

**Buffalo River Conservation Committee
Background and Frequently Asked Questions
October 16, 2019**

What is the Buffalo River Conservation Committee?

The Buffalo River Conservation Committee (BRCC) is a committee established by an Executive Order of Governor Asa Hutchinson. The purpose of the BRCC is to implement projects in the Buffalo River Watershed to protect the quality and enhance the value of the Buffalo National River in partnership with local stakeholders.

Who are the members of the BRCC?

The BRCC is composed of the following members appointed by Governor Hutchinson:

- Wes Ward – Secretary of the Department of Agriculture (Chair)
- Stacy Hurst – Secretary of the Department of Parks, Heritage, and Tourism
- Becky Keogh – Secretary of the Department of Energy and Environment
- Dr. Nathan Smith – Secretary of the Department of Health

What are the committee's specific duties?

Executive Order 19-14 requires the BRCC to:

- Work in cooperation with one another to identify opportunities to leverage their Department's unique expertise, relationships, and funding mechanisms in support of the vitality of the watershed
- Annually review the Buffalo River Watershed Management Plan, provide recommendations for updates, and provide a report to the Governor on successes during the year as identified by the BRCC
- Establish subcommittees to lead various aspects of implementing the watershed management plan
 - o The subcommittees will include key stakeholders representing local landowners, conservation organizations, environmental and technical experts, representatives of the tourism industry, county and municipal officials, and federal partners in establishing subcommittees.
 - o The subcommittees will identify opportunities for training, relationship building, and specific projects to preserve and enhance water quality within the Buffalo River Watershed.

What are the BRCC's next steps?

The BRCC members will seek feedback from landowners, county and municipal officials, tourism industry representatives, conservation organizations, agricultural groups, and other stakeholders within the Buffalo River Watershed. Ideas received will assist the BRCC in identifying areas of focus for potential subcommittees and establishing the framework for potential grants.

The BRCC will ultimately schedule public meetings within the Buffalo River Watershed area to discuss the feedback received and the areas of focus identified for potential subcommittees. The public meetings will provide local landowners and stakeholders an additional opportunity to comment on how the BRCC should move forward.

Once the BRCC establishes the subcommittees, those subcommittees will be responsible for identifying opportunities for training, relationship building, and specific initiatives to preserve and enhance water quality in the watershed.

Who will be on the subcommittees?

The subcommittees will be composed of local landowners; local city and county officials; and stakeholder groups in the areas of agriculture and tourism.

How do local landowners and other stakeholders in the watershed get involved?

Local landowners and stakeholders may submit comments and suggestions through the Arkansas Department of Agriculture's website. A link to provide feedback can be found [here](#).

These comments and suggestions will be utilized to identify areas of focus for subcommittees and be discussion points in public meetings.

Local landowners and stakeholders are encouraged to attend the public meetings which will provide an additional opportunity to give feedback and ask questions. The dates, times, and locations of the public meetings have not been determined at this time. Meeting notices will be sent to area newspapers, shared via social media, and posted on the Arkansas Department of Agriculture's website at agriculture.arkansas.gov.

Because people who live and work in the Buffalo River Watershed know what is needed the most, local landowners, officials and stakeholders will be members of the various subcommittees.

How much money is available and how will it be spent?

A total of \$2 million is available; \$1 million from Governor Hutchinson's discretionary fund, and \$1 million from private donors.

The money will be spent on initiatives identified by the subcommittees based on the feedback from local landowners, county and municipal officials, tourism industry representatives, conservation organizations, agricultural groups and other stakeholders within the Buffalo River Watershed. For example, initiatives may include stream bank stabilization, trail management practices, and waste water system management. The money can also be leveraged to obtain matching federal dollars through the United States Department of Agriculture.

The final approval for expenditure of the public dollars will be made by the Arkansas Department of Agriculture.

Will local landowners be forced to implement conservation practices on their land?

No, participation will be strictly voluntary. There are many landowners in the Buffalo River Watershed who may not need any assistance with conservation efforts; however, there may be other landowners who want to improve their current practices. Landowners who choose not to participate will not be cast in a negative light.

Will funding sources for other parts of the state be impacted by these grant programs?

No. Existing grant programs such as the Unpaved Roads Program will not be impacted. The BRCC monies can be processed through those grant programs for specific initiatives in the Buffalo River Watershed leaving the current funding within the programs in place for use in the remainder of the state.

Is the purpose of BRCC to purchase conservation easements similar to the one purchased from C&H Hog Farm?

No. BRCC funding will not be utilized to purchase conservation easements. BRCC wants local landowners to be able to continue their farming and other operations. BRCC's primary goal is to protect the Buffalo River Watershed through supporting the efforts of local landowners and municipalities not to purchase conservation easements or to take property through eminent domain.

What is the background of the BRCC?

On September 30, 2016, Governor Hutchinson created the Beautiful Buffalo River Action Committee (BBRAC) to develop an Arkansas-led approach to identify and to address potential concerns in the Buffalo River Watershed. In its creation, Governor Hutchinson directed BBRAC to initiate the development of a non-regulatory, Buffalo River Watershed Management Plan.

A copy of the Buffalo River Watershed Management Plan can be found [here](#).

The Buffalo River Watershed Management Plan (WMP) was developed with financial assistance and guidance from the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Region 6. Beginning in December 2016 and continuing until October 2017, four stakeholder meetings occurred in Marshall and Jasper, Arkansas to assist in the development of the WMP. Stakeholders in attendance included farmers; landowners; political representatives; state and federal agencies; and interest groups representing agriculture, conservation, and recreation. The WMP was fully accepted by the EPA on June 5, 2018.

On September 23, 2019, Governor Hutchinson signed Executive Order 19-14 establishing the Buffalo River Conservation Committee (BRCC) which replaces the Beautiful Buffalo River Action Committee (BBRAC).

In Governor Hutchinson's announcement, he stated "Now that the watershed management plan is in place, it is the right time to engage with stakeholders and landowners to start implementing projects that make a difference. The Buffalo National River is an irreplaceable resource, both for Arkansas and the nation. Protecting its quality and enhancing its value as a driver of economic development will require a unique cooperative effort. The Buffalo River Conservation Committee comprises the state departments with the most engagement in the watershed, and I am confident in their ability to connect with other engaged leaders to coordinate this effort."

A copy of the Executive Order can be found [here](#).