

Let there be light!

The Missouri State Parks team flipped the switch at Onondaga Cave State Park for a much-awaited reopening of the premier show cave in the cave state. The cave had been closed during installation of a new LED lighting system. The incandescent system previously used for tours was more than thirty years old and at the end of its useful life.

The new lighting provides visitors with a more enjoyable cave tour, illuminating more of the cave formations and natural beauty, costing less to operate, and reducing the amount of heat transferred to the cave. “The upgrade benefits the cave’s ecosystem by reducing invasive algae growth and providing a more suitable home for the cave’s inhabitants, who are accustomed to the dark,” said Ken McCarty, director of MSP’s Natural Resources Management Program.

This project marks the completion of the first of 28 revenue bond projects totaling \$60 million in 22 parks statewide approved by the legislature in 2021, the first such projects in decades (see *Heritage*, Dec 2021).

Onondaga cave, discovered in 1886, was first opened for tours in 1904, coinciding with the World’s Fair in St. Louis, and it has continued to captivate tourists for 120 years. Drawing more than 20,000

visitors annually, the cave is a National Natural Landmark, hosting some of the most rare and majestic speleothems in the world.



Deposits near the Lily Pad Room

Incandescent lighting was originally installed in the 1950s and had been upgraded over the years, with MSP making expensive repairs yearly to keep the old system functioning. Many of the system’s parts became obsolete, making the lights difficult to shut off, which was harmful to cave life. “We were in jeopardy of having to shut down the commercial cave operation without a new electrical and lighting system,” said MSP director David Kelly.

The new lights impress visitors, highlighting what had formerly been left in the dark. “I thought Onondaga Cave was amazing!” said Sheri Cerame, a first-time visitor. “Such a gem and so close to home, only 90 minutes from St. Louis! The cave boasts all kinds of formations and Max, our tour guide and geologist, was a wealth of knowledge.”

Missouri contractors were used to complete the \$2.1 million project, with Rogers-Schmitt Engineering designing it and Meyer Electric doing the installation. Onondaga tours are “the oldest and most popular in Missouri State Parks,” said David Kelly, “and the operation brings in more than \$400,000 annually.” This means the projected revenue should allow a complete payback in about five years.

The total cost for all 28 potential projects is now estimated to be \$68 million, and most of them will be completed over a five-year period. They are all revenue-producing projects, mostly for campground upgrades and expansion (with a lifespan of up to 40 years) or new cabins (with a lifespan of up to 80 years). State park staff identified the bond projects using occupancy data for camping and lodging, visitor comments, and park staff recommendations.

MPA Programs and Grants 2024

The **Missouri Parks Association (MPA)** continues to promote outdoor exploration and education, striving to make Missouri's state parks accessible to all, especially underserved and underrepresented populations. Here's a breakdown of MPA's efforts in 2024:

Track Chair Program: MPA purchased three **Action Trackchairs® (ATCs)** in 2024, making outdoor activities like trail exploration accessible to visitors with mobility challenges. These track chairs are available at select parks and historic sites—currently at Battle of Lexington, Bryant Creek, Elephant Rocks, and Gen. Pershing Boyhood Home—providing an opportunity for guests with disabilities to explore areas that were previously inaccessible to them.

See <https://mostateparks.com/track-chair>



Track Chair at Elephant Rocks SP

MPA Grant Program: The grant program, funded by the MPA Endowment Fund, supports Missouri state parks and nonprofit partners working to increase access, education, and stewardship in parks. To learn more: <https://missouriparksassociation.org/programs/missouri-parks-association-mpa-grant-program>. Grants in 2024 have been awarded to a variety of projects:

- **Beta Fund:** Grant for interpretive climbing way-side exhibit signs at Elephant Rocks State Park.
- **Ozark Trail Association:** Grant for maintaining the Ozark Trail within Johnson's Shut-Ins and Taum Sauk State Parks.
- **Open Space STL:** Grant for the Castlewood State Park Neighborhood Outreach Project.
- **Saint Louis Story Stitchers Artists Collective:** Grant for *Podcasts in the Park*, an Onondaga Cave State Park trip project.
- **Friends of Hawn State Park:** Grant for purchasing GPS units for trail-building and events.
- **Gateway to the Great Outdoors:** Grant for the Petroglyph Probers field trip project at Washington State Park.
- **The Society of Ozarkian Hillcrofters:** Grant for building materials for the Historic Garber School-house Kiosk at Shepherd of the Hills State Park.



Friends of Hawn Trail Building Event

Underserved Populations Outreach Program

(UPOP): The UPOP program, initiated in 2020 and sponsored every year since then by MPA, provides funding to partner organizations for field trips and educational experiences in state parks and historic sites for underserved youngsters. This summer, MPA supported programs through partner organizations in Kansas City, St. Louis, Columbia, Joplin, Salem and St. James. UPOP fieldtrips this summer included trips to Castlewood, Knob Noster, Roaring River, Rock Bridge Memorial, Onondaga Cave, Wallace, Watkins Mill and Weston Bend State Parks.



KC UPOP playing historic games at Watkins Mill SHS



Salem UPOP at Elephant Rocks SP

(See "MPA Programs" on Page 6)

A Calling of Peculiar Dignity

-Adapted from a Tisha Holden interview with Art Hebrank

What began as a love for rocks by age five turned into a 57-year career. Art Hebrank started with the Missouri Geological Survey (MGS) in 1967, seven years before MGS was transferred to the newly established Missouri Department of Natural Resources (MDNR).

"I started working at MGS in subsurface stratigraphy, served briefly in the mineral resources section, and ultimately became the information/education specialist. Here I was curator of the survey's rock, mineral and fossil collections, managed the library/archives (housing many thousands of books and maps), helped develop exhibits, and conducted field trips and workshops. I mostly thought of myself as the official question answerer and mineral and rock identifier," Hebrank said with a laugh.

Not only does he know his rocks and minerals, he has a background in mining as well. After spending a summer as a young man working in a silver mine in Idaho, Hebrank's appreciation for mines grew. In 1993, when the position as site administrator at the new Missouri Mines State Historic Site opened, he transferred laterally from the Geological Survey to Missouri State Parks, a sister division in MDNR, where he would remain for the next 31 years and counting.



Hebrank on a St. Joe shovel in the museum

He was now in charge of one of the newest and most challenging historic sites in the park system, an industrial lead-processing complex with some thirty buildings and other structures and machinery that had once been the largest plant of its type in the world. It was situated on about twenty-five acres at the north end of an 8,000-acre tract of partially mined land at the heart of Missouri's legendary "old lead belt" that had been donated to MDNR in 1976 by St. Joe Mineral Corp. after lead deposits in the area played out and processing ceased.

In fact, Hebrank had been assigned by MGS for several years in the early 1970s, when such a donation began to be discussed, as technical advisor for potential development of a museum there. Though some state officials viewed the derelict buildings as a liability, decisionmakers ultimately realized that the entire complex provided an unparalleled opportunity to tell the story of mining in Missouri, and in 1980 it was carved out from the 8,000-acre St. Joe State Park as Missouri Mines State Historic Site. Interpretation for the public would begin with a mineral gallery and an exhibit of

mining geology, history, and equipment in the powerhouse at the center of the complex.

Hebrank's demeanor and personality made him a perfect fit for his new position. He loves to answer questions and to share his knowledge with others. "I like public service; it feels good to make a difference year after year after year," he said. "The rewards are immediate, especially when you see someone leave with answers to their questions. Kids especially get really excited. It's also a great learning experience for me, as well. No matter how much time I've spent thinking about questions and answers, someone will come up with a new one and I'll think now where did that come from? And, of course, everyone out there can find

more neat rocks than I can find by myself, so I regularly get to examine interesting specimens I wouldn't otherwise have seen."

Hebrank believes his greatest accomplishment has been presenting workshops for teachers who need to incorporate earth science into their curriculum. He conducted five to eight DNR environmental education workshops yearly, with about thirty teachers in each. Over the course of thirty years, he touched more than 5000 teachers, not to mention their impacts on their own students.

After decades as site administrator, Hebrank is now on a special assignment sorting through the site's extensive mineral collections to identify potential display specimens for a future Hall of Missouri Minerals at the site. "This gallery will showcase a definitive collection of Missouri minerals, arranged by mining district and geologic occurrence. An additional lead-mining history gallery should feature groupings of local mining equipment arranged as a chronologic walk through time. I've never come across a museum like that, but I hope to make this into one before I leave," he said. "I want to show visitors the importance of the mining industry and the miners who followed this calling of peculiar dignity."

Hebrank found the expression, "a calling of peculiar dignity," in *De Re Metallica*, a 1556 classic on minerals and mining by Georgius Agricola as translated from the Latin to English in 1912 by future President Herbert Hoover, himself a mining engineer, and his wife Lou, a geologist and Latinist. It also describes Hebrank's own career, the longest in DNR of any employee ever. "I feel indeed fortunate," he told MPA, "to have had two dream jobs in my one lifetime."

Missouri Legislative Session 2024

By Shirley Wolverson

The state park budget submitted to and recommended by the governor fared quite well again this year. The first good news was that a pay raise of 3.2% for all state park staff was included in the FY2025 budget, meaning that raises would start as of July 1, 2024.

Capital improvements amounting to \$187.5 million in previously appropriated funds remain on the books, including revenue bond projects and American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) water and wastewater infrastructure projects in parks statewide. Funds for projects approved in 2023 such as the Route 66 Bridge over the Meramec River, and development of Bryant Creek and Shepherd of the Hills State Parks remain available for use.

In the FY25 capital improvements bill, new projects were approved from the Park Sales Tax Fund and the Park Earnings Fund at Van Meter, Roaring River, and St. Joe State Parks. Nothing significant was requested for Rock Island Trail State Park this session because Senate Appropriations Chair Lincoln Hough had made it clear in previous years that he would zero it out. Language was retained from the FY24 budget in a note at the end of House Bill (HB) 2006, the DNR FY25 budget bill, stating: “No funds shall be used for the maintenance, rehabilitation, restoration, and repair of the Missouri Rock Island Trail Corridor that runs from Windsor to Beaufort, Missouri on private land in which the trail runs through or outside of any city, town, or village limits.”

A big surprise to MPA was a section added to HB 2019 that appropriated \$12,553,485 to purchase 1,800 acres in McDonald County in southwest Missouri for a new state park. This project had not been addressed during the budget committee hearing. It was slipped into a house committee substitute and had no public hearing and no specific location information. Although this item made it to the governor’s desk by the May 10th deadline, he vetoed it in his signing letter.

There were relatively few other park-related bills in the 2024 session compared with recent years; however, two bills that park officials wanted to pass got caught in the quagmire. They wanted an exemption to the sunshine law for campground and lodging registrations containing individually identifiable information; they also wanted a conveyance bill to authorize transfer of the Lee C. Fine Airport at Lake of the Ozarks State Park to the City of Osage Beach, which has been operating it. We will see these bills again next year.

Finally, the MPA team was concerned about several bills that would have negatively affected the voice of the citizenry in the initiative petition process, which had been used several times to renew the Parks, Soils and Water Sales Tax. Only SJR74—which required a majority vote in a majority of House districts as well as the current majority statewide—survived a 50-hour filibuster by Senate Democrats on February 19-21 as an amended version requiring a majority in at least five of eight Congressional districts. The House amended it again; then the Senate refused to accept the House changes and returned it to the House, which sent it back to the Senate, which had adjourned early for the session and gone home. The session ended May 17th and the bill was dead. At least for this year.

Sign-up for CFM’s Legislative Action Center!

As a partner in statewide conservation efforts, MPA is an affiliate member of CFM. Follow bills that impact state parks and conservation this upcoming legislative session by signing up for the CFM’s Legislative Action Center.

<https://confedmo.org/lac/#/>



MPA 42nd Annual Gathering
Bennett Spring State Park, October 25-27, 2024

Plan now to attend the 42nd Annual Gathering of the Missouri Parks Association at Bennett Spring State Park. Join us Friday afternoon for a hike at Ha Ha Tonka State Park and an evening reception with state park leadership and state park retirees at Bennett Spring State Park. Saturday features the annual State of the Parks Address and guided tours and recreational activities at the park as well as dinner in the park dining lodge. The annual members meeting and a board meeting will be on Sunday morning.

Lodging with 4-plex units and motel units is available at the park. The 4-plex units are \$179 per night. The motel room has two (2) queen beds. Price: \$107 per night. Call the Bennett Spring Park Store at 417-532-4307 and ask for the Missouri Parks Association block of rooms. A campground is available at Bennett Spring State Park. Reserve your space online at <https://icampmo.usedirect.com/MSPWeb/>. **October 15th is the cut-off date for annual meeting registration with meals.**

Friday, October 25 at Ha Ha Tonka State Park and Bennett Spring State Park

1:00 pm - Ha Ha Tonka State Park Spring Trail and Castle Ruins (optional, on the way to Bennett Spring State Park)

5:00 pm - Registration at the Bennett Spring State Park Dining Lodge

5:00 - 7:30 pm - Opening Reception at Bennett Spring State Park Dining Lodge (Heavy Hors d'oeuvres and Drinks)

Saturday, October 26

Breakfast on your own (Breakfast can be purchased in the Dining Lodge)

Bennett Spring State Park Nature Center

8:30 - 9:00 am - Registration and Networking (Coffee Provided)

9:00 am - Welcome to MPA 42nd Annual Gathering (Larry Larson, MPA President)

- Bennett Spring State Park 100-Year Anniversary Presentation (Hayley Schnaath, Park Specialist, Bennett Spring State Park)

- 2026 Parks, Soils and Water Sales Tax Chat (Dru Buntin, Director of the Missouri Department of Natural Resources)

10:15 am - Break

10:30 am - State of the Parks Address (David Kelly, Director of Missouri State Parks)

12:00n - Boxed Lunch

1:00 - 4:00 pm Afternoon Activities – Niangua River Kayak Trip or Fly-Fishing School or Park Tour (choose one activity)

Bennett Spring State Park Dining Lodge

5:00 - 6:00 pm - Happy Hour

6:00 - 7:30 pm - Dinner

Sunday, October 27

Breakfast on your own

Bennett Spring State Park Dining Lodge

8:30 am - Annual meeting of members

9:30 am - Meeting of MPA board of directors (all are welcome to attend)

12:00n - Adjourn

-----Cut Here-----
Flat Rate Registration with Event Counts for Planning

Name(s) _____

#Persons ____ -- ____ @ \$70; Total: \$ _____ (includes all meals, activities, and tours)

Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Special Dietary needs (indicate) _____

Event Counts: Activities and Meals

#Persons _____ Ha Ha Tonka State Park Hike (Moderate Physical Activity)

#Persons _____ Bennett Spring State Park Tour (Low Physical Activity)

#Persons _____ Niangua River Kayaking Trip (Moderate/High Physical Activity)

#Persons _____ Fly Fishing Lesson (Low/Moderate Physical Activity)

#Persons _____ Friday Night Reception

#Persons _____ Saturday Lunch

#Persons _____ Saturday Dinner

Make check payable to Missouri Parks Association and mail with form **postmarked by October 15th** to Missouri Parks Association, P.O. Box 8531, Kansas City, MO 64114. For questions or link to online registration, email: ken-dra.wallis@missouriparks.org



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October 2024

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*New lighting at Onondaga Cave!
MPA Programs and Grants 2024
MPA to Gather at Bennett Spring*

www.missouriparksassociation.org

("MPA Programs" from Page 2)

Seniors to State Parks Program:

Launched in 2015, this program enables seniors to visit and explore state parks using two special trams donated by MPA. Funded by a dedicated endowment from Ben and Bettie Breeding, the program, now in its tenth year, offers transportation and activities at state parks and historic sites provided by state park staff, connecting seniors to Missouri's outdoor heritage. MPA granted \$28,000 to MSP to fund the 2024 program.



Kansas City Seniors to Parks at Knob Noster

These initiatives reflect MPA's commitment to inclusivity in outdoor recreation, ensuring that all Missourians—including youth, seniors, and those with mobility challenges—can experience the wonders of their state parks.

Donate today to support these programs.



Park Briefs

Conceptual Development Process. Conceptual development plans (CDPs) guide the future use and development at each state park and historic site. There are five phases of the CDP process: data gathering, drafting, public feedback, finalizing the plan, and implementation. Elephant Rocks SP, Eleven Point SP, Lewis and Clark SP, Sappington African American Cemetery SHS, and Harry S Truman SP, are in various CDP stages. The public is encouraged to provide input and review survey results on the CDP page at mostaparks.com.

The Ted and Pat Jones biking and walking trail, was dedicated October 5, at Edward "Ted" and Pat Jones-Confluence Point State Park. Funded by a gift from the trust of Pat Jones, the trustees of her estate – retired partners Dan Burkhardt, Bill Broderick and Larry Sobol – have worked with Mis-

souri State Parks since Pat's passing in 2018 to create the first-ever trailhead area and bike path at the state park. This new bike path, constructed on the levee along the Mississippi River, is located at the park that Pat (a former MPA president) dedicated 20 years ago.

The J. Huston Tavern at Arrow Rock SHS unexpectedly closed in March, as Missouri State Parks was unable to find a concessionaire to operate the facility. The closure raised enough concern among townspeople and other advocates of the National Historic Landmark community that by June a new non-profit, the J. Huston Tavern Society, had formed with a mission "to maintain and preserve the tradition of the J. Huston Tavern as the oldest continuously operating restaurant west of the Mississippi." Led by Leslie Huston, whose husband is a fifth-generation member of the founding family, the group developed a business plan geared to weekends and special events and entered into a partnership agreement with State Parks to operate the restaurant and associated functions. With a new chef and manager, they opened for business in early October, demonstrating once again the Arrow Rock can-do spirit.