

Wakonda Celebrates Zita Robertson

by Edge Wade

Friday, August 11, 2023 was a very special day at Wakonda State Park as Missouri Birding Society (MBS) members and Missouri State Parks (MSP) leadership were joined by Lewis County residents to celebrate the dedication of a beautiful interpretive sign created by Zita Robertson.

Zita (14 years-old), national American Birding Association 2022 Young Birder of the Year, had gone to Wakonda Manager Kyle Scott with an idea and some questions: Would he be in favor of her designing signage about the park's flora and fauna, and how could such a project be funded?

Manager Scott was very much in favor and knew of the MBS/MSP SPARKS partnership program for citizen science bird monitoring and habitat projects. He suggested Zita take her idea to MBS. Zita took her plan and sample artwork to the 2022 MBS fall meeting in Columbia. MBS followed up by forming a partnership with ABA, the Missouri River Bird Observatory, Missouri Young Birders Club, MoDNR's Missouri State Parks, and Doug Miller to fund the sign production and installation. Zita went to work painting and writing text.

The dedication day events began with a bird walk led by Zita, who has been leading bird walks for the public Sunday mornings at Wakonda. This group was joined by State Park Director David Kelly, Northern Region Director Dustin Webb and Deputy Brett Barnes, and Allison Vaughn, MSP Natural Resource Ecologist and liaison for the SPARKS program, as they

climbed aboard a tram driven by Supt. Scott to explore more of Wakonda's diverse bird habitats.

The morning's activities sharpened appetites for the potluck lunch waiting at Shelter #2. Cindy Kell, director of the City of Canton Public Works De-

partment, managed the picnic. She made shrimp kabobs, provided the charcoal, tended the grill, cooked the kabobs and hot dogs and brats brought by others, and laid out the dishes for the tasty summer buffet.

Edge then spoke briefly of the development of the partnership to fund Zita's project, and concluded, "Young birders like Zita and her brother Zalán continue to learn and to share their knowledge. They are our future. The members of the Missouri Birding Society are pleased to share in building that future and proud to celebrate Zita's gift to the people who explore Wakonda State Park. Thank you, Zita."

MSP Director David Kelly presented an overview of the history and funding resulting from the SPARKS program and noted this as the second sign funded by MBS at a state park. He complimented Zita on her drive and achievement, for the example she sets, and the value of her work for Wakonda visitors' appreciation of the park's natural features and inhabitants.

Zita stepped forward, thanked all who participated in supporting her project, and in appreciation of MBS's role, presented Edge with her painting of a Greater Prairie-Chicken in full dance mode. Zita and Edge (to the smiles of many) then marked Zita's life sighting of a Blue Grosbeak during the morning walk with a Prairie-Chicken duo celebratory dance.

All stepped out into the sunshine for the highlight event of the day. Manager Scott removed the sign from its box and handed it to Zita, who slipped it into place in the frame. As photos were taken, there were many "oohs and aahs" clearly in appreciation of the artwork and text Zita had created.

Zita Robertson's sign will inform Wakonda State Park visitors of the riches around them and stand as an example of what can be accomplished through creative partnerships.



David Kelly, Zita, Allison Vaughn, Edge Wade, and Kyle Scott

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Manager Scott opened the 2pm dedication ceremony with praise for Zita's vision and contributions to the park, then introduced MBS President Edge Wade, who read a statement from Laura Guerard, ABA Young Birder Programs Coordinator. The statement praised Zita's talent and "her drive and determination that have cultivated her Conservation and Community Leadership vision into a reality" and concluded, "Her local outreach actions will have a global impact through educating others about birds and birding and inspiring them to care about the natural world around them."

MPA Gathers at Lake of the Ozarks SP

President's message, by Larry Larson

MPA members met at Lake of the Ozarks State Park for our 41st annual gathering. The park is Missouri's largest at 17,666 acres and there is something for everyone to enjoy at this fantastic facility. The event kicked off Friday afternoon at Ozark Caverns Visitor Center on the far south side of the park, where we were treated to a wonderful lantern tour of the cave by park naturalist Guerric Good.

On Saturday morning, we met at Camp Clover Point, one of three organized group camps at the park. We used this as our base to see and learn everything we could about the park and take care of MPA business. It is difficult to experience all the park has to offer, but we did the best we could in the time we had.

Director David Kelly led with the annual State of the Parks Address. I cannot do justice to his excellent presentation and the bright future he forecasts that will continue to make our parks even more outstanding than they already are. We continued to a panel on our meeting theme, Wild Areas in Missouri State Parks, introduced by John Karel, whose article "Celebrating State Park Wild Areas" was in the July issue of *Heritage*. John's presentation brought home the importance of large wild areas in our parks, of which there are twelve totaling over 23,000 acres, each spacious enough to provide immersion in natural surroundings, a primary criterion for designation. John then moderated a panel including state park ecologists Allison Vaughn and Chris Crabtree, who discussed the history and status of each area and the management challenges of these special places.

In the afternoon we visited the 1,275-acre Patterson Hollow Wild Area, one of the first to be designated. As we left the outside world behind, we experienced nature without any intrusions. Ecologist Chris Crabtree and Park Superintendent Larry Wood were excellent guides for our hike on the Woodland Trail.

Even the changing Missouri weather, as it turned colder and decided to drizzle, could not dampen our spirits on this wonderful day.

We had planned to close the day with dinner at a 1930s open-air shelter house constructed by the

CCC. This nearly 1,500 square foot structure, made of native stone quarried from the park and timber harvested on site, is a grand example of rustic buildings that highlight the missions of the CCC, WPA, and National Park Service to provide jobs and develop recreational opportunities during the Depression era. Many of these structures are now on the National Register of Historic Places. But as the temperature dropped further, we were not sorry to move dinner to the warmer and drier dining hall at Clover Point, where we enjoyed a delicious meal and reminisced about our great day.



Patterson Hollow Wild Area Hike

Sunday morning, we gathered for our annual members and board of directors meetings. We had a great discussion about our work to support UPOP, Seniors to Parks, and park Friends Groups to increase access, education, and stewardship in our state parks, as well as our work toward the new Rock Island Trail and a third edition of our state parks book. Another highlight was nominating and voting Jennifer Vaeth to the board of directors. Welcome, Jennifer!

What a wonderful weekend! We came together and made some great memories, just as visitors to Camp Clover Point have done since the 1930s at Lake of the Ozarks. I hope to see you all next fall for our 42nd gathering as we visit behind-the-scenes and learn about another of Missouri's special places. Meantime, keep visiting and enjoying our state parks.

Rock Island Chugs Ahead

by Kendra Varns Wallis

Missouri State Parks officially welcomed the Rock Island Trail as Missouri's 93rd state park last June (see *Heritage*, July 23). To build on the enthusiasm, business owners, representatives of 'trail towns,' and elected officials gathered at the Eldon Community Center in September for the first Rock Island Summit, to discuss and coordinate efforts for trail development. Sponsored by MPA, MSP Foundation, Friends of Rock Island Trail State Park, Missourians for Responsible Transportation, CFM, MPRA, and Ozark Greenways, the summit brought together this group of advocates who had been meeting virtually the past couple of years, for their first in-person meeting.

Since legislative shenanigans prevented federal funding for the trail (*Heritage*, July 22), individual communities along the trail have rallied to secure grants and raise matching funds to build the trail within their city limits. At the summit, Missourians for Responsible Transportation moderated a round table discussion featuring trail community leaders sharing their successes and the benefits that the trail will bring. At this time, over \$2 million in federal grants and \$650,000 in matching funds and donations have been secured by communities to build 13 miles of trail.

MPA coordinated a legislative panel that included Reps. Bruce Sassmann, R-Bland, Don Mayhew, R-Crocker, Tim Taylor, R-Bunceton, Willard Haley, R-Eldon, Michael O'Donnell, R-St. Louis, Peter Merideth, D-St. Louis, and Sen. Mike Bernskoetter, R-Jefferson City, moderated by CFM President Zach Morris. Panelists agreed that the best ways to persuade other legislators to lend support is through their experiencing the trails and trail towns firsthand and having supporters show up at the state capitol regularly to promote the trail and convey the local passion and investment in the trail. Starting in January, trail advocates will be following this advice and going weekly to the capitol to promote the trail and invite the legislators to their towns or trailside properties. All trail supporters can help by seeking out opportunities in this election year to write or talk to your own local representative and senator or candidates to seek their support.

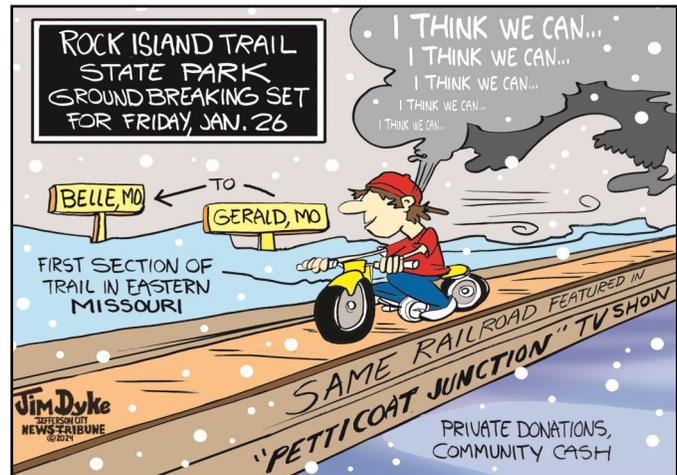
Former governor Jay Nixon provided inspirational closing remarks reminding advocates to "be evangelical about your winning." Groundbreaking ceremonies for the first mile of the eastern section of the park took place in Gerald on January 26th at the

Bistro at the Mill adjacent to the trail. This marks the first mile of the highly anticipated trail to be funded exclusively through private and community donations of cash, labor, equipment, and professional services.

To donate for trail development, go to <https://www.missouristateparksfoundation.org/>.



Rock Island Groundbreaking Ceremonies in Gerald



Park Updates and Briefs

Pomme de Terre Threat Averted

by Shirley Wolverson

Local citizens and statewide organizations have rallied to avert further waste discharges from a meat-processing facility near Pleasant Hope north of Springfield into the Pomme de Terre River, threatening Pomme de Terre Lake and State Park. The park has two public beaches and attendance over 260,000; further downstream is Harry S. Truman Reservoir and State Park, also with two swimming beaches. (See "Park Briefs" on Page 4)



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("Park Briefs" from Page 3)

Missouri Prime Beef Packers (MPBP) applied to MoDNR for a permit to dump 350,000 gallons per day of slaughterhouse waste into the Pomme de Terre River following treatment by an experimental technique for which they provided little detail or history. The facility has a record of nine DNR letters of warning and 14 notices of violation in the last decade, both before and since MPBP's purchase. The river has been listed, de-listed, and recently proposed for re-listing as an impaired body for E-coli, and the lake is listed as impaired for chlorophyll-a, which also comes from animal waste.

Several local groups formed to oppose the MPBP discharges along with statewide organizations such as MPA, Missouri Coalition for the Environment, Sierra Club Missouri Chapter, and Great Rivers Environmental Law Center, which submitted detailed analysis of DNR's initial review indicating that the discharges would not harm the river. Following a public hearing and comment period with numerous comments, DNR announced a draft denial of the permit for direct discharge as well as prohibition of further land application of wastewater, which now also requires a permit under Missouri's Clean Water Law following a recent decision of the Missouri Fertilizer Board.

With another public meeting planned for January 6, 2024, MPBP on Janu-

ary 2 withdrew its permit request. MPA will continue to monitor this threat to two state parks, as it remains to be seen what might happen next.

Bennett Spring's 100th. Missouri State Parks will be celebrating the 100th anniversary of Bennett Spring State Park on October 5, 2024, so mark your calendar. The state officially celebrated 2017 as the centennial of the park system, since 1917 was the year the legislature created a state park fund with an annual transfer of five percent of fish and game license fees to the fund. Trouble was, the funds accumulated too slowly to actually purchase any parks until Gov. Arthur Hyde persuaded the legislature to increase the annual transfer. Finally in 1924 he and his game and fish commissioner were able to secure the first six parks totaling 24,000 acres, including Bennett; so some would argue that 1924 actually marked the start of the state park system.

As it happened, two of the original parks, Indian Trail and Deer Run, remained with the new Conservation Commission after its establishment in 1936 with responsibility for fish, wildlife, and forests, which led to a separate agency for the state parks and historic sites. Then in the 1960s three of the other original parks—Big Spring, Round Spring, and Alley Spring—were transferred to the National Park Service as part of the deal that led Congress to establish the Ozark National Scenic Riverways (the

Current and Jacks Fork Rivers) in 1964 as the nation's first federally protected rivers. So only Bennett Spring remains to commemorate the origins of Missouri's highly regarded and beloved state park system. It is a worthy exemplar, so plan now to join its centennial celebration.

Tom Sawyer returns to Mark Twain Birthplace SHS. By a special act of the Missouri General Assembly, the original handwritten manuscript of Mark Twain's *Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) was placed in the museum in the then-ultramodern "shrine" that also houses Mark Twain's boyhood home when the new structure was dedicated in 1960. More recently, the manuscript was removed for examination and extensive restoration, a painstaking process, which was performed by specialist conservators in the Missouri Secretary of State Office. It was returned to a new temperature, light, and humidity-controlled case in the museum for ceremonial unveiling last September 20, where visitors may now again see it.

The birthplace cabin in Florida, MO, bought by a friend of the Clemens family in order to save it, and a small nearby tract of land acquired by the Mark Twain Memorial Association were both given to the state in 1924 for its new state park system, so these historic Missouri treasures join Bennett Spring in celebrating their centennial this year.