

Parks and Soils Tax Renewal Effort On Front Burner

Renewal of the 1/10th-cent sales tax for parks and soils has moved to the front burner for the Missouri Parks Association and other organizations and individuals who care about our state parks and historic sites and the conservation of our soil and water resources.

Bills have been moving through both houses of the Missouri General Assembly this term in the form of joint resolutions that would place a referendum on renewal of the tax on the ballot in November 2006 for a vote by Missouri citizens. The measures are very similar to previous bills for renewal of the tax except that, if approved, they provide for automatic placement of the measure on the ballot every ten years thereafter.

MPA kicked off this year's focus on renewal by hosting a breakfast in the capitol on February 2 to celebrate twenty years of successful operation of our state park system under funding from the tax. About thirty representatives and senators who attended the breakfast were presented with copies of *Exploring Missouri's Legacy*,

(See "Tax" on Page 6)



UPOP Comes to the Capitol

Three youngsters who participated in MPA's Urban Populations Outreach Project last summer in St. Louis traveled to the state capitol in February with two of their teachers and two parents to testify at a hearing before the House Committee on Conservation and Natural Resources about the work of the Department of Natural Resources.

For teenager Omega Johnson, perhaps the highlight was the drive along I-70 into the setting sun, something he had never seen before. He was awestruck. Teachers Kathy Bayless and Michael Nelson described the UPOP program and introduced the kids. Ten-year-old Bre'elle Raynor spoke eloquently about the importance of clean water and described her UPOP experiences, imploring the legislators to protect the parks. Her sister, Zaria, age six, was more direct. "I learned a lot about natural resources," she told the legislators, "and you should too."

Representatives were highly complimentary and asked numerous questions. The children not only gained a memorable lesson in citizenship and democracy but they changed the dynamic of the hearing. It had begun as a gripe session about DNR permits and



enforcement actions but, after the kids spoke about the importance of clean air and water and parks, some of the others who likely had come to complain quietly left.

MPA President's Message

Our State Parks In a Climate of Political Change*by Ron Coleman*

This winter you may have had the opportunity to do some eagle watching from one of our newest state parks, the Ted and Pat Jones Confluence Point State Park, where two of the world's mightiest rivers—the Missouri and the Mississippi—join forces, or you may have visited one of our 34 state historic sites, a good way to get out of the cold and at the same time have a memorable cultural experience.

By the time you receive this issue of *Heritage* the climate will be changing and spring will be very close, or at least the official date of March 20th will appear on your favorite wall calendar. Perhaps you have dipped a trout from the icy waters of Bennett Springs, Montauk or Roaring River State Parks.

If you are not a fisherman then maybe your have taken a hike on a section of the Ozark Trail or traversed a pathway that meanders though the diverse landscape in the over 200,000 acres park land managed by our Missouri Division of State Parks to observe those beautiful Missouri spring wildflowers that are already poking their heads through the forest ground cover.

I hope by now you have taken the time to reserve your ideal campsite or park cabin for a long weekend getaway or your summer family vacation. Our park system has many

facilities to choose from, but prime available spots do go in a hurry. The diversity found in our state parks is really pretty amazing. Tradition is abundant and the natural qualities of the protected park environment are slow to change in a fast-paced world.

Naturally, we expect year after year to come back and enjoy the same quality experience that we have become accustomed to in our parks. However, we do have a potential threat – funding for the operation of our parks in the form of a 1/10 cent sales tax for parks and soils is due to expire in the near future if the Missouri Legislature does not act soon.

In this session of the general assembly your Missouri Parks Association has a bill moving along that will allow the 1/10 cent

parks and soils tax measure to be placed on the ballot in 2006 for a vote by Missouri Citizens prior to its expiration in 2008, thereby assuring adequate funding to keep the same level of high quality park services that you as a park user have come to expect.

MPA is the only statewide citizens group working exclusively for the benefit of our state parks. Your membership in MPA can be the difference between a mediocre park system and a gem of a program that has consistently ranked among the top three state park systems in the United States. I encourage you to help us make a difference in keeping our parks in the condition that you enjoy by renewing your membership or inviting a friend to join MPA today.



A view of the Meramec River from the lookout at Meramec State Park.

Childers Is Named New Director Of DNR

Doyle Childers, former Republican legislator from Reeds Spring, was nominated by Governor Matt Blunt as director of the Department of Natural Resources, and he is now hard at work. Governor Blunt described him as



Doyle Childers

“somebody who could build consensus, somebody who could work across party lines to deal with important challenges,” and MPA leaders who met with the new director shortly after his confirmation think his appointment augurs well for the beleaguered department.

Childers represented the southwestern Ozarks for fourteen years in the House and eight years in the Senate, including service on the committees on Appropriations and Agriculture, Conservation, Parks and Tourism before being term-limited in the last election. He has been a strong supporter of parks, including Roaring River and Table Rock in his district, and worked hard to bring environmental and poultry interests together to deal with water quality issues in Southwest Missouri. MPA leaders concerned about water quality and park issues in that part of the state are particularly pleased with his appointment.

Born and raised on a farm near Ironton, he served four years in the Peace Corps in Central America and taught chemistry and physics in Reeds Spring for ten years. In addition to farming, his background also includes timber (including service on the Governor’s Advisory Committee on Chip Mills), drill rigs, and housing construction.

Childers replaces Stephen Mahfood, who resigned at the end of December following seven years of substantial accomplishment as director and more than a quarter century of technical and management experience before that in the environmental arena. Mahfood had a background



Stephen Mahfood

somewhat similar to Childers, having been born and raised in the Ozarks and having spent several years working with Project Hope in Tunisia. He also ran a park in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina and, just prior to his appointment as DNR director, was director of DNR’s Environmental Improvement and Energy Resources Authority.

During his tenure at the helm of DNR, Mahfood added four

parks to the system: Edward “Ted” and Pat Jones Confluence Point State Park, Clark’s Hill/Norton State Historic Site, Morris State Park (on Crowley’s Ridge in the Bootheel), and the 61,000-acre Roger Pryor Pioneer Backcountry in Shannon County, for which the park division manages primitive recreation under a cooperative agreement with the L-A-D Foundation’s Pioneer Forest.

He also made significant strides in lead cleanup at Herculaneum, air quality improvement in St. Louis, and water quality improvement in Southwest Missouri, and oversaw

construction of the DNR’s new “green” headquarters building overlooking the Missouri River in Jefferson City, among many other accomplishments. And he did all this while handling a budget reduction of 65 percent of the department’s general revenue funding over the past four years.

The challenge for the new director will be to use his strong relationships with the legislature and the governor and his reservoir of public support, especially in southwest Missouri, to stop the hemorrhaging at DNR so he can build on the solid record of accomplishment of his predecessor. MPA extends its gratitude to Steve Mahfood for his leadership and offers its strong support to Doyle Childers as he takes the helm at DNR.

UPOP Under The Microscope

By Marty Galganski and Dianne Benjamin

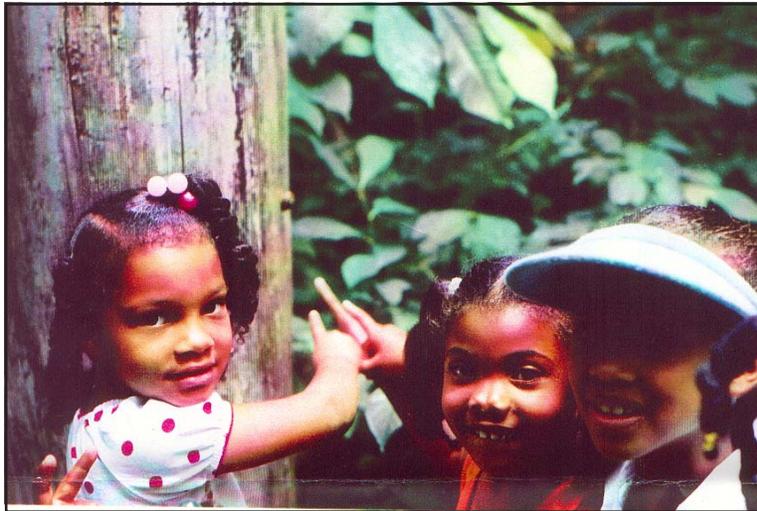
A doctoral student at St. Louis University, Marty Galganski, undertook a series of interviews with thirty UPOP participants last summer ranging in age from seven to fifteen in an effort to assess the impact of their experience. The children, who were interviewed both before and after their UPOP week, were selected from among the 160 St. Louis participants by the directors of each of the social service agencies involved.

At the initial interviews, children were asked to take a photo within sight of their social service agency, using the prompt, "Show me nature in your neighborhood." Each child was shown how to use the digital Nikon 600 camera before taking the photo, but the interviewer did not provide any other prompts. After the photos were taken, children were asked, "Describe nature in your photo." All children briefly and consistently described nature as trees, grass, or flowers. Only a few mentioned the sun, sky, shadows, and people as aspects of nature, with one child including cars because they were moving objects. Even with a personally taken photograph, blown full-size on the computer or printed, two-thirds of the children provided just two to three single words about nature in their picture.

Then they spent a week with UPOP, beginning with a day at the Green Center exploring patches of

urban woods, wetland, and prairie; then a day at the Missouri and Mississippi River confluence followed by a day at Meramec or Cuivre River State Park; and ending back at their agency planting a garden, picking up litter,

and splashes, but it wasn't flat-sounding, as in the single words or phrases first used to describe nature in their neighborhood. In fact, during the second interview, some children pointed out leaves, grasses, and small organisms on the ground near their agency, as if they noticed many more details than during their first interview, though they were not specifically prompted.



The summer of 2004 was memorable for UPOP kids.

creating public art, and installing antipollution stickers on storm water curb drains.

In the post-interviews, the children expounded on what they found or liked in nature. Rather than writing a few words, as in the pre-interviews, the interviewer scurried to keep up with the torrents of description. Three children told of caves and bats, eight loved fishing in the river, four described the organisms they saw: the crab (crayfish) that jumped, the bats that should not be disturbed, the deer, the shells, the garter snake and the tadpoles, the frogs, and the ants. The beach and the cave were favorite places about which the children built one story upon another.

Nature felt cold or wet and slimy and sounded like burrups

When asked about favorite activities, children always mentioned the field experiences at the parks, with the storm drain marking and public art projects as distant second choices. Fishing was the favorite activity,

followed by the cave tour, hiking, planting, and locks and dam tour. Children under age ten described the visit in lengthy stories while older students recalled the events in a few sentences. When asked about what they learned, one child discovered that rocks were not alive. Many children spoke of caring for plants, about animal behavior, and how to keep rivers clean. Clearly, the UPOP experience made a difference in their lives.

The 2004 UPOP summer experience in St. Louis was coordinated by the Green Center, of which Dianne Benjamin is program director. It was initiated by MPA and funded by MPA and its members, the Open Space Council, MEMCO Barge Line, the USEPA, EarthLinks, and Union Avenue Christian Church.

Annual Meeting Focuses On Lewis & Clark At The Confluence

MPA met at Historic St. Charles October 23-25 to visit the new Edward "Ted" and Pat Jones Confluence Point State Park and other Lewis and Clark sites in the vicinity. For some



Mary Abbott was honored for her role in development of the UPOP program.

members the meeting began with a bike ride on the Katy Trail from St. Charles to Creve Coeur Lake and back on Friday afternoon, followed by a reception hosted by Karen and Al Haller.

State park director Doug Eiken opened the Saturday morning conference by discussing the need to gear up for the 150th anniversary of the Civil War while continuing Lewis and Clark activities and giving top priority to renewal of the Parks and Soils Sales Tax. Representatives of DNR's new St. Louis area office and staff of the Green Center, which coordinates MPA's Urban Populations Outreach Project, discussed efforts to introduce inner city residents to our state parks, complete with a slide show offering a peep at the children's wonderful experiences last summer, after which MPA president Ron Coleman presented a plaque to the Green Center in recognition of its partnership efforts on the project.

Following a box lunch and tour of First State Capitol State Historic Site and a visit to the Katy Trail

interpretive exhibit at Riverfront Park, the group caravanned to the

confluence, where hundreds of white pelicans wheeled and spiraled above the throng at the very tip of the point between the two great rivers. The next stop was the Lewis and Clark



MPA President Ron Coleman presents a plaque to Green Center staff for their performance in the UPOP effort.

Lower Missouri River Gauntlet: The First Trial of the Lewis and Clark Expedition," and Ron Coleman presented plaques to Eleanor Hoefle in recognition of her long-standing dedicated service as treasurer of MPA and to Mary Abbot for her dedicated service to MPA in the development of the Urban Populations Outreach Project.



Eleanor Hoefle was recognized for dedicated service to MPA.

Interpretive Center near Camp du Bois on the Illinois shore, after which most of group stopped at Fort Belle Fontaine Park high above the Missouri River, where Eleanor Hoefle told of her desire to nominate the site to the National Register of Historic Places.

At the banquet Saturday evening, park division historian Jim Denny presented a stunning illustrated talk on "Running the

At the annual meeting on Sunday, MPA members elected three former board members—Mary Abbott, Susan Flader, and John Karel—and five new directors: **Greg DeLong** of Springfield, an Edward D. Jones affiliate who is also active in Ozark Greenways; **Mary Jo Dessieux**, director of parks and recreation for the city of Wentzville, who is active also in MPRA and the National Recreation and Parks Association; **Brenda Miller**, who lives on a sesquicentennial farm and was coordinator of a SALT (water quality) project in Greene County; **Dr. Alan Politte** of Chesterfield, who was instrumental in the passage of a \$10 million bond issue for acquisition of Chesterfield park land; and **Tony Robyn**, director of the new Wildcat Glades Conservation and Audubon Center in Joplin, who coordinated MPA's UPOP program in Joplin last summer.

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the color-illustrated book about state parks and historic sites that MPA was so instrumental in producing. MPA directors in town for the celebration and a board meeting delivered copies of the book to the offices of other legislators later that day. The books were purchased through an anonymous donation by a generous supporter of MPA and parks.

The initial Parks and Soils Sales Tax, placed on the ballot by a legislative joint resolution at a time of severe financial constraint for state parks, was originally approved by Missouri voters in 1984 and funds began flowing for park operations in 1985. Because the tax originally had a sunset clause limiting it to five years, it had to be returned to the ballot for a second public vote by 1988. The legislature debated various proposed changes for two sessions without acting, so it was left to citizen groups including MPA to circulate an initiative petition to place the renewal on the ballot, this time with a ten-year sunset.

After Missourians voted two-to-one for renewal, the governor and the legislature stripped some \$7 million in general revenue that had previously supported parks, so that for the past two decades state parks have been almost entirely dependent on the sales tax. MPA repeatedly defended the tax against diversions for inappropriate purposes, such as local parks, golf courses, zoos, and even tuckpointing the state

capitol, but it was less successful in preventing administrative diversions or new charges to cover personnel or oversight functions, costs that have probably aggregated more than \$10 million annually.

The results of the tax, though mixed, have on balance been highly beneficial to Missouri, giving us a system of parks and historic sites widely regarded as among the highest quality and best managed in the nation. Missouri's system has ranked in the top four in each of the past three years in the national gold medal competition among state park systems, even though it is below the national median in both acreage and funding. This national recognition is owing in large part to the consistency of funding provided by the tax, which has allowed park officials to operate efficiently and plan systematically for staffing, development and maintenance.

By the time the tax came up for renewal in 1996—again through initiative petition and by an overwhelming two-to-one majority vote of the citizenry—it was clear to park officials and MPA leaders that rising operating costs, especially for personnel, coupled with continued diversions would soon leave parks with inadequate funds for maintenance and development, to say nothing of needed growth to accommodate more than 17 million visitors annually. Former Governor Holden recognized as much when he expressed interest

in restoring lost general revenue—by then worth perhaps as much as \$18 million—to cover park operating costs so the sales tax could be used for infrastructure and expansion. But that was in 2000, just before the national economic downturn and an even deeper state financial crisis that continues to this day.

When leaders of MPA and other organizations met last year under the aegis of the Citizens Committee for Soil, Water, and State Parks to begin the process of seeking renewal of the tax, they reluctantly concluded that it was not feasible in the current economic climate to increase the tax, despite the compelling need for additional funding for parks. Legislative leaders agreed, and offered to introduce the measures currently making their way through the General Assembly.

Senator David Klindt (R-Bethany) led the way, introducing Senate Joint Resolution #1, which was heard January 26 in the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, Parks and Natural Resources before a standing-room-only crowd. MPA President Ron Coleman spoke on behalf of the measure, as did Ed Stegner of the State Park Advisory Board and representatives of numerous other groups including the Missouri Park and Recreation Association, the Conservation Federation, the Soil and Water Districts Commission, and the Farm Bureau. All testimony was favorable, and the measure was reported out “do

pass” on February 2, the same day as MPA’s 20th anniversary celebration of the tax. It reached the floor of the senate and was perfected on February 21, after Senator Klindt fended off a proposed amendment that would have siphoned soils money to urban programs, and it was given final floor approval on February 24 by a vote of 24 to 8.

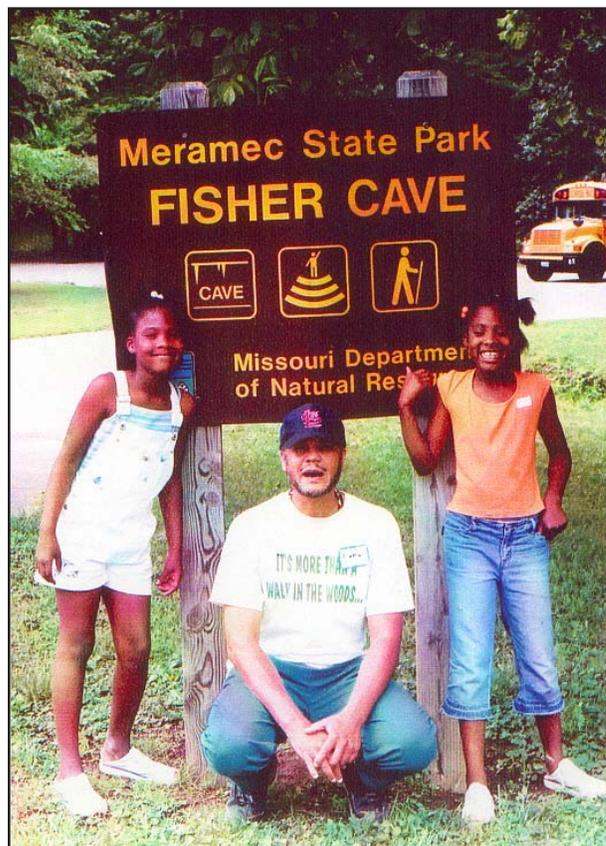
Meanwhile in the House, which organized somewhat later than the Senate, three different but similar resolutions were introduced by Representatives Sander, Chinn, and Munslinger. HJR 16 (Chinn) was heard February 23 by the House Agriculture and Conservation Committee with virtually all testimony in favor. Although the joint resolutions for renewal of the tax have met little resistance so far, they still have to clear both houses with identical language in a crowded, sometimes chaotic legislative calendar, so citizen expressions of support to representatives and senators will be very helpful.

There have been several other developments in Jefferson City that are cause for concern and vigilance. Some of the same legislators supporting renewal of the parks and soils tax are supportive also of

a measure to place a similar ten-year sunset on the Conservation Department’s 1/8th cent sales tax, which was approved by Missouri voters in 1976 as a permanent tax. Whatever the possible merit of such a sunset—and there was powerful testimony at a senate hearing February 23 in opposition to a sunset—MPA leaders and other conservationists are agreed that it could be potentially devastating to the parks and soils tax for a sunset to the conservation tax to advance at the same time. There would almost certainly be widespread public confusion between the two measures, with the inherent risk of a negative vote when people are confused.

As the session began there were rumors of possible efforts to further siphon funds from the Department of Natural Resources and possibly transfer various of its programs to other agencies, with parks rumored to be considered for transfer to the Conservation Department. Now that a strong Republican appointee, former state senator Doyle Childers, is heading the Department of Natural Resources (see article on page 3), dismemberment of DNR is perhaps less likely, but the financial crisis in state government is no less severe and will undoubtedly have further impact on DNR and the park division, including possible efforts to siphon park sales tax funds for other purposes.

Further discussion about state government reorganization is likely to take place within the context of a commission being formed by Governor Blunt to study and recommend ways to make state executive departments more efficient, including restructuring, reducing or eliminating certain operations. This will be the first such comprehensive review since a major reorganization of the early 1970s, when the Department of Natural Resources was established after the Conservation Department and its supporters strongly (and successfully) resisted an effort to combine all natural resource and environmental functions in a single agency. Co-chairs of the



Missouri parks are for all ages!!

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20-member commission will be Warren Erdman, a Kansas City Republican, and Stephen Bradford, a Cape Girardeau Democrat. Other members had not yet been named as *Heritage* went to press. The group will have a year to make its final report.

MPA has expressed strong support for retaining parks within DNR, not only because of the many synergies between the various DNR functions but also

because of the substantial differences in mission between state parks and the conservation department. Particularly vulnerable in any combination of parks with conservation would be historic sites and cultural resources in virtually all units of the state park system. One of the most significant hallmarks of the quality of Missouri's park system is its close integration of cultural and natural resource management and interpretation throughout the system. MPA leaders also

believe that if parks were transferred to the conservation department, or if the Soil and Water Districts Commission were to be placed in a different agency than parks, renewal of the Parks and Soils Sales Tax would be gravely jeopardized.

For now, all segments of the conservation community appear to be united in the quest for renewal of the parks and soils tax. It is critical that a joint resolution for renewal pass the General Assembly this year in order to avoid the need for another expensive, time-consuming initiative petition campaign.

MPA members can help by expressing their views on the state park system and the need for renewal of the tax to their state legislators.

Save September 23-25 For MPA Park Fest

MPA's annual meeting this year will be September 23-25 in Columbia, headquartered at the Stoney Creek Inn south of Columbia on the way to Rock Bridge State Park. We plan to invite a wide array of friends groups and organizations that use and care about our parks and historic sites—support groups like Friends of Rock Bridge, the Watkins Mill Association, and the Friends of Arrow Rock and user groups like campers, hikers, cyclists, cavers and equestrians. Look for more information in the next issue, but in the meantime be sure to save the date.



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