophic failure of a waste pond, which have happened a number of times at such facilities, the ecology of the Buffalo River system, and to some extent that of the White River, would be seriously and irreversibly damaged.

Given the huge importance of these river systems to the recreation industry of Arkansas, the hundreds of thousands of people who enjoy fishing, swimming, boating and other activities on and in the rivers each year, and the many millions of dollars they pump into the local economy on a continuing basis, it would be foolish indeed to allow this vital natural resource and state treasure to be needlessly – and inevitably - damaged for private profit. For these reasons and many others, I strongly encourage the amendment of the Arkansas Pollution Control and Ecology Commission Regulations to be amended to ban new medium and large confined swine operations in the Buffalo River watershed.

Michael J. Westerfield
westerfield@sysmatrix.net