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B.2 Wes Ward
Secretary of Agriculture

February 2, 2021

Senator Jonathan Dismang, Chair
Representative Lane Jean, Co-Chair
Joint Budget Committee
Arkansas State Legislature
1 Capitol Mall
Little Rock, AR 72201

Dear Senator Dismang and Representative Jean:

On behalf of the Buffalo River Conservation Committee, I am writing to request review by the Joint Budget Committee of three funding allocations recommended by the Buffalo River Conservation Committee during meetings held in January of 2021.

The three funding allocations being submitted for review are:

- \$65,000 to the U.S. Geological Survey for funding to continue a study to determine why filamentous algae is increasing in the Buffalo River
- \$2,500 to fund the Searcy County Chamber of Commerce's tree proposal
- \$50,000 to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Wildlife Services for feral hog eradication efforts in the Buffalo River Watershed

Detailed information about the funding proposals and an update on recent activity of the Buffalo River Conservation Committee are attached for your review. A copy of the committee's annual report is also attached.

I appreciate your consideration. Please do not hesitate to let me know if additional information is needed.

Respectfully,

Wesley W. Ward
Secretary of Agriculture
State of Arkansas

Buffalo River Conservation Committee
Recent Activity and Funding Allocations
February 3, 2021

The Arkansas Legislative Council approved providing \$1 million from the Governor's discretionary fund on November 15, 2019. When the funding was approved the BRCC agreed to submit funding allocations to the House and Senate Public Health, Welfare, and Labor Committee for review prior to disbursements.

Due to the 93rd General Assembly convening on January 11, 2021 the Arkansas Department of Agriculture submits the following updates to the Joint Budget Committee for their review.

The BRCC distributed a press release on November 9, 2020 seeking applications for projects that need assistance through the remaining \$167,421 in funding available through the BRCC. Applications were accepted through December 15, 2020. A total of ten applications were received and each applicant was invited to provide a presentation to the BRCC on their funding proposal. The following meetings were held to discuss the funding proposals and determine allocation of the remaining BRCC funding:

January 7, 2021: BRCC members and subcommittee members convened to receive an update on the four topic areas and receive presentations and review proposals submitted for funding. The presentations and proposals for funding included the following: (1) U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) request for funding in order to continue a study to determine why filamentous algae is increasing in the Buffalo River; (2) City of Jasper request for funding to purchase a historic building that would serve as an information center and provide restrooms for the public; (3) United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Wildlife Services (WS) request for funding to expand feral hog eradication efforts across the Buffalo River Watershed; (4) Greater Searcy County Chamber of Commerce request for funding to purchase trees that would be given to Searcy County residents and also planted in public areas in the county; and (5) University of Arkansas Pine-Bluff (UAPB) request for funding to conduct a study to identify strategies to control algal blooms in the Buffalo River. Due to the length of time associated with the presentations, the BRCC members decided to reconvene at a later date in order to continue to discussion of the proposals.

January 21, 2021: BRCC members and subcommittee members reconvened to continue funding discussions. The BRCC members agreed to provide \$65,000 in funding to the U.S. Geological Survey and \$2,500 to fund the Searcy County Chamber of Commerce tree proposal. The BRCC also agreed to hold approximately \$50,000 of the remaining funds for additional consideration and exploration of a mobile app that could be utilized within the Buffalo River Watershed. Lastly, the BRCC decided to reconvene at a later date to continue discussions on the USDA APHIS WS feral hog funding proposal.

January 29, 2021: BRCC members and subcommittee members reconvened for additional discussion of the feral hog funding proposal. Following the discussion, the BRCC approved providing \$50,000 to USDA APHIS WS for materials and supplies associated with feral hog eradication efforts. USDA APHIS WS agreed to report back to the BRCC on the progress of feral hog eradication efforts within the Buffalo River Watershed at the appropriate time.

At the conclusion of the recent meetings, the BRCC has allocated \$950,079 of available funding and is holding \$49,921 in reserve for exploration of a mobile app that could be utilized within the Buffalo River Watershed.

Buffalo River Conservation Committee
Current Status of Funding Allocations
February 3, 2021

City of Jasper Wastewater Treatment Facility Improvements: \$250,000

- July 15, 2020: Arkansas Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Commission approved a \$440,000 loan and a \$1,351,750 loan with principal forgiveness from the Arkansas Clean Water State Revolving Loan Fund to the City of Jasper for wastewater treatment facility improvements.
- August 6, 2020: The BRCC approved providing \$250,000 to the City of Jasper to assist with wastewater treatment facility improvements.
- August 20, 2020: The House and Senate Public Health, Welfare, and Labor Committee approved the \$250,000 funding to the City of Jasper.
- January 15, 2021: The Arkansas Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Division received a draft facility plan that lays out the project in two phases. The first phase of the project will be the pump station, a retaining wall that will elevate the pump station to mitigate the flooding issues that affect the existing pump station, a standby power generator and 150 linear feet of 8 inch gravity sewer line and 150 linear feet of 4 inch force main that will tie the new pump station into the existing system.
- BRCC funding of \$250,000 will be used in Phase 1 and it is anticipated that the contract for this phase will be awarded in June 2021.

Searcy County and Newton County Unpaved Roads: \$570,979

- August 6, 2020: The BRCC approved providing \$231,935 for Cane Branch Road in Searcy County and \$397,400 for Cave Mountain Road (to Hawksbill Crag) in Newton County. The Arkansas Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Division, Nonpoint Source Management Program, will provide \$110,263 in funding assistance to the projects bringing the total funding for the two sites to \$570,979.
- August 20, 2020: The House and Senate Public Health, Welfare, and Labor Committee approved the \$570,979 funding for the two unpaved road sites.
- November 13, 2020: \$124,806 dispersed to Searcy County to begin work on Cane Branch Road.
- It is anticipated that the BRCC funding will be distributed and that work will begin on Cave Mountain Road (to Hawksbill Crag) in Newton County after the National Park Service has completed an environmental assessment and an agreement has been fully developed and signed by all appropriate parties.

Town of Gilbert Dark-Sky Streetlight Conversion: \$11,600

- November 4, 2020: The BRCC approved providing \$11,600 to the Town of Gilbert for conversion of their existing streetlights that will help the natural sky environment by replacing the current crude streetlights with modern zero up-light LED fixtures. The lights will shine the minimum of biologically impactful blue light and assist the town with being recognized as a Dark-Sky Town.
- November 9, 2020: Approved by the House and Senate Public Health, Welfare, and Labor Committee.
- November 13, 2020: Funding dispersed.

United States Geological Survey (USGS) Water Study: \$65,000

- January 21, 2021: The BRCC approved providing \$65,000 to the United States Geological Survey (USGS) to continue a five-year study to determine why filamentous algae is increasing in the Buffalo River. USGS has completed three years of the study and this funding would allow the

study to continue for an additional year. The BRCC members pledged to work together to seek additional funding outside of the BRCC to help the USGS complete the final year of the study which will be complete in September 2022.

Greater Searcy County Chamber of Commerce Tree Purchase and Planting: \$2,500

- January 21, 2021: The BRCC approved providing \$2,500 for the Greater Searcy County Chamber of Commerce to purchase trees that will be given to Searcy County residents and be planted in public areas within the county. The Nature Conservancy of Arkansas pledged to match the funding for the project bringing total funding to \$5,000 for trees in Searcy County.

United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Wildlife Services (WS) Feral Hog Eradication Efforts: \$50,000

- January 29, 2021: The BRCC approved providing \$50,000 to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Wildlife Services (WS), for materials and supplies associated with feral hog eradication efforts. USDA APHIS WS agreed to report back to the BRCC on the progress of feral hog eradication efforts within the Buffalo River Watershed at the appropriate time