

**Buffalo River Conservation Committee (BRCC)  
Public Health, Welfare, and Labor Committee  
Progress Report and Funding Proposal Update  
November 9, 2020**

**Background:**

On September 30, 2016, Governor Hutchinson created the Beautiful Buffalo River Action Committee (BBRAC) to develop an Arkansas-led approach to identify and to address potential concerns in the Buffalo River Watershed.

On September 23, 2019, Governor Hutchinson signed Executive Order 19-14 establishing the Buffalo River Conservation Committee (BRCC) which replaces the Beautiful Buffalo River Action Committee (BBRAC).

The BRCC membership consists of the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, Secretary of the Department of Energy and Environment, Secretary of the Department of Health, and Secretary of the Department of Parks, Heritage, and Tourism.

The members of the BRCC are required to work in cooperation with one another to identify opportunities to leverage their Department's unique expertise, relationships, focus areas, and funding mechanisms in support of the vitality of the watershed.

The BRCC is required to establish subcommittees that include key stakeholders representing local landowners, conservation organizations, environmental and technical experts, representatives of the tourism industry, local county and municipal officials and federal partners. The subcommittees will identify opportunities for training, relationship building, and specific projects, all of which will be in service to preserving and enhancing water quality within the Buffalo River Watershed.

**Funding:**

November 15, 2019: following approval by the Arkansas Legislative Council, \$1 million from the Governor's discretionary fund was transferred to an Arkansas Department of Agriculture fund account to support grants and projects within the Buffalo River Watershed, including but not limited to the following – voluntary best management practices for farmers and landowners, improvements to wastewater and septic systems for cities and counties within the watershed, and reduction of sediment runoff from unpaved roads within the Watershed. An additional \$1 million was pledged by private donors bringing total funding for BRCC efforts to \$2 million.

The \$1 million contribution from private donors was pledged for a proposal to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) entitled the Buffalo River Watershed Enhancement Project.

April 16, 2020: USDA announced the selection of the RCPP proposal for the Buffalo River Watershed Enhancement Project. The \$1 million contribution from private donors is part of \$2,769,100 in partner contributions that leverages \$2,694,805 from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) bringing total project funding to \$5,463,905.

### **Timeline of Efforts:**

December 12, 2019: a 17-member subcommittee was established that is comprised of local landowners, local city and county government officials, and stakeholders in the areas of agriculture, conservation, and tourism.

January 23, 2020: The first meeting of the BRCC members and subcommittee members scheduled to take place in Marshall, Arkansas was cancelled due to inclement weather.

February 13, 2020: BRCC members and subcommittee members convened in Marshall, Arkansas for the first meeting. During this meeting the discussion centered around four main topic areas that will be the focus for future BRCC action and funding proposals. These four topic areas include: unpaved roads; cost-share programs for agriculture; water and wastewater system infrastructure; tourism and tourism impacts.

March 11, 2020: The first coronavirus case in Arkansas prompted the cancellation of scheduled subcommittee meetings on March 19, 2020 and April 2, 2020.

April 29, 2020: BRCC members and subcommittee members convened by conference call to get an update on the work of the four subcommittees and discuss efforts to move forward.

June 2, 2020: BRCC members and subcommittee members convened to review proposals submitted for funding as well as receive updates from the four topic areas. Requests for funding included four unpaved roads sites as well as three water and wastewater proposals. During the meeting the four unpaved roads sites and funding of \$250,000 to the City of Jasper for wastewater treatment facility improvements received recommendations for funding. The full proposals for funding are included below.

June 9, 2020: Presentation to the House and Senate Public Health, Welfare and Labor Committee. The presentation including an update on the BRCC efforts and the current status of funding requests. Secretary Ward stated that the BRCC members and subcommittee members would continue to refine the funding proposals that were received and will work with partners in order to maximize the use of state funding on projects within the Buffalo River Watershed.

August 6, 2020: BRCC members and subcommittee members convened to review updated proposals submitted for funding and received updates from the four topic areas.

BRCC members and subcommittee members decided to table discussions regarding funding for Marble Falls and Feral Hogs until additional information was provided. The BRCC approved the following updated requests to be submitted to the House and Senate Public Health, Welfare and Labor Committee for review and approval of funding:

(1) maintaining the funding amount of \$250,000 to the City of Jasper for wastewater treatment facility improvements;

(2) revising funding requests for Unpaved Roads to reflect \$231,935 for Cane Branch Road in Searcy County and \$397,400 for Cave Mountain Road (to Hawksbill Crag) in Newton County. The total funding for Unpaved Roads equates to a \$570,979 once contingency costs are added and funding from the federal nonpoint source management program are subtracted.

August 20, 2020: Presentation to the House and Senate Public Health, Welfare and Labor Committee. The presentation including an update on the BRCC efforts and the current status of funding requests. The legislative committee approved the funding request of \$250,000 to the City of Jasper and \$570,979 to assist with the Cane Branch Road and Cave Mountain Road unpaved road sites. With the approval of the two projects, funding of \$179,021 remains for distribution by the BRCC.

November 4, 2020: BRCC members and subcommittee members convened to receive updates from the four topic areas and review a funding proposal. The BRCC approved providing funding to the Town of Gilbert for their Dark-Sky Streetlight Conversion Proposal in the amount of \$11,600. If this funding proposal request is approved by the House and Senate Public Health, Welfare and Labor Committee, there will be funding of \$167,421 remaining for distribution by the BRCC.

The BRCC members and subcommittee members also discussed the annual report requirement and implementing an application process in order to consider any additional funding requests.

**Moving Forward:**

A press release is being distributed seeking applications for projects that need assistance through the remaining \$167,421 in funding available through the BRCC. Applications will be accepted through December 15, 2020. Applications will be reviewed and discussed by the BRCC and subcommittee members at the next quarterly meeting.

BRCC members and subcommittee members will continue to work with partners in order to maximize the use of state funding on projects within the Buffalo River Watershed.

BRCC members and subcommittee members will continue to meet as needed on the four topic areas of: unpaved roads; cost-share programs for agriculture; water and wastewater system infrastructure; and tourism and tourism impacts.

An annual report of the BRCC will be completed by the end of the calendar year, 2020.

The BRCC members and subcommittee members will convene as a whole at least once per quarter with the next meeting anticipated to occur between the months of January and March 2021.

**Enclosures:**

(1) Town of Gilbert Dark-Sky Streetlight Conversion Proposal

Dear Senator Irvin,

Please find the submittal materials we promised for Gilbert's street lighting project. In addition to the cost of the fixtures, the budget includes a rough estimate for covering the buyout of Entergy's existing system and some added switching to enable some of the lights to be turned off for public viewing events. The city will address and seek council approval covering the additional cost of the buyout and switches once this is finalized.

Alvin Johnson

Gilbert, Mayor

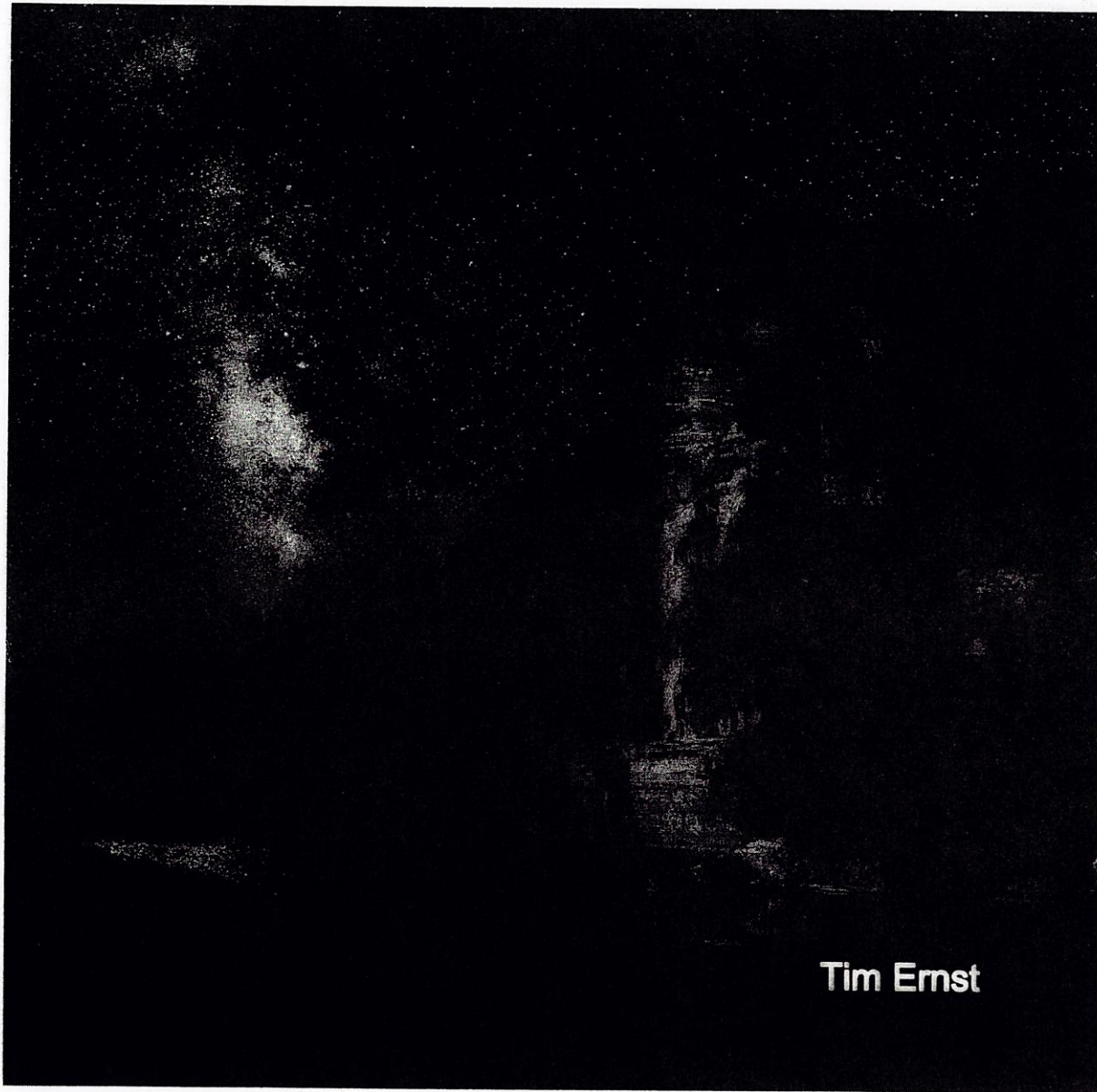
### Town of Gilbert Proposed Streetlight Project Budget

<b>Fixture Specifications</b>
2700K
zero to little uplight
Type II lights

#### Fixtures with switches on 3 lights

Fixtures	New LED wattage	Turnkey Fixture Price	Quantity	Total Extended Price (for 16 fixtures)
LED Cobraheads	14-25W	\$450	16	\$7,200
Switches (Gilbert is willing to cover these costs if necessary)		\$100	16	\$1,600
Buyout (Gilbert is willing to cover these costs if necessary)		\$175	16	\$2,800
			<b>Total</b>	<b>\$11,600</b>

Town of Gilbert, Arkansas  
Dark-Sky Streetlight Conversion Proposal  
Buffalo National River Conservation Committee



**Tim Ernst**

The Town of Gilbert is the smallest incorporated Town in Arkansas. It is the only Town on the Buffalo National River and lies inside the Park boundaries. Gilbert's relationship with the River and the Park are defining elements of their community.

The spectacular night sky is one of the major attractions in this area. Increasingly, people who want to experience nature want it at night as well as in the day, but such places are rapidly disappearing.

Electric light has impacted the world in many ways, however not all of them are good. Only recently have we begun to realize the environmental impact of artificial light on wildlife and human health. The esthetic loss of the night sky, literally nature's grandest spectacle, occurred so slowly that it went all but unnoticed for a time.

Recognizing this and seeking to highlight and protect remaining high-quality dark-skies, the International Dark-Sky Association (IDA) developed the Dark-Sky Places Program. Today there are 149 Dark-Sky Places (Parks, Reserves, & Communities) worldwide and 95 in the United States. A designation as a Dark-Sky place has economic value. Natural heritage resources that have lost their skies to light pollution are increasingly at risk of being seen as damaged goods.

The Buffalo National River is Arkansas's natural heritage crown jewel and its first and only International Dark Sky Park. This designation process took two and a half years. A light-scape management plan had to be developed, outdoor lighting inventoried, and where necessary, modified along its 135-mile length. The community support for the night sky had to be documented, and programming established.

The Searcy County Chamber of Commerce dedicated its Annual Banquet last year to its dark-sky asset. Host facilities along the river and in other areas of the state, with nearly natural skies, are joining the Arkansas Natural Sky Association's [Natural Sky Host Map](#) to market their natural sky assets.

The Town of Gilbert has been pursuing the conversion of our existing streetlights to be more responsible stewards of the environment. We want to help our community, protect the park, and the natural sky environment by replacing the current crude streetlights with modern zero up-light LED fixtures. These lights would shine the minimum level of biologically impactful blue light. With such lighting, Gilbert could become Arkansas' first Dark-Sky Town.

The attached is a cost estimate to replace the existing lighting with environmentally responsible fixtures. The estimate has been developed by Tanko Lighting, a firm which specializes in helping communities nationwide to obtain ownership of their streetlights and convert them to the most energy efficient design feasible.

The Town of Gilbert appreciates the Committee's consideration of this proposed project and thanks Senator Irvin for her efforts and support.