



# HERITAGE

Newsletter of the Missouri Parks Association  
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Susan Flader, Editor

## Rock Island Agreement Signed

The Missouri Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and Missouri Central Railroad Company, a subsidiary of Ameren Missouri, signed a long-awaited Interim Trail Use Agreement on December 17, 2019, at a ceremony in Eldon, a community along the Rock Island corridor.

The agreement is an important first step in ensuring that the 144-mile corridor of the former Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad between Beaufort and Windsor, Missouri, will be protected and available for future transportation use under the National Rails to Trails Act, which provides for protection of such corridors by long-term interim use as recreational trails. The agreement is also intended to facilitate Ameren Missouri's eventual donation of the property in the corridor to DNR for future development as Rock Island Trail State Park. A 49-mile western extension of the Rock Island corridor from Windsor west to Pleasant Hill is already in operation as what is currently called the Rock Island Spur of Katy Trail State Park.

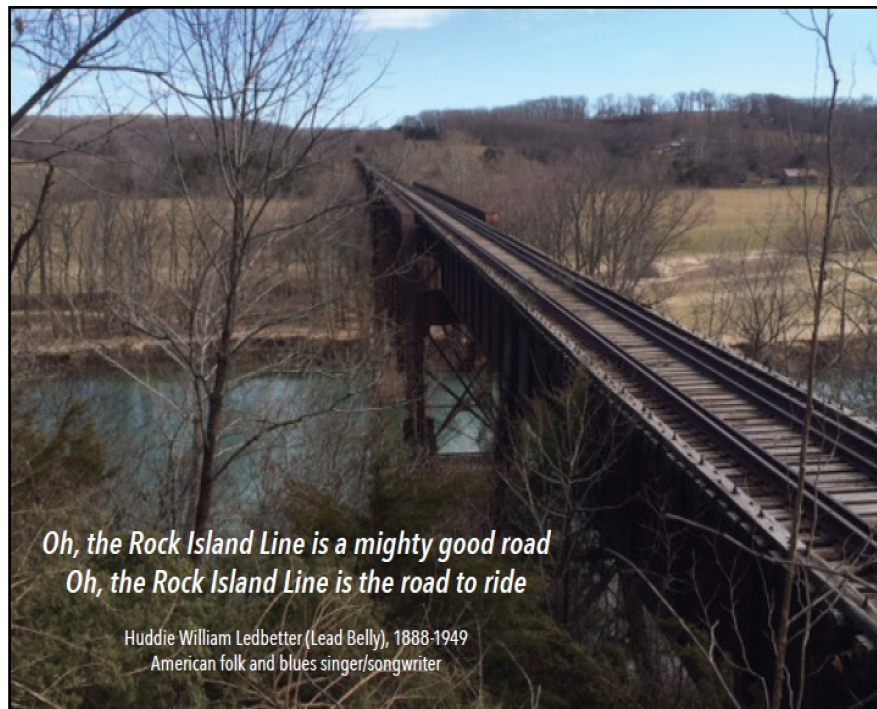
Eager as communities along the Rock Island corridor and hiking and

bicycling enthusiasts statewide are to see the trail in operation, however, there are still more milestones to be met. The agreement signed December 17 requires \$9.8 million to be raised for initial development,

crossings, are estimated at some \$65-85 million.

The Missouri State Parks Foundation (MSPF) is leading a fundraising campaign – "Connections: The Next Step" – with a goal of \$20 million in partnership

with twenty-some organizations statewide, including the Missouri Parks Association. The campaign's first goal is the \$9.8 million needed for the state to take title to the property, the rest for initial trail development. The effort is being led by Melanie and Rusty Coats of MSPF. The Foundation has contracted with Hartsook, a Kansas City-based international fundraising consulting firm, whose CEO lives



*Oh, the Rock Island Line is a mighty good road  
Oh, the Rock Island Line is the road to ride*

Huddie William Ledbetter (Lead Belly), 1888-1949  
American folk and blues singer/songwriter

Illustration from the MSPF "Connections" campaign case statement

security and management costs before DNR would take title to the property in the corridor.

The land is currently the property of Missouri Central Railroad and is not open to public use. Once the initial funding is raised and the state takes title, development of sections of the trail may begin, likely in partnership with local communities and various other public and private entities. Costs for development of the trail as whole, including many expensive bridges, tunnels and road

near the Rock Island and has taken a special interest in the project.

The campaign is still in its early "quiet" phase, but we encourage you to donate now through the MSPF website:

[missouristateparksfoundation.org](http://missouristateparksfoundation.org)

For more information, see *Heritage*, October 2019, and additional links from the MPA website:

[missouriparksassociation.org/Issues-Action/Rock-Island-Trail](http://missouriparksassociation.org/Issues-Action/Rock-Island-Trail)

Meet Your Missouri State Parks Team:

by Jennie Sieg

## Working for Missouri State Parks Isn't Just Another Day in the Office

Behind every great state park system is a group of passionate employees. In turn, these employees draw their passion from the parks.

Missouri State Parks features some unique landscapes, awesome scenery and fascinating historic sites, but probably the best resource the state park system has is its dedicated employees. Many people, past and present, have spent their entire careers working for Missouri State Parks, careers spanning 30 to 40 plus years. The state park system currently has 36 people with more than 30 years of service. So, what drew these people in and what keeps them coming to work each day, even for many years after they could retire?

**Choosing a Career.** Roxie Campbell, park naturalist at Rock Bridge Memorial State Park, said when she pursued a job with Missouri State Parks, “I was an idealist wanting to protect natural resources and help people enjoy them.” She said what has kept her coming back to work for the past 33 years is “taking care of the natural resources.” Also, it’s very rewarding when people who come to programs express their joy or ‘ah-ha’ moments and kids say things like ‘This is the best day of my life!’”

Northern Regional Director Jack Winburn, who recently celebrated his 40th year with the state park system, chose his career path because of a love for the outdoors, which he credits to his dad. Many Missouri State Parks employees pursued the career for a similar reason, then stayed around because of their passion for the mission. Jane Lale, a retiree, is one of those people. “Working in the exquisite natural and historic surroundings of our parks and historic sites is special. Doing what we do is a wonderful, fulfilling career.”

The variety of work is one reason many loved their job. Deb Schnack, a retiree who spent more than 32 years in various positions, said “No two days were the same, which was appealing to me. It could include mowing grass, removing skunks from the campground, answering the same question 100 times during the summer season, laying out hundreds of miles of trail, or planning new state parks. It was all exciting. And you certainly have the best of office anyone could ever want!”

Mike Dickey, site administrator at Arrow Rock State Historic Site with 35 years of service and counting,



Roxie Campbell  
Rock Bridge Memorial State Park

says “When I feel pressure and need to blow off steam, I can take a walk in my ‘outside office’ and decompress, but I am still working because I can see what needs attention. “

**Changes.** Many things have changed over the years. The most important may have been the passing and the benefits received from the Parks, Soils and Water Sales Tax, which is the primary funding source for the state park system. Many state parks employees, current and past, spent hours of their personal time collecting signatures and campaigning for the sales tax.

Carl Bonnell, park superintendent at Table Rock State Park, mentioned the change in “all the stuff campers feel like they have to bring with

them on a camping trip – from LED rope lights strung out throughout the campsites, hammocks, hoverboards or drones to the occasional swimming pool or bounce house.”

And now there is a new generation of people who may be considering a career in state parks. Current and retired employees say they would encourage youths to pursue such a career. George Kastler, a retiree who served 45 years as a park naturalist, said “I have always encouraged young folks to consider a career with Missouri state parks and historic sites and I still do.”

**Staying Involved.** The enthusiasm and passion for the state park system has followed retirees into retirement. Many belong to and some are heavily involved with the Missouri Parks Association, which supports and advocates for the system. This retiree involvement is beneficial as a lot of knowledge about the system walks out the door with them when they retire. Some of the long-term employees still working already have plans to be involved with Missouri State Parks after retirement: volunteering, joining MPA, or just getting out and enjoying more of the parks and historic sites. Dickey says after he retires he will still make himself available for questions related to the historic sites he oversees “because I know stuff that is not necessarily written down or easy to find in archives.”

Over the years, many retirees have found their colleagues to be like an extended family. Neither their passion for the system nor their friendships with colleagues were left on the doorstep when they walked out the door. Both are lifetime loyalties.

*Jennie Sieg recently retired after more than 19 years as an information specialist for Missouri State Parks.*

## New Leader for State Parks

In early November, shortly after his upbeat "state of the parks" address at the MPA annual gathering in Branson, State Park Director Ben Ellis announced suddenly that he would be retiring effective Nov. 15, and Deputy Director Mike Sutherland announced that he had agreed to serve as acting director. MPA leaders were stunned, and did not receive an explanation. Both men had been newly appointed from outside the system and began their tenure on June 15, 2017, working alongside Deputy Director for Operations David Kelly, a three-decade veteran of the system, and reporting to new DNR Director Carol Comer. In late January 2020, Sutherland was announced as the new state park director.

Ben Ellis came to Missouri (where he had earlier earned a masters in Journalism at MU and taught high school) from Alaska, where he had served several decades with various institutions, culminating with six years as director of Alaska State Parks (see *Heritage*, June 2017). As director of Missouri State Parks, he was outgoing, accessible, and straightforward. He early saw the need to return to basics in administration of the system following years of emphasis on new efforts to increase visitation, rapid building of the new park at Echo Bluff with the most elaborate visitor facilities in the system, and acquisition of major new park lands.

Ellis resolved to focus on the system's fundamental mission by developing three well-thought-out and long-term initiatives: 1) stewardship of natural resources, 2) preservation and stewardship of cultural resources, and 3) addressing the large backlog of maintenance and repair of physical infrastructure, largely related to visitor facilities statewide.

Without any infusion of much needed new funding, Ellis and his team had to focus on systematic analysis of needs and prioritization and allocation of available funds. Equally important were establishment of



*Mike Sutherland on the Katy Trail*

performance objectives for all staff related to the three initiatives, coupled with training workshops throughout the system. From regular reports at MPA meetings and discussion with various staff, the initiatives have appeared to be progressing very well. MPA appreciates Ben Ellis's strong support of the basic mission and thanks him for his service to the state park system.

The new state park director, Mike Sutherland, with a background in communication and public affairs, served the maximum eight years in the Missouri House of Representatives, including as chair of the House Ways and Means Committee, and then with the Missouri Budget Project— and as a member of the MPA board. As MSP Deputy Director for Administration, he oversaw a number of special projects including a reassessment of the proposed

Rock Island Trail and MSP cooperation with the new National Historical Park in Ste. Genevieve, and several ongoing programs including cultural resources and historic preservation.

During his two months as acting state park director, Sutherland brought the Rock Island corridor to an important milestone on December 17 when the Missouri DNR and Ameren's Missouri Central Railroad signed an Interim Trail Use Agreement. He continued negotiations with the National Park Service and others regarding additional cooperative efforts on the Ste. Genevieve National Historical Park. There was also an important hearing just before Christmas on the lawsuit challenging the legality of the state's ownership of the new Eleven Point State Park (see separate articles in this issue of *Heritage*).

The announcement of Mike Sutherland's appointment as State Park Director occurred January 29, just the day before the Missouri Parks Association's winter meeting, at which he commented that it was quite an experience to be meeting with this group of which he was once a part. The MPA board congratulates Mike Sutherland on his appointment as director and wishes him well in his new assignment.

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## Ste. Genevieve NHP Negotiations Raise Concern

For local leaders and park lovers, the establishment of the new Ste. Genevieve National Historical Park (NHP) cannot come soon enough. The park was authorized in a massive federal appropriations bill signed into law in March 2018, National Park Service (NPS) interpreters from nearby parks have begun training on site, and the first superintendent reported for work in February 2020. But it is now apparent that the park will not be officially established until the NPS acquires sufficient properties in Ste. Genevieve beyond those initially authorized to trigger a decision by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior for its formal establishment. That has been the subject of tortuously complex negotiations among multiple public and private parties in recent months, some of which have raised considerable concern among MPA leaders.

The Missouri Parks Association has long been interested in Ste. Genevieve and has held three annual member meetings there, each followed by a resolution: in 1989, 1999, and 2012. The first advocated state acquisition of a traditional French vertical log structure, the remaining 38-acre portion of the original town site, and a Mississippian Indian mound complex (the latter two both in the Big Common Field), for addition to the Vallé House State Historic Site. The 1999 resolution commended the state for acquisition of the Beauvais-Amoureux and Delassus-Kern vertical-log houses, while the 2012 version added strong support for an NPS presence there. For more background, see [missouriparksassociation.org/Issues-Action/Ste-Genevieve](http://missouriparksassociation.org/Issues-Action/Ste-Genevieve)

For years during a lengthy NPS study of cultural resources in the town authorized in 2006 and finally approved in 2016 and then the effort to gain congressional authorization of the NHP, NPS officials had been counselling the locals that any NPS presence in Ste. Genevieve would



Felix Vallé House State Historic Site

likely be quite limited and rely greatly on cooperation with other public and private partners already involved in Missouri's most historic community. The authorizing legislation included three vertical log houses fronting the common field, one private and two public – the Amoureux and Delassus-Kern, both of which had been donated to the state historic site in 1993. The NPS took possession of the 1792 Amoureux House from MSP in March 2019 and signed an MOU with the state to continue to operate it until the Ste. Genevieve NHP could be formally established.

By August 2019 MPA leaders began to pick up indications that NPS expectations for the new park had grown considerably beyond the original three historic buildings in the authorizing legislation, that the state might be considering giving NPS its only remaining vertical log building, the Green Tree Tavern (acquired in 2017), and that local

leaders were concerned that establishment of the park was not progressing as anticipated. The *Ste. Genevieve Herald* for August 7 reported that the National Society of Colonial Dames of America in the State of Missouri was planning to donate all five of its historic buildings to the NPS, including the meticulously restored Louis Bolduc House, which had been designated a National Historic Landmark in 1970, and the 1794 Jean-Baptiste Vallé House, home of the last colonial commandant of Ste. Genevieve. During his "State of the Parks Address" at MPA's annual meeting October 26, State Park Director Ben Ellis said that state parks would be

keeping the Green Tree. But by early December it seemed that the Colonial Dames had withdrawn their offer, and there was again talk of state willingness to part with the Green Tree.

The situation became somewhat more clarified at MPA's January 30 board meeting during a presentation by Mike Ward, Superintendent at the St. Louis Arch, who had taken over NPS negotiations. Ward explained that the NPS had been on a path to get five historic buildings from the Colonial Dames, but it now appeared they would get only the J. B. Vallé, so NPS had been negotiating with the state for more of its buildings. The plan was for NPS and MSP to work side by side as equal partners, which would set a standard for other cooperating groups and could set a national standard for NPS cooperation with a state. New State Park Director Mike Sutherland added that MSP is determined to maintain a significant staff presence in Ste. Genevieve, and a bill providing for transfer of

additional state properties had been introduced. Questioning from all quadrants of the table brought out that the state was prepared to transfer *all* its remaining properties to NPS, and that an MOU was in the works in which other concerns could be addressed.

Subsequent discussions by various MPA leaders with current or former officials in MSP, DNR, NPS, and other related agencies and NGOs revealed a strong consensus among those most knowledgeable about Ste. Genevieve and the state park system that **it is critical for MSP to retain title and operate at least one significant historic building** – likely the Felix Vallé House, name-sake of the state historic site – if a strong partnership with the NPS is to have any chance of enduring. Moreover, the integrity of the state park system and the cultural aspect of its three-part mission – to preserve and interpret the finest examples of Missouri's cultural landmarks – demands a continued stake in Ste. Genevieve.

Meanwhile, bills for transfer of the state's remaining properties to NPS have been favorably heard in both House and Senate, after sponsors were urged to move expeditiously by Missouri's U.S. Senator Roy Blunt, a strong advocate of the Ste. Genevieve NHP; but the state legislature is now in recess owing to COVID-19. MPA testified for information, indicating our strong support for the National Historical Park and our strong conviction that the state must retain and operate at least one significant historic structure, both for the integrity of the system and its mission and for the future of an enduring partnership with NPS. NPS now has the Amoureux and J. B. Vallé Houses, will likely soon get the Green Tree and Delassus from the state, and there are many other highly significant buildings and archaeological sites, including the Old Town Site– all identified in the NPS study– that could become available.

## ***Eleven Point State Park Lawsuit Heard***

While other new state parks such as Bryant Creek and Ozark Mountain– both visited by attendees during MPA's annual fall gathering in Branson last October (see article on page 6) – have been progressing through MSP's conceptual development planning phase, the new Eleven Point State Park has been hung up by a lawsuit challenging the acquisition of the land by the Missouri Department of Natural Resources (DNR) for park purposes.

The case (McGibney et al v. Missouri DNR) was filed in September 2017 by several owners of land in the Eleven Point National Scenic River area in Oregon County; they allege that MDNR's acquisition of the land was in violation of federal and state law because a portion of the land is subject to a scenic easement deed held by the US Forest Service that provides that the land "shall not be used for other than agricultural purposes." The plaintiffs further allege that the property was conveyed to MDNR only for the purposes of "public use as a state park and for natural resource restoration and preservation," and MDNR has no legal authority to own and manage the land for agricultural purposes.

The response by the Missouri attorney general, arguing on behalf of MDNR, stated that the plaintiffs' assumption that use of the land was restricted to agricultural use was unconfirmed and unreasonable. Holding the land as a park is not a violation of the easement because the stated purpose of the easement is to protect the "scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural, or other similar natural values of the free-flowing Eleven Point River and its immediate environment" and to prevent developments that would detract from these values. This language comes directly from the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968, which authorized the Eleven Point as one of the original eight designated rivers. The state also argued that the

plaintiffs failed to state a legal claim of injury sufficient to show that they have standing to bring the case.

After more than two more years of legal maneuvering, discovery depositions, and rescheduled hearings, the case finally came up for a hearing in the circuit court of Oregon County on December 19, 2019. The courtroom in Alton was packed with passionate supporters for each side of the case, perhaps about 100 people, many of them local, and some from afar. Both plaintiffs and defendants had early on presented motions for summary judgement and this was a hearing on those motions, not a trial with evidence, testimony, and cross examination.

From reports of several MPA members and other park supporters present that day who talked among themselves after the hearing, they felt the attorney for the state seemed ill-prepared and had not defended MDNR or the park adequately, despite efforts by the judge to encourage more clarity. This was surprising and embarrassing to them, since those who had read the attorney general's written briefs regarded them as strong and persuasive. They left feeling deflated and uncertain about what might happen next.

In the end, the judge did not grant either side's motion, but set a date of April 2 for a trial. On March 24, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and event cancellations, the trial date was rescheduled for June 11.

Meanwhile, Representative Jeff Pogue (R-Salem), whose District 143 extends south all the way to the Arkansas border and includes Eleven Point State Park, introduced HB2535, which mandates sale of the 4,200 acres acquired by the state for the park, and the bill was heard on March 10. The bill is similar to bills he has introduced without success in the years since the land was acquired, but he has also assiduously sought to insert the language in other bills more likely to pass at the end of the session, which is always a threat. MPA will remain vigilant, so stay tuned.

## MPA Visits New Parks

by Shirley Wolverson

Park supporters gathered in October, 2019 for MPA's 37th annual fall meeting, held this year at Table Rock Lake near Branson, complete with visits to two of the new state parks and discussion on planning a park from concept to reality.

On Friday, members toured Bryant Creek State Park and learned about future development and the outstanding natural resources the park has to offer. Some visited the nearby Assumption Abbey and a few lucky ones were able to purchase the Trappist monks' famous fruitcakes! Following the tour, MPA members were welcomed to a reception at the State Park Marina at Table Rock. The Cox Brothers through their Starboard Corporation have run the 600-slip marina for many years, and what a spread they set amongst the docked boats and a nice sunset – and a birthday cake for Director Ben Ellis!

Members and guests were on hand Saturday morning for a welcome by Table Rock State Park manager Carl Bonnell and the "State of the Parks" address by State Park Director Ben Ellis, held at the Army Corps of Engineers' Dewey Short Visitor Center. Planning and Development staff discussed the conceptual development plan process (CDP). The CDP process is used by state park staff when developing land for a new park and includes a series of public meetings to allow user groups to provide suggestions as to the scope and use patterns of the park. Currently, Bryant Creek is undergoing the process; information about Bryant can be found at <https://mostateparks.com/park/bryant-creek-state-park> and the general process is described at <https://mostateparks.com/page/55051/>

*conceptual-development-plan-process*. A few members who arrived early attended the Ozark Mountain State Park CDP meeting Thursday night at the same visitor center for a lively and informative discussion (see <https://mostateparks.com/park/ozark-mountain-state-park>).



### Hiking at Ozark Mountain State Park

Following lunch and delicious Dutch oven deserts made over coals outdoors despite pouring rain by versatile state park staff, attendees went on a field trip to Ozark Mountain State Park northwest of Branson along Highway 465. They braved the rain to hike the new park, which features five largely-open 400-foot-tall rounded hilltops known to ecologists as White River Glades, but in local parlance "bald knobs." An old one-room country schoolhouse on site inspires one's imagination with the ghostly remnants of children's writing on the chalkboard dominating one wall.

Saturday evening, as it continued cold and rainy, our can-do MPA officers shifted plans from an outdoor venue at Table Rock Park to the Lodge of the Ozarks for a social hour and dinner, complete with interpretive stations set up by staff from Prairie State Park and Nathan

Boone Homestead Historic Site. We were impressed by the artifacts and documentation that the interpreters brought and their passion for their work and the natural and cultural features of their sites.

Sunday morning, we met again at the Lodge for the members' annual meeting. There were three nominees for the Board of Directors who were approved unanimously and welcomed: Kurt Gretzinger of Urich, Mary Nemecek of Kansas City, and Kelley Brent of Poplar Blunt. Updates were shared about our popular UPOP and Seniors to Parks programs as well as the Member Meet-up, the Rock Island Trail and the Missouri Outdoors Coalition.

During the Board of Directors meeting that followed, Deb Schnack announced that she and Nonie McClammer would be leaving their posts of president and vice president after two eventful years in those positions. They both will remain on the board. We are extremely grateful for their leadership, which included the hiring in 2018 of MPA's first executive director, Kendra Varns Wallis. New officers were elected: President Terry Whaley, Vice President Shirley Wolverson, and Secretary Jessi Perry, with Treasurer Melissa Hope thankfully staying on. Dawn Nicklas will continue as our lobbyist for another year, helping us keep on top of relevant legislative actions. Kendra is working hard to increase membership and improve communication, and announced new Missouri Parks Association Facebook, Instagram and Twitter pages; they are now active, and all members are encouraged to like or join or follow, as appropriate!

*Heritage* is now being mocked up and designed by Kendra in conjunction with editor Susan Flader. In order to speed delivery, we have been emailing it when possible, and posting it on our missouriparksassociation.org website with links from Facebook. If you are not receiving *Heritage* and our occasional MPA Action Alerts by email please send your email address to [info@missouriparks.org](mailto:info@missouriparks.org) and make sure our informative emails do not go to your "Spam" or "Junk" folder!

There was also a presentation by the Family Investment Center; the MPA Board is considering using it to handle our investments in order to have professionals advise our treasurer Melissa Hope and the board in its fiduciary responsibility for MPA's endowment funds and other investments. Following robust discussion, the matter was deferred to the board's January meeting.

MPA is looking forward to planning for the next annual meeting in early October 2020. As always, it will be a fun and informative event where MPA members from around the state can get together and enjoy state parks through behind-the-scenes tours with park staff; we also hear in-depth reports about park issues, maintenance and stewardship projects, park funding and finances, legislative issues, and MPA programs. We hope you will join us!

### ***MPA and Park Briefs***

**Ron Coleman**, long-time MPA director and former president, was inducted into the **Missouri Recreation and Parks Hall of Fame** on February 20 for his extraordinary contributions to the parks and recreation movement in Missouri. His entire 40-year career has been one of public service. Known as "the start-up guy," he served as the first director in each of his successive positions—Ellisville Parks & Rec, Ozark Greenways, Chesterfield Parks & Rec, and St. Louis Open

Space Council—leaving behind vibrant, well-functioning agencies.

He has led in conserving thousands of acres of open space, developing hundreds of miles of hiking and biking trails, and restoring the corridor of the free-flowing lower Meramec River, in the process inspiring thousands of individuals and corporations to volunteer their time and resources and raising millions of dollars. He was the principal of a consulting company, The Coleman Group, chaired many initiatives and committees, and served as president of three state-wide organizations: the Missouri Park and Recreation Association, the Missouri Parks Association, and the Conservation Federation of Missouri.

During his MPA years, Ron guided the St. Louis UPOP program and chaired the multi-year effort to renew the Parks and Soils Sales Tax in 2006 through the Citizens Committee for Soil, Water and State Parks. He led an ambitious fundraising effort, found and worked with a superb consultant to develop coordinated messaging, and pulled together the wide range of organizations needed for success. MPA extends its deep gratitude and hearty congratulations to Ron Coleman.



**Ron Coleman with UPOP Kids**

**Harriet Beard 1926-2019.** MPA learned belatedly of the death last May 1 of its honorary director and former longtime board member, Harriet Beard. Harriet was a businesswoman in Kirksville who was tireless in serving on local and state commissions, including the Missouri Air Conservation Commission and the Missouri Highway Safety Commission. She even has a portion of Highway 63 named in her honor. MPA members will remember her for her friendly smile, her sage advice, her championing of Thousand Hills State Park, and her gracious hosting of an MPA annual meeting with a bountiful reception in her Kirksville home.

**COVID-19.** On March 13, MSP cancelled all special events in state parks through April 30, then in quick succession it suspended all group and indoor tours, closed visitor centers and equipment rentals, and waived fishing permits at the trout parks. On March 31, MSP announced closure of five popular but overcrowded parks—Castlewood, Elephant Rocks, Watkins Mill, Weston Bend, and the ORV area at St. Joe— and provided for limiting cars to lot capacity at other parks. More actions may follow.

**Feral Hogs.** The USDA Forest Service on December 7 announced its long-awaited decision to close the Mark Twain National Forest to hunting of feral swine (see *Heritage*, June 2019), except for "opportunistic" take while hunting lawfully during deer and turkey seasons. With that decision, the Missouri Feral Hog Elimination Partnership, of which Missouri State Parks is a member, ramped up for highly coordinated, concerted action. The Conservation Department has been detailing and training about 150 additional staff from around the state for periodic service on hog eradication. The effort, however, has been facing substantial resistance in the legislature from lawmakers sympathetic with hog-hunting enthusiasts.



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*New Leader for State Parks  
Rock Island & Eleven Point Issues  
Ste. Genevieve NHP-MSP Negotiations*

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## MPA Employee Awards

MPA's annual Employee of the Year Awards were presented to state park staff at the January board of directors meeting. These awards are given annually to state park staff who demonstrate exceptional work and are nominated by their peers for their efforts. We were pleased to present the 2019 MPA awards to the following outstanding park employees:

**Jessica Apel** (Central Office), was selected for her outstanding work ethic and leadership. She is a huge benefit to the Business Services Program by providing creative solutions to issues and completing projects that make the park system more efficient. Jessica approaches her work with a positive attitude and is always willing to help others. Her dedication and can-do approach to any situation she faces is a benefit to the entire division.

**Carol Clark** (Interpretation Program), has been instrumental in her role as Interpretive Resource Technician since joining Weston Bend State Park in May of 2015. Carol bases her work as an IRT on the mission of Missouri State Parks, and that is evident in her efforts towards invasive/exotic species removal and natural resource management in the park. Her dedication to community service is apparent in her efforts with local civic groups and in her work to create dialogue and interest in careers in the sciences for women. Her

service has supported Missouri State Parks to achieve their mission.

**Melanie Robinson-Smith** (Field—Northern Parks Region, Katy Trail State Park), was honored for her ongoing leadership as the Katy Trail Coordinator and supervisor of the Missouri Valley parks in the Northern Region. In 2019, the Missouri



2019 MPA Award Winners

River Basin was faced with record flooding, tornado damage, rockslides, and numerous bridge and facility projects on the Katy Trail in addition to staffing vacancies at several facilities. Most of these impacts occurred in the area which Melanie manages, and she responded to every situation with positive leadership that exemplifies her professionalism and her dedication.

**Mike Dickey** (Facility Manager) is the long-time facility manager responsible for Arrow Rock State Historic Site. He was selected for his response to a fire in May at

J. Huston Tavern. On May 17, 2019 an alarm sounded in Mike's residence indicating an issue at the Tavern. Mike responded and saw gray smoke billowing from the Tavern kitchen area. He notified Saline County Rural Fire Protection, Station 2 (which he happens to be the Station Chief). He got the fire truck himself and got it to the Tavern and assessed the situation. After the fire, Mike remained involved, working with the Friends of Arrow Rock to get the dining service resumed in a tent and mobile kitchen for the busy summer season. His fast action and guidance saved a National Historic Landmark and an icon for the town of Arrow Rock and Missouri State Parks.

### **Wakonda State Park Staff**

(Maintenance and Construction), were recognized for their tireless efforts and outstanding job of preparing, managing and recovering from the 2nd largest recorded flood event on the Mississippi River that occurred on Aug. 30, 2019. This was a catastrophic event, flooding 1,050 acres located within Wakonda SP. Staff spent many hours sandbagging low areas, transporting supplies and monitoring levee conditions throughout the days and nights leading up to the levee failure. After the waters started to recede, staff was tasked with repairing and cleaning buildings, campsites, and removing debris from the park. The staff worked through stressful circumstances to have the park open for the public to enjoy as soon as possible.