

## Legislating During a Pandemic

by Shirley Wolverson

The Second Regular Session of the 100th General Assembly in Missouri began in the regular way. State agencies submitted their budget requests, and the governor compiled and edited them into his FY2021 budget. Political priorities were the focus of term-limited legislators as they submitted bills to satisfy their constituent and personal interests. Out of the corner of their eye members may have noticed a virus in China and on cruise ships that appeared to be under control – until it wasn't!

MPA watched carefully as Representative Wright and Senator Wallingford filed bills to authorize transfer of the state's remaining properties in Ste. Genevieve to the National Park Service to facilitate the establishment of the new National Historical Park (see *Heritage*, March 2020); Rep. Pogue (R-Salem) filed his usual bill to force the sale of Eleven Point State Park; Rep. Ross (R-Yukon) and others filed bills targeting the Conservation Department (MDC) and several of its most popular programs; and Rep. Reedy (R-Windsor) introduced HB1556 to authorize purchase of Antioch Cemetery in Clinton for a state park. The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) appeared to have General Revenue funding restored to its Historic Preservation Revolving Fund (see *Heritage*, June 2018) in a "new decision item," and the "Clean

Missouri" amendment to the Missouri constitution was targeted for another statewide vote on redistricting.



*Missouri House of Representatives, masked and unmasked*

Concern began to build as the first few cases of Covid-19 appeared in Missouri and the state park system entered various stages of closure. On March 12 the Senate adjourned, not to meet again until April 27. The House, facing a May 8 deadline to pass the FY21 budget, continued to meet until Sunday, March 15, when the budget committee completed markup on all the budget bills including HB2006, with the state park and SHPO budgets intact plus an *extra \$200,000* found by Rep. Deb Lavender (D-Kirkwood) for the SHPO. Rep. Pogue's Eleven Point bill had been heard in committee but had not yet gained traction, despite his repeated attempts to amend it to other bills.

When legislators returned on April 27, with the limited goal of passing a budget including certain

federal stimulus funds, it was a different world. Most Democrats wore face masks though most Republicans did not, temperatures were taken at the door, many staff still worked from home, and visitors (a.k.a. citizens) were encouraged *not to attend*. MPA volunteers and consultants tried to watch the House video streaming (when it worked), listened to the senate online without knowing who was speaking, and struggled to follow key bills.

The budget bills, despite concern that nobody really knew how the virus and mitigation efforts would affect Missouri's economy, moved expeditiously from the floor of the House to the Senate and then to conference committee until they were truly agreed and finally passed on May 8, the constitutional deadline. But in the process \$1,006,790 intended for the SHPO revolving fund was reduced to \$155,739). The actual loss is more than doubled because the funds could have been used as part of the 40 percent match required to secure federal funding to support mandated historic preservation programs.

While the Senate was preoccupied with budget cutting, the House began constructing omnibus bills under cover of Covid-enabled secrecy to satisfy term-limited and other members who wanted their pet bills passed. (See "Legislating" on Page 3)

## President's message: Coronavirus and Parks

by Terry Whaley

Like many of you I've lost the 2020 spring camping and canoeing season to the coronavirus crisis. Our parks have been closed and restrictions placed on gatherings and travel. Homebound quarantine has kept us separated and inside. Phrases such as untimely, uncertain, and unprecedented are pitched about to attempt description and acceptance of the pandemic's impacts.

It has been interesting to see what people gravitate towards when times are untimely, uncertain, and unprecedented. Once secure with the basic needs of food, water, shelter and toilet paper, there is a clear and visual demonstration across the state of our need for the outdoors and natural connections.

State Park Director Mike Sutherland recently said that some parks reported higher than normal use during the past few months and a few had to be closed at times to manage visitation levels. Throughout this crisis our state park staff have not lost sight of the state park mission--*to preserve and interpret the state's most outstanding natural landscapes and cultural landmarks, and to provide outstanding recreational opportunities compatible with those resources*. Even in these times, stewardship and volunteer efforts are up to 3,500-hours in our natural resource parks, and some parks have recorded an increase in first-time visitors.

Charles Flink, in his new publication *The Greenway Imperative*,

states, "During the past 60 days of our shelter-in-place lifestyle, we have learned how valuable parks, greenways, and green spaces are to daily life. Greenways have become a refuge for millions of Americans in search of safe outdoor landscapes that encourage movement and are therefore perfectly suited for individual or small group use, satisfying social distancing requirements. For decades, advocates have been extolling the physical and mental benefits of greenways. The pandemic has reinforced the value these linear parks provide, not just within America, but throughout the world."

It could be a local trail right outside your front door, a park down the street or the state park a short drive from home. The value of parks when the world is shut down needs to be remembered as the world reopens. Let's also not forget our urban neighbors in marginalized communities who often have an even greater need for parks. This crisis has proven that parks and open spaces are not just icing on the cake when times are good but they are imperative elements when times are untimely, uncertain, and unprecedented.

Megan B of Springfield observes: "Through Covid-19 I have rediscovered my love of biking and my daughters love that I now ride with them instead of watching. We love to ride on the Greenway trails. I knew the trails were there and had even been on a few, but nothing like what we've discovered since being quaran-

tined. We were able to find so many silver linings during quarantine; a renewed sense of the joy of being active was my favorite."

As we live our way through the current challenges and survive the pandemic's impact, I challenge you be thinking about how we build a long-range political and economic strategy to support our state park system. This is an opportunity to look forward toward a comprehensive and sustainable approach for park growth and improvement. It is an opportunity to summon the political will and attitudes that can outlive our current cabin fever. Parks, greenways and open spaces need to be a part of our community's and state's emergency survival kits in times of need as well as times of good.

Please support our park leadership and field staff as you make your next state park visit. They have protected and guarded our park resources and enhanced their outreach on social media to educate us about park resources available for home schooling and general public information.

As time passes, let's not forget the role our parks play in offering places for walks, bike rides, fresh air and a change from our daily quarantine routine. As parks continue to offer necessary escapes during the virus crisis, it's a great time for a phone call or email to your state representative to express your support and ask for theirs for the important role parks play in our daily lives during good times and times of uncertainty.

### (“Legislating” from Page 1)

Non-controversial bills of perhaps 1-3 pages would mushroom at the last minute into committee substitutes with the language from a dozen or more unrelated bills appended, some of which had not even been heard or would not pass in the light of day; they were rammed through rapid-fire hearings to party-line votes without interested citizens or even some concerned legislators present or able to learn in time what bills were where in the humongous omnibuses.

Fortunately, after a week of utter frustration in the legislative coalition in which MPA participates, several citizen leaders drafted an op-ed about the tainted process, won sign-on support from a dozen civic, religious, economic, and environmental nonprofits across the spectrum of issues, and managed to get coverage and editorial support about the threat to our 'government by the people' in several major newspapers across the state. This likely encouraged senators from both parties to put the brakes on some of the most egregious megabills in the final week.

The fate of bills in both House and Senate to authorize transfer of state park properties in Ste. Genevieve to the National Park Service is a case in point. MPA had testified "for information" in the Senate hearing on March 11 (the day before the Senate adjourned), indicating MPA's strong support of the new National Historical Park and expressing MPA's equally strong belief that the state should retain title and operate at least one important property there to ensure the future of the NPS/MSP partnership and the integrity of the state park mission. The Ste. Genevieve language was first amended to several omnibus bills in the House alongside other unrelated and more controversial measures that might prevent passage. It was then attached by the Senate committee that had heard the original bill to another bill authorizing several similar conveyances of state properties (SCS HB1330), passed the Senate and was returned to the House where it passed.

As debate on the Senate version of HB1330 was winding down on the floor of the House, Rep. Pogue stood up to ask if the sale of Eleven Point State Park (which he had sought to amend to the bill) was included in the final version. Thankfully NOT, in MPA's view, but Pogue made it the occa-

sion for an extended rant as he finished his eighth and final year without having managed to sell any of the new parks, and the 100th General Assembly came to an end.



*Hearing for HJR 100*

### Feral Hogs Become a Political Chit

by Mary Nemacek

Feral hogs inflict deep, widespread wounds on Missouri's natural landscape. From state parks to private lands, nothing is sacred or exempt from their catastrophic, overnight damage. The issue of feral hogs, especially as related to state parks, was chronicled in *Heritage* (June 2019). This year the battle over feral hogs took an unanticipated political turn.

It started in Missouri House Hearing Room 5 on February 25, 2020. A controversial and widely opposed bill, HJR 100, was on the agenda. This bill, proposed by Representative Robert Ross of Texas County, would change the independent oversight of the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC). In the middle of a week day it was standing room only with estimates of more than 70 citizens present to testify on HJR 100. In a blinding rebuke of the proposal, not one citizen testified in favor of the bill.

Among the NGOs speaking out against the bill was the Conservation Federation of Missouri (CFM), of which MPA is an affiliate. The following morning, in a hearing related to the state budget but in apparent retribution for the testimony the day before, Rep. Ross moved to strip funding to \$1 for each of two popular programs run jointly by CFM and MDC, Share the Harvest and Operation Game Thief. This action had far-reaching consequences. It was a shot fired by a lawmaker against an NGO and citizens exercising their right to free speech a public hearing.

(See “Feral Hogs” on Page 4)



### **(“Feral Hogs” from Page 3)**

It also swiped at Missourians most in need--those who receive the greatest benefit from Share the Harvest.

Share the Harvest is an innovative program that allows hunters to donate part or all of deer they harvest to Missourians in need. The processing fees are covered by private donations to CFM, which began and has run the program since 1992, and the now-stricken funding from MDC. Missouri families have received more than 4.3 million pounds of meat from Share the Harvest through local food banks and food pantries over the years, with nearly 9,000 deer donated last year alone.

What ensued was state-wide outrage that such a beneficial program would take the bullet over a representative's ire at testimony against his bill, which was ultimately passed out of committee on a straight party line vote despite the overwhelming public opposition. Newspapers and citizens across the state decried the move, and by the following Sunday, Representative Ross began a damage control plan that involved actually increasing funds for MDC. He not only brought funding for Share the Harvest back to the previous level of \$150,000, but doubled it to \$300,000, while continuing to exclude the managing organization, CFM, from involvement in the program. Despite the increase, the overall funding is now at a lower level than before, since the private donors have no NGO to which to direct their donations.

Adding insult to injury, Ross added a highly controversial provision: feral hog meat should now be included with venison in Share the Harvest. Immediate concerns were raised about the safety of distributing feral hog meat due to the amount of disease the animals can carry and pass to humans. In his May 14 legislative report, Senator Mike Cunningham wrote, “I’m particularly concerned that feral hog meat may make it into our food supply. These are disgusting creatures, known to carry brucellosis, pseudorabies, tularemia and other diseases. Meat from Share the Harvest often ends up on the tables of senior citizens and other low-income Missourians who rely on the program for affordable protein. I believe it was misguided to allow meat from feral hogs to be distributed by Share the Harvest.”

Furthermore, the Federal Meat Inspection Act requires all hogs to be inspected both in motion and at rest prior to entering the processing facility, meaning

feral hogs would need to be transported alive. Because of the difficulty of tracing the origin of feral hogs and their potential for carrying disease, they are considered unfit for human consumption by the USDA and hence not processed in commercial processing plants. Additionally, allowing for transport of live feral hogs would cloud the issue of those moving feral hogs with the illegal intent of releasing them in Missouri.

This provision remained in the budget passed by the legislature and sent to the governor. If not challenged, feral hog meat will remain part of Share the Harvest, which is now costing taxpayers more due to Ross's political stunt.

Feral hogs need to be eradicated from the state because of the enormous damage they do to public and private property. It is unconscionable to dole out meat that is possibly diseased to Missouri families in need or to have live feral hogs transported around the state and forced upon meat processors. Missouri has taken major steps to control feral hogs by greatly enhancing the Feral Hog Partnership and by the closure of Mark Twain National Forest and other public lands to hunting of feral hogs. This work needs to continue, unimpeded by legislative efforts to use feral hogs as currency to cover for other failed legislation.

### **Park and MPA Briefs**

**The Great American Outdoors Act**, widely hailed as the most important conservation legislation in the past half century, passed the U.S. Senate June 17 in a strongly bipartisan 73-25 vote and is now back in the House. The bill establishes the National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund to support deferred maintenance and infrastructure rehabilitation in national parks, forests, wildlife refuges, BLM lands, and the Bureau of Indian Education. Expected to clear half the massive NPS maintenance backlog in the next five years, it will also create thousands of jobs nationwide during the extended Covid recession.

Equally important, the bill makes full funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund permanent. The fund, established in 1965 for half of all federal revenues from oil, gas, coal, and alternative energy development on federal lands and waters, was critical in the development of Missouri state parks and other public lands from the late '60s to the early '80s, but funds have been increasingly diverted by Congress to other purposes. **(See “Briefs” on Page 6)**

Meet Your Missouri State Parks Team:

by Sue Holst

## Lee Wilbeck, Interpretive Resource Coordinator, Northern Region

“It was the best decision I ever made.” That was Lee Wilbeck’s response about being offered the interpretive resource coordinator (IRC) position in the State Parks Northern Regional Office.

At the time, Wilbeck was working as a science teacher in the high school in Brookfield and he had a passion about two things – the outdoors and teaching people about the outdoors. He said this position gives him the best of both worlds. “I still get to be outside and it allows me to work with kids.”

As the region’s IRC, Wilbeck is considered a resource for all 33 state parks and historic sites in the region. He is the only IRC located in a regional office; the others are all located in a specific park. He says this gives him a chance to work in more parks and see “more pieces of the puzzle” in the state park system.

His main responsibilities include both land stewardship and interpretation. Because of this, he needs to be flexible and each day is different, which he likes. His land stewardship responsibilities include being a burn boss, which means he takes the lead on many controlled burns in the region’s state parks and historic sites.

On the interpretation and recreation side, he helps with many special events including Wings over Weston, an annual event at Weston Bend State Park that invites the public to learn more about birds. He is active in many “Learn2” events that teach the public about various outdoor activities. He has taken a leadership role in the state park system’s Learn2 Paddle events and is certified in kayak instruction by the American Canoe Association. He also assists with the annual Katy Trail Rides.

The road that eventually brought him to Missouri State Parks began in his hometown of El Campo,

Texas, southwest of Houston, where he was raised on a farm and ranch. He earned a degree in wildlife and fisheries science from Texas A&M in College Station. During part of the year, Wilbeck participated in the college’s co-op program by working as a biologist for a big game hunting operation in Michigan. After graduation, he was hired as an outfitter and biologist for Heartland Wildlife Ranch in north central Missouri. He also worked as a seasonal in the Northern Region in Brookfield.

While working at Heartland, he met his wife Melinda, who is a middle school principal in Brookfield. They have two daughters, Sydney, 19, who attends William Woods University in Fulton, and Maddie, 14. Lee now has deep roots in Missouri, but he also keeps roots in Texas. He and his brother operate Skip Rock Ranch southwest of San Antonio, which produces grass-fed beef they sell directly to individuals.

Wilbeck says he has no plans of moving with a family in Brookfield and a job he enjoys: “I love my job. It combines two things I love – being outside and working with people.”



*Lee Wilbeck at Learn2 Paddle Event*

For more information about the Missouri State Parks Learn2 Paddle

kayaking program, please visit

[mostateparks.com/learn2paddle](http://mostateparks.com/learn2paddle)





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## SAVE THE DATE October 8, 6-8 pm

Each year since 1982, MPA members have looked forward to gathering in the fall to connect with other members, get an insiders' view of nearby state parks, and learn about issues facing Missouri state parks and historic sites. But given the concerns around COVID-19, MPA has made the difficult decision to postpone the in-person MPA Annual Meeting to the spring of 2021. The health and safety of our members and state park staff are top priority.

In place of the in-person meeting, we are planning other ways for our members to get together through a virtual MPA membership meeting and state of the parks address by Director Mike Sutherland. The event will take place on Thursday, October 8, from 6-8 pm; it will be posted on our website afterward. For those without internet service, a call-in number for the event will be available. We will share additional details on our plans for the online event as the time draws closer. Meanwhile, please save the date.

If you are not receiving Heritage or our occasional updates by email,

please send your email address to [info@missouriparks.org](mailto:info@missouriparks.org). In the meantime, thanks for your understanding and support of MPA and Missouri State Parks, and let's look forward together to seeing each other in person in the spring of 2021!



Ron and MPA Pres. Terry Whaley at HOF

### ("Briefs" from Page 4)

MPA has been advocating for full funding for years. Missouri's Senator Blunt spoke powerfully for the bill, but Sen. Hawley voted Nay. Now is the time for you to call or email your Congressional representatives asking for their support of the bill in the House.

**Ste. Genevieve National Historical Park** (see *Heritage*, March 2020) is expected to be officially established sometime in the coming year. Virtually all leaders of public and private entities with whom MPA has spoken in recent months have interpreted the General Assembly's authorization for transfer of additional state properties to NPS for the park as permissive rather than mandatory

and acknowledged the validity of MPA's point that the state must retain title and operate at least one historic building for the partnership with NPS to remain strong and endure. Negotiations continue between NPS and MSP regarding transfer of buildings, and MPA remains hopeful.

### Eleven Point State Park Lawsuit.

The trial on the merits of the 2017 lawsuit filed by several Oregon County landowners challenging the legality of the state's acquisition of land for the new Eleven Point SP (see *Heritage*, March 2020), which had been postponed from April 2 to June 11, has now been rescheduled for August 4, which is also the day of Missouri's primary election.

**Ron Coleman, 1946-2020.** MPA board member and former president Ron Coleman, who was inducted into the Missouri Recreation and Parks Hall of Fame on February 20 (see *Heritage*, March 2020), passed away April 28 after a long bout with cancer. Ron had a 40-year career of leadership with numerous parks and conservation organizations in Missouri, including as president of the Missouri Park and Recreation Association and the Conservation Federation and as executive director of the Open Space Council of St. Louis. His family has suggested memorials to CFM's Conservation Leadership Corps.