



Memorandum January 7th, 2019

To: U S Forest Service –District Ranger, Tim Oosterhous & Forest Geologist,
Andrew McCormick

From: Friends of the Ouachita Trail—Bo Lea, President

Subject: Barber Quartz Prospecting Permit

Friends of the Ouachita Trail (FoOT) would like to go on record as strongly opposing the permit that would allow open pit mining next to the Ouachita Trail. FoOT does not oppose the appropriate use of forest resources. However, we do not feel that putting a mining operation right next to a National Recreational Trail would be considered an appropriate action. Several FoOT members did a field survey of the proposed site which affirmed the negative impact on the OT. With 1.3 million acres in the Ouachita National Forest, you would hope there would be other options.

It has been disappointing and disheartening as to how this permit application has been handled in regard to the Ouachita Trail. Reinforcing the points made by FoOT District Captain, David Saugey concerning the project assessment (1) The Ouachita Trail should have been included in the “Issues” (2) The Ouachita Trail should have been addressed in the “Quality of the Human Environment” (3) The Ouachita Trail should have been addressed in the “Unique Characteristics of the Geographic Area” (4) FoOT should have been one of the groups consulted for original input. I agree with David that you would never know reading the EA that the Ouachita Trail existed next to the project or if it might be impacted in a negative way.

We learned over the past year or so, that the current Forest plan no longer has the protective corridor for the OT which was previously included. As stewards of the trail this has made us somewhat concerned about the Forest Service’s commitment to the OT and its protection. Now with this mining proposal, it

would appear our concerns were well founded. FoOT cannot clean out a water seep to improve a water source for trail users but this permit calls for removing the vegetation and top soil from 21 acres plus building a high wall to protect the public from the excavation area. FoOT moved the Rock Garden Shelter due to the possible impact I believe on a lizard species but when you read the EA concerning the northern long-eared bat, a way is found to justify the likely adverse effect on the bat. The change in habitat and the negative impact on the Pileated Woodpecker and Scarlet Tanager was ok because other species would benefit. The EA says that the disturbance from noise and general human activity would impact the forest species during mining activities. I find the contrast in environmental application somewhat uneven to say the least.

I have serious concerns that this matter beyond just the mining issue will have lasting ramifications going forward with FoOT and the Forest Service. The risk is high that both parties will lead to a defensive position that will not be good for the Ouachita Trail. With different opinions on whether to have the FoOT & Forest Service joint planning session in February, I have not cancelled the meeting but at the same time I will not attend until there is some clarification on the Barber Mining issue. Hopefully that can happen sooner than later.

FoOT has done amazing work for the OT. Volunteers have given so much in time, labor, expenses, and money to maintain & improve the trail. Many are upset about what has happened and how it happened. For the first time, I too question my future with this effort. Probably an issue that should have never gotten to this point but here we are. I trust the Forest Service to carefully consider where we go from here. A lot rides on the outcome and it will be more than one mining permit.

Respectfully submitted

Bo Lea, FoOT President

501-622-8809