



## Spring 2019 Report by Bo Lea, President

**The 18<sup>th</sup> annual Ouachita Challenge** mountain bike race was held the weekend of March 30-31. From all accounts it was another very successful event. Although the weather was cold on Saturday, it was a lot better than had been forecast. FoOT plays a major role in the event. Robert Cavanaugh, Ron & Debbie Mayfield, and Bo & Brenda Lea serve on the Board of the Ouachita Mountain Challenge Association. Numerous meetings are held beginning in the fall to plan for the next Challenge.

A big “thank you” to all the FoOT and Ouachita Mountain Hikers that again this year volunteered to help make the Challenge possible. The Challenge is FoOT’s primary source of revenue for its mission of keeping up the Ouachita and Womble Trails. Appreciate all those who give back to our trails. I think most of those volunteering would say it is a lot of fun.

This year at the Challenge Saturday evening dinner, **retiring OT district captains, Ed & Sue Hawkins were recognized** for their many years of contributions to FoOT and the OT. Also, Ed and Sue were primary leaders of the Challenge for the first 14 years. Theirs is a remarkable record of service and giving.

FoOT under the leadership of VP of Maintenance, Ron Mayfield has implemented the first **contractor program for the OT**. The primary funding source has come from the \$300 adopt a mile effort. The goal is to work those parts of the OT that are not adopted due to difficulty and accessibility. Fouche Mountain has been completely worked, which includes both sides of Foran Gap. Yes, the wall of briars west of Turner Gap was cleared.

FoOT has made its objections known to the U.S. Forest Service in regard to a permit application for a **quartz mining operation within 150’ of the OT**. Currently we are waiting on a revised proposal from the Forest Service on this issue.

The **FoOT Website** has been transitioned to the WordPress software. Web Master Tom Calhoun has done an excellent job accomplishing this difficult task. This upgrade will make the site more functional and user friendly.

With our adopters, the TCC teams, contractors, and special volunteers, the **Ouachita**



**Trail had for the first time a condition of “green” for the entire 223 miles.** That does not mean the trail is in perfect shape. No doubt before the ink dried, weather events have impacted the OT and perhaps the green status in different sections. Still a remarkable achievement. Trail conditions are a moving target that requires a sustained effort. A wet spring and resulting growth will provide plenty of opportunities.

A **Texas Conservation Crew** will be working on the OT from April 23<sup>rd</sup> to April 30<sup>th</sup>. Teams of TCC members have been a great addition to our efforts on the trail. Hopefully FoOT will be fortunate to have some additional crews this year

FoOT has been awarded a **Recreational Trail Program Grant** to remodel and upgrade the remaining 8 older shelters on the east end of the OT. Final paperwork has been submitted to the Arkansas Department of Transportation to allow us to proceed. Upon final approval, we anticipate actual work to begin this fall. Completion of this project will give the OT 9 upgraded shelters and 12 new shelters, a major improvement to the OT.

FoOT's corporate sponsor **Mountain Valley Spring Water** has new warm weather **short sleeve t-shirts for sale**. They should be available online and at their Hot Springs visitor's center by April 12<sup>th</sup> is not a little sooner. We had them for sale at the Ouachita Challenge and sold several. This year's design is really nice, I think everyone will like them. Remember all the profits go to FoOT and our trails.

A busy first part of 2019 for FoOT. Contributions of time, effort, and money from so many great volunteers has allow FoOT to carry out its mission to maintain and improve the Ouachita and Womble Trails. Thanks!!!

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