



File Code: 2300

Date:

JAN 15 2013

Mr. David M. Fleming  
President  
Pocahontas County Commission  
900 Tenth Avenue  
Marlinton, WV 24954

Dear Mr. Fleming :

Thank you for your letter of December 4, 2012, to Secretary Vilsack regarding the locally-generated proposal to establish a Birthplace of Rivers National Monument in the State of West Virginia. Secretary Vilsack has asked me to respond to you. While the Forest Service has not been asked to review a specific proposal around establishment of a National Monument, I am happy to provide some insight as to the process, considerations and management associated with monument designation.

As part of its America's Great Outdoors Initiative, the Obama Administration has placed a high priority on supporting locally-driven conservation efforts including those that encourage a strong recreation and restoration economy. As part of this initiative, the Administration committed to ensuring strong local input into any designation under the Antiquities Act. For example, last fall, after extensive outreach and local public meetings, President Obama designated the Chimney Rock National Monument on the San Juan National Forest with the bipartisan support of the Colorado Congressional delegation and the support of hundreds of local business owners, recreationists, tribal members and interested citizens. Chimney Rock, like six other monuments, will continue to be managed by the US Forest Service. Regarding your concern that a potential monument on the Monongahela National Forest stay under control of the US Forest Service, there is no reason that that couldn't continue to be the case.

Every monument designation is unique and reflects the place-specific management needs and opportunities of that particular situation. Typically, as has been the situation on recent Forest Service monuments, monument designations complement the underlying management plan—which is developed with public input. If hunting and fishing access is permitted under the current forest management plan, that would typically continue as a national monument. The Forest Service recognizes the importance of hunting and fishing to rural communities in West Virginia. Likewise, if restoration activities or vegetative management treatments are a recognized and prioritized component of the exiting forest management plan, a national monument designation would typically continue such activities.



National monuments explicitly preserve all valid existing rights (such as grazing or valid oil and gas leases), and do not enlarge or diminish the existing jurisdiction of any state fish and wildlife agencies regarding fish and wildlife management. In addition, designations direct the completion of a monument management plan—in accord with all public outreach, notice and comment required of any national forest management plan.

Should leaders in the local community and the state continue to have interest in exploring monument designation, an open, transparent public process in partnership with local residents, governments and any other interested parties would be a critical step in considering a potential monument designation that honors your rich cultural heritage and has a positive effect on the vital tourism economy.

Again, thank you for writing and sharing the values and concerns your constituents ascribe to this special place. I look forward to working with you as the Administration considers conservation of this important area.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Thomas L. Tidwell". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

THOMAS L. TIDWELL

Chief