



March 22, 2022

Timothy Jones, District Ranger
12000 SR 27
Hector, AR 72843

Dear District Ranger Jones,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Arkansas Audubon Society, a statewide organization committed to fostering a greater knowledge of the natural history of Arkansas and promoting conservation of natural resources in Arkansas. **We strongly support the 2022 Blue Hole Project proposal by the Big Piney Ranger District, which will strengthen protections for the Blue Hole Special Interest Area (SIA) and preserve its wilderness state.**

The science is clear that wilderness areas are threatened by human land-use practices and climate change. In their 2016 article in *Current Biology*, Watson et al. estimated that nearly 10% of the world's wilderness areas were lost between the early 1990s and 2015. The important role of wilderness in protecting biological diversity and providing ecosystem services such as carbon storage and clean water should prompt us to bolster protections where we can.

The Blue Hole Special Interest Area presents an opportunity to do just that. The Arkansas Audubon Society strongly supports the proposal to bring the Blue Hole SIA more in line with the Arkansas Wilderness Act of 1984 by limiting mechanized travel in this region and restoring roads that have contributed to erosion and degradation of the area. These actions will contribute to protecting the ecological integrity of this area, ensuring it is available for wildlife and humans alike to enjoy in perpetuity.

Thank you for putting forth this proposal. I would appreciate it if you would add my contact information to further updates and opportunities to comment on this effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "M. R. McClung".

Maureen R. McClung, Ph.D.
Conservation Chair
Arkansas Audubon Society
mcclung@hendrix.edu