



HERITAGE

Newsletter of the Missouri Parks Association
Post Office Box 8531, Kansas City, MO 64114

Volume 44, No. 2

September, 2026

Shirley Wolverson, Guest Editor

Missouri Voters Renew Commitment to Parks, Soils and Water by Kendra Varns Wallis

Missouri voters have once again demonstrated their strong support for protecting the state's natural resources. On August 4, 2026, a record 82% of voters approved Constitutional Amendment 1, renewing Missouri's Parks, Soils and Water Sales Tax for another 10 years. The measure passed in every county across the state.

There was understandable concern that voter confusion could affect the outcome, particularly with several amendments related to ballot initiatives and taxes appearing on the same ballot. Despite those concerns, Missourians made their position clear: they overwhelmingly support continuing investment in Missouri's state parks, historic sites, soil conservation, and water resources.

Amendment 1 did not create a new tax or increase the existing tax rate. Instead, it renewed the existing one-tenth of one percent sales and use tax that Missouri voters have approved repeatedly since its original passage in 1984. The tax is evenly divided between Missouri State Parks and Missouri's 114 Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

Since its creation, the tax has now been renewed by Missouri voters six times. At 10 cents on a \$100 purchase the tax costs the average Missourian about \$20 per year, often less than the cost of park entrance fees charged in many other states.

The Parks, Soils and Water Sales Tax provides approximately 75% of

the operating budget for Missouri State Parks. The remainder comes largely from user fees, such as camping, lodging and rentals, as well as federal sources. No general revenue funds are used in the state park budget. With this vital sales tax renewed, state park staff can plan for a future with stable funding.



One of the most notable benefits of this funding model is that Missouri state parks and historic sites remain free to enter. Missouri is one of only a handful of states that does not charge a general admission fee to its state parks.

That free access is significant. Missouri's state parks and historic sites welcome nearly 20 million visitors each year, ranking among the nation's top 10 state park systems for attendance.

The Parks, Soils and Water Sales Tax also provides critical support for Missouri's agricultural communities and natural resources.

Since the first passage of the tax in 1984, the funding has helped Mis-

souri prevent more than 195 million tons of soil erosion, while improving water quality and helping keep farmland productive.

In fiscal year 2026, the Missouri Department of Natural Resources' Soil and Water Conservation Program provided nearly \$45 million to Missouri landowners through 5,736 cost-share contracts with agricultural landowners implementing soil and water conservation practices, helping prevent more than 924,000 tons of soil erosion.

These projects included:

- 2,511 cover crop contracts addressing approximately 148,000 acres.
- 455 terrace contracts that prevented an estimated 330,000 tons of soil erosion.
- Management of approximately 37,000 acres through rotational grazing.
- Projects protecting 21 miles of streams through livestock exclusions and streambank stabilization.

Additional funding provides technical assistance, program administration, research, conservation monitoring and other statewide services to Missouri's 114 local soil and water conservation districts.

Each county-level district works directly with farmers and landowners, providing hands-on technical assistance, education and best practices.

(See "Amendment 1" on Page 2)

Missouri State Parks: An Economic Powerhouse for Missouri

Missouri's state parks and historic sites are more than places to hike, camp and explore—they are a significant economic engine for communities across the state.

A recent comprehensive economic impact study conducted by the University of Missouri found that Missouri's 93 state parks and historic sites, including Katy Trail State Park, generate approximately **\$1.5 billion in business sales each year and support nearly 12,000 jobs statewide.**

With nearly 20 million visitors annually, the state park system contributes an estimated \$882.7 million to Missouri's Gross Domestic Product and generates approximately \$514.7 million in local labor and payroll income.

Visitors spend money not only inside the parks but also in nearby communities. Restaurants, lodging facilities, retail stores, outdoor outfitters and other local businesses benefit when visitors stop for meals, shopping, accommodations and other services. Day visitors spend an average of \$46 to \$67 per day, while overnight visitors spend between \$64 and \$148 per day.

The study also shows how far visitors are willing to travel to experience Missouri's parks. While 91% of visitors are Missouri residents, nearly half travel more than 60 miles to reach a park. Summer is the busiest season, and popular activities include walking, running and hiking. Many visitors also leave the parks to explore surrounding communities.

Katy Trail State Park, an important contributor to Missouri's outdoor recreation economy, is an important example. In 2025, visitors to



the trail generated \$24.6 million in direct economic impact, supported 261 jobs and contributed \$20.2 million to Missouri's Gross Domestic Product.

Trail visitors spend an average of \$45 per day on one-day trips, while overnight visitors spend approximately \$148 per day, with lodging representing their largest expense. Restaurants, shops, historical attractions and other businesses in communities along the trail benefit from this visitor spending.

Importantly, Missouri State Parks receive no revenue directly from the Katy Trail. Maintenance of the trail is supported through the Parks, Soils and Water Sales Tax, demonstrating another way this dedicated fund-

ing source benefits communities and Missouri's economy.

The study reinforces that Missouri's investment in its state parks provides benefits far beyond recreation. The Parks, Soils and Water Sales Tax provides approximately three-fourths of the operating and development budget for Missouri State Parks, while visitor spending generates billions of dollars in economic activity throughout the state.

Missouri's parks protect natural and cultural resources, provide affordable opportunities for families to enjoy the outdoors and support local businesses and jobs. The new economic impact findings make clear that Missouri State Parks are not only treasures worth protecting—they are an important investment in the state's economic future.

A link to MU's study is available on Missouri's Division of State Parks website: Facts and Figures | Missouri State Parks. <https://tinyurl.com/4vz7z8c6>

("Amendment 1" from Page 1)

The passage of Amendment 1 continues a funding source that supports both Missouri's state parks and the conservation work taking place on farms and throughout communities across the state.

The continued success of Missouri State Parks is made possible through effective management, dedicated staff and volunteers, and strong partnerships. Their commitment has earned national recognition, with Missouri selected a record seven times as a finalist for the prestigious Gold Medal Award from the American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration. Every day, park staff and volunteers care for these special places, welcome visitors, maintain trails and facilities, protect natural resources, and help ensure Missouri's state park system remains one of the best in the country.



At the same time, investments in soil and water conservation help protect Missouri's farmland, waterways, and agricultural future.

With Amendment 1 approved, Missouri has a stable source of funding to continue investing in places, resources, and conservation programs that benefit residents, visitors, farmers, and communities across the state. Missourians love their state parks—and on August 4, they made that message unmistakably clear.

MPA 44th Annual Gathering
 October 16–17, 2026 | Jefferson City, Missouri

Please mark your calendars and plan to join fellow members and partners for the Missouri Parks Association's 44th Annual Meeting in Jefferson City this October! The lunch presentation, "Celebrating Jefferson Landing State Historic Site's 50th Anniversary," will be presented by Tiffany Patterson, Historic Site Administrator, followed by guided tours of the State Museum, Benton Room, and State Capitol. The evening will conclude with the State of the State Parks Address by Laura Hendrickson at dinner. October 5th is the cut-off date for annual meeting registration with meals (Saturday lunch and dinner).

A block of rooms is available for Friday and Saturday, October 16th and 17th, at the Courtyard by Marriott Jefferson City at a rate of \$174 per night. Call the front desk at (573) 761-1400 and ask for the Missouri Parks Association block of rooms. They must be reserved by September 18th to get the room rate of \$174 and please note daily parking fees apply.

Friday, October 16

5:00 – 8:00 pm Registration and Reception
 Lohman Building — Front Lawn
 100 Jefferson St., Jefferson City, MO 65101
 Dinner on your own

Saturday, October 17

Breakfast on your own
8:00 AM–Noon — MPA Membership and Board Meetings
 Lohman Building
 100 Jefferson St., Jefferson City, MO 65101

Noon–1:30 PM — Lunch and Presentation
 Lohman Building
 100 Jefferson St., Jefferson City, MO 65101
 Celebrating Jefferson Landing State Historic Site's 50th Anniversary
 Presented by Tiffany Patterson, Historic Site Administrator

2:00–3:30 PM — Tours
 Tours of the State Museum, Benton Room, and State Capitol
 201 W. Capitol Ave., Jefferson City, MO 65101

5:00 PM — Dinner and State of the State Parks Address
 Prison Brews
 305 Ash St., Jefferson City, MO 65101



Flat Rate Registration with Event Counts for Planning

Name(s) _____

#Persons ____ -- ____ @ \$50; Total: \$ ____ (includes all meals, tours)

Address _____

Phone _____ Email(s) _____

Special Dietary needs (indicate) _____

Event Counts: Activities and Confirm Meal Count

#Persons _____ Friday Night Reception

#Persons _____ Tours of the State Museum, Benton Room, and State Capitol (Low Physical Activity)

#Persons _____ Saturday Lunch #Persons _____ Saturday Dinner

Make check payable to Missouri Parks Association and mail with form **postmarked by October 5th** to Missouri Parks Association, P.O. Box 8531, Kansas City, MO 64114. If you would like to register and pay online, please visit <https://forms.gle/qLeM8TFxbJBVCdoQ7>. **For questions email:** kendra.wallis@missouriparks.org



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MPA 44th Annual Gathering
Park Updates

www.missouriparksassociation.org

Park Updates and Briefs

Revenue Bond Project Update. In the March 2026 issue of *Heritage*, we reported the completion of five revenue bond projects. Since that time, work has proceeded on eight projects and one highly anticipated project has begun. At Current River State Park, the contractor has set up trailers and begun moving workers and equipment in for this large project to build six cabins on the upper lake, renovate the dorms and kitchen in the historic lodge, and install new water and wastewater systems necessary for their future operations. For more information on all 28 revenue bond projects at 22 different parks, visit <https://tinyurl.com/pczxczz9>.

Conceptual Development Plans (CDPs). CDP meetings were held at the following locations this summer: Echo Bluff State Park (June 11), Watkins Woolen Mill State Park and State Historic Site (June 17), and Missouri Mines State Historic Site and St. Joe State Park (July 18). Surveys were conducted and completed.

Coming up: Missouri State Parks invites the public to attend Lake of the Ozarks State Park's CDP meeting beginning at 5 p.m. Monday, Sept. 28, at the park's Public Beach #1 Shelter. For more information, visit <https://tinyurl.com/4eucfyrf>.

Park Centennials: MPA participated in the following events, promoting our organization and the Yes on 1 campaign to renew the Parks, Soils and Water Sales Tax: Montauk State Park celebrated the 100-year anniversary of becoming a state park at Old Mill Days, May 8-9, 2026 and Sam A. Baker State Park celebrated 100 years as a Missouri State Park on June 13, 2026. For these and other park events, including monthly bison saunters, Dark Sky programs, and basket weaving classes, go to <https://tinyurl.com/y8hwu5pn>.

Camp Zoe Lodge Renovation at Echo Bluff State Park. Crowning the hill overlooking Sinking Creek, the Camp Zoe Lodge and its stone walkway bear witness to the footsteps of generations of campers from 1930-1986. Built in 1929 in the distinct Missouri vernacular architecture genre, Ozark rock masonry, the Lodge is historically significant both architecturally and culturally.

Friends of Camp Zoe (FOCZ), in cooperation with Missouri State Parks as an official Friends organization, provided the funding for the new roof installed in 2021 by the state parks construction crew, who also rebuilt the porch roof that surrounds three sides of the building prior to installing the new, coated, corrugated steel roofing. The old building foundation was still unstable, and the floor was collapsing, so state parks staff proposed

a project in 2024 that would require FOCZ to raise substantial matching funds to hire a contractor capable of stabilizing the foundation, walls, and chimney with the goal of a three-season building that could serve as an interpretative center as well as somewhere to house and display Camp Zoe memorabilia and preserve its memories.

Work began in August 2026 and is proceeding at a good pace. The deteriorated floor was removed and new Missouri oak flooring will be installed over a stable and well supported sub-floor, additional support was added to the stone fireplace and chimney, the foundation has been stabilized around the entire perimeter, and installation of guttering and drainage improvements will divert water from the hill and road behind the lodge to prevent future incursion.

During the biennial Camp Zoe Reunion held August 21-23, 2026, former campers, counselors, owners, and staff from the 1950s through 1986 were able to see the progress while enjoying telling camp stories, soaking in Sinking Creek, making S'mores at the campfire, reading the Landmark Signs posted at the former sites of cabins, visiting the Barn with some horses' and campers' names still etched in the wood, and just soaking in the atmosphere of this magical place where they spent the summers of their youth.