

Big Spring Lodge and Cabins
Request for Expressions of Interest Regarding Adaptive Re-use
Ozark National Scenic Riverways
Van Buren, Missouri
Spring 2026

Introduction

The National Park Service (NPS) is seeking expressions of interest in developing the historic Big Spring Lodge, guest cabins and other associated structures within Ozark National Scenic Riverways (Riverways). The site is in the Lower Current River District of the Riverways less than 5 miles from downtown Van Buren, Missouri, at the end of State Route 103. While these buildings were historically used as overnight accommodations and food service, the NPS seeks concepts and ideas for adaptive reuse of the buildings. The NPS particularly believes that a lodging operation, conference center, special event space, retail operations and food and beverage operations, may be appropriate.

Instruments

The two instruments most commonly used by the NPS for facilities such as those under consideration in this Request for Expressions of Interest (RFEI) are a concession contract and a lease. These instruments are governed by 36 CFR 51 (concession contracts) and 36 CFR 18 (leasing).

Financial Requirements

Financial requirements vary based on the legal instrument under which the business opportunity is issued and may be based on fair market lease value or a financial analysis. The operator will be required to comply with all provisions of Executive Order 14026 of April 27, 2021, (Increasing the Minimum Wage for Federal Contractors) and its implementing regulations, including the applicable contract clause, codified at 29 C.F.R. pt. 23. The operator must comply with all provisions of Executive Order 13706 of September 30, 2016, (Establishing Paid Sick Leave for Federal Contractors) and its implementing regulations, including the applicable contract clause, codified at 29 C.F.R. pt. 13.

Term Length

Only long-term occupancy arrangements will be considered. Term length will be determined by the NPS. Depending upon the instrument used, the shortest term may be 10 years, and the longest could be up to 60 years.

Process

Detailed guidance for responses to this RFEI are contained in the “Considerations” and “Submission Guidelines” sections. The NPS may choose all, part or none of the content of one or more responses to the RFEI for further consideration and possible development into a public solicitation that the NPS then would advertise to the public, inviting all qualified candidates to submit proposals for the operation. There are very limited circumstances under which the building may be reused by a non-NPS entity without a public solicitation. The precise process for soliciting and selecting proposals will depend on the nature of the business opportunity and the legal instrument under which the proposal is issued.

A concessions contract is awarded through a prospectus process and issued to provide necessary and appropriate visitor services within a park area. Concessioners pay, to the NPS, a franchise fee for privileges granted under the contract. The franchise fee is determined through a franchise fee analysis; consideration of revenue to the NPS is subordinate to protecting park resources and providing services to the park visitors. The franchise fee also takes into consideration that the Concessioner has a reasonable opportunity for a net profit related to capital invested and the obligations of the contract. Concession contracts include compensation for capital investments in the property. Concession contracts are generally 10 years or less but may be awarded for a term up to 20 years if warranted by the contract terms and conditions, including required capital improvements.

A lease is typically awarded through a Request for Proposal. Leased property can be used for any lawful purpose with some required determinations identified in 36 CFR 18 § 18.4. Fair market value rent is required for leases. However, requirements under the lease for the lessee to maintain the property are taken into consideration when determining the fair market value rent, as well as possible restrictions on the use of the property.

Visiting the Site

A Site Visit will be held August 28, 2024, at 9:00am CDT. **All parties intending to participate in the site visit must send an email message to eric_nikkel@nps.gov no later than 4pm CDT, Friday, August 21, 2024**, to make a reservation. A strict limit of two persons per business entity will be authorized to attend the site visit.

Questions

All questions related to this RFEI must be submitted in writing no later the 4pm CDT, Friday, September 6, 2024. Questions must be submitted to eric_nikkel@nps.gov.

RFEI Response Due

No later than 4pm CDT, October 11, 2024, to Eric Nikkel at the address below.

Contact

Eric Nikkel, Concessions Specialist, eric_nikkel@nps.gov (402) 661-1772 Interior Regions 3,4,5, 601 Riverfront Drive, Omaha, Nebraska 68102

Request for Expressions of Interest

The NPS announces this RFEI for the adaptive re-use of the historic Big Spring Lodge, the former museum building, 14 unique guest cabins, a boat dock and one staff residence. The RFEI allows interested parties an opportunity to review the property, facilities, and area and to submit their concept(s) of potential future use of the facilities, considering the Riverways' purpose and building's significance. The NPS may choose all, none, or part of the content of one or more responses to the RFEI for further consideration and possible development into a public solicitation that the NPS then would advertise to the public, inviting all qualified candidates to submit proposals for the operation.

Big Spring Lodge History: When the energetic young men of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) began construction of the historic Big Spring Lodge and Cabins in 1934, their task was a mighty undertaking. They

painstakingly crafted buildings, trails, and landscape features from dolomite stone and oak timber harvested locally. In 1938 the Works Progress Administration continued the legacy of the CCC, adding cabins, boat docks, and other structures.

In the spirit of their original efforts, the NPS has recently completed a major revitalization of the historic Big Spring dining lodge, 14 vacation rental cabins, retail store, boat dock, trails, and other associated facilities and structures near Van Buren, Missouri. The project included extensive restoration and preservation of the original timber and stone construction, as well as major upgrades to deteriorating utility systems and fixtures. The boat dock and one of the cabins were upgraded to comply with the Architectural Barriers Act Accessibility Standards in order to provide accessible experiences for all visitors. Modern amenities and conveniences have been incorporated, while still retaining the rustic charm that makes the area so special.

The Facilities

The facilities housed a dining and lodging concession operation that dates to their construction, when they were a central feature of Big Spring State Park. After the area was transferred to the NPS to be included in Ozark National Scenic Riverways in 1970, concessioners continued to operate the historic lodge and cabins to provide visitors with a unique and rich experience in one of the most heavily visited areas of the Riverway during the summer months. Annual visitation to the Ozark National Scenic Riverways welcomes approximately 1.3 million visitors each year.

- Big Spring Lodge – Approximately 3720 square feet



- Former Museum – Approximately 836 square feet



- Cabins – The cabins range in approximate square footage from 436 to 1061.



- Residence – Approximately 620 square feet



The Park Area

Ozark National Scenic Riverways extends along 134 miles of the Current and Jacks Fork rivers in the Ozark Highlands of south central and eastern Missouri. The National Riverways' authorized boundary encompasses a total of 80,790 acres of land. The clean, clear waters of the Riverways, alternately sliding over rapids and gathering in still translucent pools, provide excellent opportunities for canoeing, floating, swimming, fishing, and jonboating. Other recreational activities include camping, picnicking, sightseeing, hiking, horseback riding and hunting in season. The rivers are fed by intermittent streams, which wind their way through narrow valleys, or hollows, in the gently rolling countryside, and by numerous springs. The springs are associated with a network of more than 380 caves that extends along the river corridors. The landscape remains predominantly rural, with broadleaf forests and occasional open fields providing habitat for wildlife and a scenic backdrop for the rivers. Many of the local residents are descendants of the self-sufficient Ozark settlers, whose history is represented by numerous historic buildings and archeological sites throughout the Riverways.

Warm summers and mild winters permit year-round recreation in the Riverways, with the most favorable temperatures for recreation occurring from April to October. About half the days in July and August have maximum temperatures around 90 degrees Fahrenheit. Precipitation is distributed irregularly and averages 45 to 50 inches per year. Local severe thunderstorms are common during summer months. September, October, and November are typically the driest months and April, May,

and June the wettest months. Flooding is common in the Riverways, and flash floods may occur during the rainy season. The NPS implements a visitor-warning system whenever danger of flooding or flash flooding is known to be severe.

The Riverways is the first national park to protect a river system in the country with over 134 miles of rivers to float on, and including many caves, springs and over 12,000 years of human history.

Considerations

Use of federal land must be authorized by law and comply with the law under which the use is authorized. As previously mentioned, the two instruments most commonly used by the NPS for a facility such as the one under consideration in this RFEI are a concessions contract and a lease.

Uses of federal land under NPS management must meet certain criteria. This means that the proposed use must:

- not degrade or unduly impair the park's resources and values;
- be compatible with the programs of the NPS;
- be consistent with the purposes established by law for the park area in which it is located; and
- ensure the preservation of any historic property involved with the proposed use.

Additionally, the proposed use must follow all applicable local, state, and federal laws, such as health, safety, food handling, and labor and employment law. Proposed uses may, if implemented, be subject to compliance with environmental and historical laws.

Submission guidelines

Respondents are encouraged to provide input that demonstrates how their concept will support the park's purpose. Responses should not exceed 15 pages total. The NPS is particularly interested in receiving:

Transmittal letter indicating the name of submitting company or organization, legal structure, and contact information for person(s) authorized to represent the submitting company or organization.

Description of the reuse concept for the assigned property at the Big Spring Lodge, Cabins and other associated structures, including anticipated site improvements, type and estimated square feet of all uses, estimated parking requirements in addition to the space provided, and a description of the type of visitor experience.

Submittal of conceptual-level description of financial structure for proposed use. This may be stated in broad terms and may include desired instrument for occupancy (e.g., lease, concession, etc.), general design for compensation to the NPS (e.g., ratio of capital investments vs. cash payments) and anticipated requirements such as lease or contract term in years.

Any other pertinent points or conditions.

Please indicate in your submission whether you would like the NPS to retain your contact information and notify you of future business opportunities.

Please submit two (2) original copies of your response to the Request for Expression of Interest **by 4pm CDT, October 11, 2024**. In addition, respondents are encouraged to include an electronic copy of their proposal. All submittals become the property of the NPS. The NPS may choose all, part or none of the content of one or more responses to the RFEI for further consideration and possible development into a public solicitation that the NPS then would advertise to the public, inviting all qualified candidates to submit proposals for the operation. Submittals must be sent to **National Park Service, Commercial Services Office, Attn: Eric Nikkel; 601 Riverfront Drive, Omaha, NE 68102.**

The following websites provide information for commercial services and Ozark National Scenic Riverways,

The Concessions Program: <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/concessions/index.htm>

The Leasing Program: <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/leasing/index.htm>

Ozark National Scenic Riverways: <https://www.nps.gov/ozar/index.htm>

Disclaimers

This document is not intended as a formal offering for the award of any legal authorization. Participants should not assume they will receive any preference in connection with any future solicitation should they choose to submit materials in response to this RFEI. The NPS reserves the right, at its sole discretion to withdraw or discontinue the RFEI in whole or in part; use the ideas or materials submitted in response to this RFEI in any manner deemed to be in the best interests of the NPS, including, but not limited to, the undertaking of the prescribed work in a manner other than that which is set forth herein. The NPS likewise reserves the right, at any time, to change any components, concepts or approaches of the RFEI. All costs associated with responding to the RFEI are the sole responsibility of the respondent and any such costs shall not be reimbursed by the NPS. NPS will not return materials submitted in connection with this RFEI. All materials submitted in response to this RFEI shall become the property of NPS. The NPS shall retain use of the ideas or materials submitted in any manner deemed to be in the best interests of the NPS, including, but not limited to, the undertaking of the prescribed work in any manner. The NPS likewise reserves the right, at any time, to change any components, concepts or approaches of the RFEI. All costs associated with responding to the RFEI are the sole responsibility of the participant and any such costs shall not be reimbursed by the NPS.

NPS assumes no liability for the accuracy of the information provided in this RFEI.