

Media Advisory

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John Paul Hammerschmidt Memorial, Tribute Float, and Buffalo River Rally

The Buffalo National River is the jewel of the Arkansas Ozarks and the pride of the state. If not for former 3rd District Republican Congressman John Paul Hammerschmidt, and others like him, this natural treasure would have been lost to dams and developers. The late Congressman Hammerschmidt reached across the aisle and worked with disparate groups to forge a consensus that created America's first national river.

Now, some 43 years later, his efforts are being threatened by pollution from an industrial hog farm in the Buffalo River watershed. This Memorial Day weekend we are paying homage to the man who sought to preserve our river and reminding people that the fight to save the Buffalo is not over yet.

What The Ozark River Stewards along with other groups and concerned individuals will hold a short memorial in honor of Congressman Hammerschmidt. Those attending will be given the opportunity to write a note to his family expressing thanks and perhaps sharing memories of the Buffalo River. Afterwards, scientists from the National Park Service will share recent water testing results taken below the factory hog farm. The presentation will be followed by float from the Ozark access to Pruitt Landing about two miles downstream. Participants are encouraged to decorate their canoe, kayak or raft with streamers, balloons and banners that will be provided.

When 2:00pm, Sunday, May 24th, 2015

Where Pavilion at the Ozark Access to the Buffalo River, just east of Highway 7 between Jasper and Harrison.

Who Members of Congressman's Hammerschmidt's family will be attending. Also available for interviews will be Lin Wellford of the Ozark River Stewards, Gordon Watkins of the Buffalo River Watershed Alliance, Biologists Faron Usrey and Chuck Bitting of the National Park Service.

Rafts and canoes will be provided upon request to media members wishing to participate in the 2 mile float trip.

About Congressman Hammerschmidt

John Paul Hammerschmidt is a Harrison native and legendary member of the U.S. House of Representative who died on April 1. He represented Northwest Arkansas for 13 terms before retiring. Many remember him for his unwavering devotion to the people who elected him. During his career, JPH secured both large and small projects for his district while tending to his constituents' needs. Among his accomplishment was his fight to save the Buffalo River from being impounded by the Army Corps of Engineers. In 1972, he crafted legislation that was passed and then signed into law by President Richard Nixon creating America's first national river. His leadership and foresight have allowed people from all over the country and the world to come enjoy one of the finest free-flowing streams in America.

About the Buffalo National River

The Buffalo River, the crown jewel of Arkansas, was designated America's first national river. Its pristine, spring-fed waters wind 135 miles through the heart of the Ozarks. The river is an environmental wonderland and a treasure of the Natural State administered by the National Park Service. The watershed is home to over 300 species of fish, insects, freshwater mussels, and aquatic plants, including the endangered snuffbox mussel, the endangered Gray bat, and the endangered Indiana bat. The Buffalo is the number two tourist destination in Arkansas, receiving more than a million visitors a year. The economy surrounding the river generates more the 40 million dollars annually and provides more than 600 jobs for local Arkansans.

About C & H Industrial Hog Farm

C & H Hog Farm is located at Mount Judea a few miles upstream of the Buffalo River. The factory farm houses 6,500 pigs and generates more than two million gallons of feces and urine each year—the equivalent waste of a city the size 35,000 people. The untreated sewage is first held in ponds and then spread on thin topsoil over porous limestone terrain along the banks of Big Creek, which is a major tributary of the Buffalo. The factory farm was approved without notification of local residents, landowners, the Arkansas Department of Health or the National Park Service. There were no postings in newspapers or public hearings. Recently, a federal court cancelled a 3.5 million dollar taxpayer guaranteed loan to C & H because of an inadequate and flawed Environmental Assessment. The hog far employs approximately 5 people and is sponsored by Cargill, an international conglomerate.

The EPA estimates that 55% of its monitored waterways in America are now impaired, up from 36% twenty years ago. Agricultural runoff has been named as the leading cause of water pollution, much of it generated by industrial-scale operations like C& H.