

Parks and Soils Tax on August 8th Ballot

For more than two decades, Missourians have supported their state parks, clean water and soil conservation through a one-tenth of one cent statewide sales tax. Now voters will again have the opportunity to renew this funding measure when the tax appears on the August 8 ballot statewide.

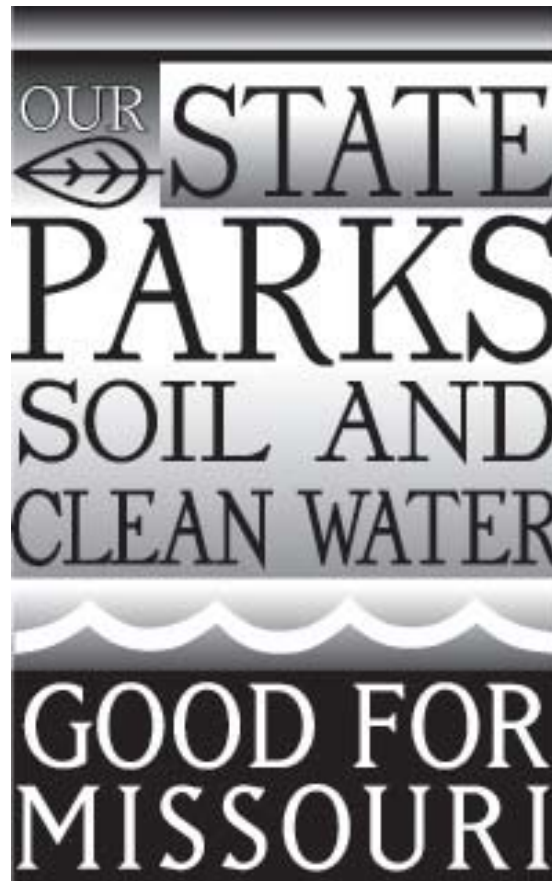
The parks-and-soils sales tax will be on the ballot as Amendment 1, and it will be the fourth time Missourians have had the opportunity to vote on this dedicated funding for state parks and soil conservation. This is because the funding measure contains a sunset clause that requires that the tax come before voters every ten years for renewal. This clause assures accountability to taxpayers, allowing voters to weigh in on the tax's effectiveness and efficiency.

This brief timeline outlines how voters have supported the parks-and-soil sales tax since its inception:

- In 1983, Missouri's state parks and historic sites lacked funds for even basic maintenance; improvements to facilities and expansion were not possible, and some parks even had to be closed for a time. In addition, Missouri's soil erosion rate was the second highest in the nation.

With the backing of the Missouri Parks Association and other groups, the state legislature approved a joint

period, with funds by law split equally between state parks and soil conservation programs.



- In 1988, heartened by the positive impact of the tax on state parks, clean water and soil conservation, volunteers from MPA and other conservation groups gathered hundreds of thousands of signatures on an initiative petition to put the sales tax on the ballot for renewal. Bolstered by improving conditions at state parks and decreasing erosion rates, the renewal was passed for ten years by a two-to-one margin.
- In 1996, Missouri's state parks ranked among the state's most popular tourist attractions, with new trails, improved visitors centers and enhanced services funded primarily through this dedicated sales tax. On the soil conservation side, Missouri's erosion rate was dropping more than any other state's as effective programs were put into place. Volunteers again gathered signatures to place the renewal measure on the ballot, and voters again renewed the parks-and-soils sales tax by a two-to-one margin.

resolution that would allow citizens to vote for a one-tenth-cent sales tax for parks and soil conservation. Volunteers organized to educate Missourians about the crisis of parks and soils, and in August 1984 voters passed the tax for an initial five-year

(See "Ballot" on Page 2)

("Ballot" from Page 1)

- In 2005, the Missouri legislature was asked to change the procedure for the ongoing renewal of the parks-and-soils sales tax. With voters' approval, in the future the tax will automatically be placed on the ballot for renewal every ten years, without the lengthy initiative petition process. This preserves the critical accountability feature of the parks-and-soils tax without the constant cycle of signature-gathering needed for initiative petitions.
- In 2006, the parks-and-soil sales tax continues to provide the funding vital to state parks and soil conservation. Neither of these programs receives any general revenue funds; that means our state parks, clean water and soil conservation are dependent upon this funding source. Amendment 1, on the ballot on August 8, will once again let Missouri voters register their support for state parks and soil conservation.

Just as the Missouri Parks Association led in the establishment of the parks-and-soils sales tax 22 years ago, it continues to play a key role in its renewal through Amendment 1. Educating Missouri voters about the tax is one of the MPA's priorities for 2006. To help in this educational effort, contact us at **636-733-0088** or email MPA President Ron Coleman at **ron@openspacecouncilstl.org**. See related articles throughout this issue of *Heritage* and for updates check the MPA website <http://parks.missouri.org>.

Missouri's Parks and Soils Funding at a Glance

- Since 1984, Missouri's state parks and historic sites have been funded primarily by a one-tenth-of-one-cent statewide sales tax.
- That means that Missourians will not be authorizing a new tax on August 8; instead Amendment 1 would allow for the continuation of the same parks-and-soils sales tax that has been in place for more than two decades.
- This sales tax provides 75 percent of the funds needed for our state parks, plus funds for soil conservation statewide.
- Our state parks and soil conservation programs do not receive any general revenue from the state. Our parks, clean water and soil conservation are dependent on this sales tax.
- Funds generated by the sales tax are earmarked for state parks and soil conservation; by law, the funds can not be used for any other purpose.
- The sales tax generates an estimated \$82 million annually; because the funds are split equally between state parks and soil conservation programs, each of these two areas receives about \$41 million each year.
- Every 10 years, Missouri voters are asked to renew the sales tax to continue to fund our state parks and soil conservation.
- In the two previous votes, citizens supported this important funding by a two-to-one majority.
- If the sales tax is not renewed by Missouri voters, another funding source for our parks will need to be found. Drastic operational changes would need to occur to continue to manage our parks and soil and water resources.



Amendment 1 at Work: Parks and Soils Sales Tax Results

When Missourians chose to fund their state parks and soil conservation through a dedicated sales tax 22 years ago, they established an efficient and effective revenue stream that directly impacts designated programs. Because of its long history, the parks-and-soils sales tax can be traced to visible, measurable results statewide.

Improving State Parks for Families and Visitors

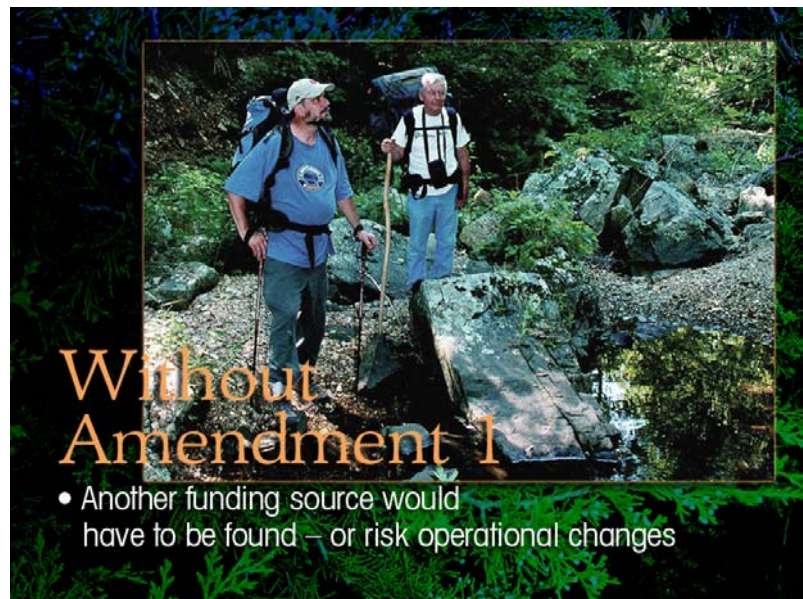
Half of the sales tax proceeds go to state parks and historic sites, with the majority of the park funds used to repair, improve, and operate existing locations. Visitor centers, campgrounds, roads and other facilities have been improved and a maintenance program established to ensure that the parks stay in good shape. New facilities, such as campgrounds, picnic areas and playgrounds, have been built to better serve the public. In addition to upgrading campgrounds and day sites, infrastructure has been improved at about 30 state parks. This includes water and sewer systems, lagoons and wastewater treatment facilities, all ensuring that environmental standards are met and the parks' valuable resources are protected.

Another major priority has been providing quality service to visitors. The vast majority of staff provides service directly to visitors, maintaining the parks and historic sites, upgrading facilities, assisting visitors, and offering interpretation.

Today, thanks in large part to the parks-and-soils sales tax, Missouri's state parks play a major role in tourism, one of the state's largest industries. This in turn strengthens the state's economy. More than 17 million people visit our state parks each year for an economic impact of \$538 million annually for Missouri. This was not always the case. Because of decreasing funding in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the state park system had begun to deteriorate, impacting park usage. But since the passage of the tax in 1984, Missouri

citizens have effectively worked in partnership with the Department of Natural Resources to protect and maintain our state parks.

Missouri now has 83 state parks and historic sites with 140,000 acres, plus 61,000 acres in the Roger Pryor Pioneer Backcountry. Although donations and partnerships have become a major emphasis for acquisitions to the state park system, the dedicated



sales tax is the key to maintaining the quality of Missouri's existing state parks and historic sites.

Effective Soil Management Statewide

Since 1984, sales tax revenues have gone toward several key programs focused on conserving Missouri's soil and water resources by through incentives to put conservation practices to work on land. The tax has provided funding assistance for more than 70 watershed projects and has helped many landowners install conservation practices, processing over 150,000 claims. Missouri has decreased its erosion rates by half since the passage of the sales tax, saving more than 148 million tons of soil and protecting our streams.

(See "Results" on Page 6)

UPOP in Four Missouri Cities for 2006

by Dr. Dianne Benjamin, The Green Center

Encouraged by the success of the past three summers, Missouri Parks Association, Open Space Council, MEMCO Barge Line, Great Rivers Greenway, and Green Center partnered to make UPOP 2005 a reality. The St. Louis Urban Populations Outreach Project summer experience was headquartered once again at the Green Center in University City. This five-week program met three days each week, on Mondays through Wednesdays, from June 27th through August 3rd. Each week's program was tailored to meet the needs and interests of a particular youth agency and consisted of a half-day at the Green Center, a full day at the confluence of the big rivers, and a full day at a Missouri state park. Under the guidance of Michael Nelson, Alicia Boelhauf, and Tara Brown, 143 urban children from low-income families enjoyed various activities on the year's theme: *The Role of Plants and Parks in Clean Water*. Seventeen adult leaders from five youth agencies also benefited from the UPOP summer experience.

Mondays at the Green Center provided an orientation to the great outdoors. While exploring the many roles of a low-lying wetland, children transformed their attitudes from "Yucky" to "Wow." While on a sensory walk in a hilly forest, children made friends with trees, their "Breathing Buddies." Back at the Green Center's headquarters house, children relaxed in the shade and time-traveled with artist Craig Eppes. He took them on an imaginary journey to 1804, 1904, 2004, and 2104 to reflect how topography influences changes in land use,

transportation, and communication in St. Louis. Children colored topographical maps of the Green Center's wetland and woods, and surrounding neighborhoods, as a way to learn how to "read" the earth beneath their feet.

Tuesdays at the confluence of the big rivers provided an introduction to larger landscapes. Small groups of children led by one of the UPOP field instructors explored a trail in a "sand forest" on the bluffs of the Missouri River, overlooking the confluence with the Mississippi River. AmeriCorps team members then reinforced the children's adventures with a friendly game about the water cycle. Children collected different colored beads while on a journey as a water molecule, e.g., white beads when in a cloud, green beads when in a river, blue beads when in an ocean, etc. Their beaded friendship bracelet then told a story about their watery journey. Children lunched with pelicans at a Mississippi River bay and then created nature-theme posters to be displayed as public art in the advertising spaces of MetroLink light rail cars and buses. In the heat of the afternoon, they enjoyed an indoor scavenger hunt at the National Great Rivers Museum. On one special Tuesday children met with Chad Pregracke and his barge crew of "Living Lands and Waters" and learned how they are collecting mounds of trash and planting trees along the big river shorelines.

Wednesdays at either Meramec State Park or Cuivre River State Park reinforced the theme of "plants, parks, and clean water" even further. The cave tour at Meramec was a unique

opportunity for children to marvel at how water travels underground. An insect safari in a restored prairie at Cuivre River was a fun way to examine butterflies and native plants. One small child smiled for the first time all week when he reluctantly waded in a stream. This Somali boy was even more shy and angry than the other Somali, Afghan, Bosnian, Kurdish, Congolese, etc. refugee camp children we served from "Youth in Need." Yet once he splashed his hands in the water, it was if some distant memory from happier times in nature was triggered. He threw back his head and grinned from ear to ear. In that instant, we all knew how much the UPOP outdoor experience is truly therapeutic and life changing.

For most participating children, MPA's Urban Populations Outreach Project provides their first adventure outside the city limits. And UPOP gives all children a safe and educational way to experience nature in the city near where they live and out in the countryside not too far from home.

During summer 2006, UPOP will offer programs in four Missouri cities: St. Louis in partnership with the Green Center and others, Kansas City in partnership with the Discovery Center, Joplin in partnership with the Wildcat Glades Conservation and Audubon Center, and Columbia in partnership with Friends of Rock Bridge.

If you would like to contribute to UPOP 2006, please write a check payable to Missouri Parks Association (UPOP) and mail to Missouri Parks Association, c/o The Callaway Bank, P.O. Box 10, Fulton, MO 65251.

Johnson's Shut-ins Planning Process Underway

The state park division is seeking public engagement this summer in a long-term conceptual development planning process for Johnson's Shut-ins State Park in the wake of the December 14 rupture of the Taum Sauk Reservoir that tore the heart out of the park. The planning process will include not only the damaged shut-ins area but the entire park and nearby lands, including Taum Sauk Mountain State Park.

MPA is urging citizens to become involved in this process and to express their interest also in the long-term preservation of nearby Church Mountain and Taum Sauk Creek Valley (see articles in *Heritage*, January 2006 and August 2001, on the MPA website <http://parks.missouri.org>). MPA has been advocating the donation of these lands to the

state by AmerenUE in recompense for the destruction to state resources caused by the reservoir breach. Governor Matt Blunt on April 14 called on state agencies to ensure that Missourians are fully and appropriately compensated for the damage, suggesting the donation of Church Mountain and the railbanking of the Rock Island Railroad line, and Attorney General Jay Nixon is expected to file suit against Ameren sometime this summer for its operation of the reservoir before the December collapse.

The state park division has already conducted initial open houses to gather public comment during the first week of April in Lesterville, Jefferson City, Farmington, and St. Louis. Hundreds of Missourians

expressed their views at the meetings or through an on-line survey, and these comments are now being analyzed. MPA President Ron Coleman expressed MPA's support for adding Church Mountain and Taum Sauk Creek to state park lands and called for the state to begin immediately to develop a loop trail on Church Mountain with connections to the Boy Scout Trail along Taum Sauk Creek under terms of a lease for trail development on Ameren lands already in force.

A second round of public meetings to consider various alternative plans for parklands in the area will likely be held in early June, with a third round to consider park division recommendations planned for August. At each stage there will likely also be information and opportunity for

public comment on-line on the DNR website, together with an opportunity to sign up to receive notice of further stages in the planning process. The planning process is expected to be completed in the fall, with construction and other development to begin shortly thereafter. **MPA calls on all members to become engaged in this process.**



MPA President Ron Coleman chats with two UPOP participants.

("Results" from Page 3)

Everyone in Missouri benefits from soil and water conservation. Conserving soil is necessary for productive agricultural lands for future generations. A decrease in soil productivity could negatively impact the Missouri economy, which heavily depends on agriculture. In fact, agriculture is a \$5 billion industry for the state.

In addition to the agricultural impact, erosion is the leading cause of water pollution in Missouri. The sediment, nutrients, pesticides and other chemicals that enter Missouri's waterways can add millions of dollars to water treatment costs in Missouri communities each year, increase chances of flooding, and harm valuable aquatic habitat and organisms. By focusing on agricultural land, we can have a greater impact and better conserve Missouri's soil and water resources.

With an estimated 3.7 million Missouri acres still eroding above tolerable levels, Amendment 1 will continue to work to protect Missouri's soil and water resources for future generations. It will continue to provide assistance to landowners as it works to decrease soil erosion, decrease agricultural nonpoint source pollution and promote resource management.



The Opportunity
to renew this funding and continue the success

- Without increasing our taxes
- Supported by two-to-one votes in 1988 and 1996

Amendment 1:
Pass the Word

Amendment 1 Word for Word

Here is how Amendment 1 will appear on the August 8 ballot when it comes before voters for renewal:

Shall Article IV, Section 47(a), (b), and (c) of the Missouri Constitution be amended to:

- A) reauthorize for ten years the one-tenth percent sales/use tax for (1) soil and water conservation; (2) state parks and historic sites; and
- B) resubmit this issue to a vote very ten years or at an earlier special election?

The proposed constitutional amendment continues until 2016, but does not increase, the existing sales and use tax of one-tenth of one percent that is set to terminate in 2008. The tax would generate approximately \$82 million

Pass the Word!

To spread the news about the parks-and-soils sales tax, the Missouri Parks Association has dedicated itself to a statewide educational initiative under the banner of "Good for Missouri." Please help us distribute free materials, including handouts, notepads, decals and posters, in your community. Pass them out at meetings, community events, Fourth of July celebrations or in your neighborhood. Use the form included in this newsletter to request these free materials.



If you would like a speaker for your next meeting, please let us know. In less than 15 minutes, someone from our Good for Missouri Speakers Bureau can tell your group why state parks, soil and clean water are good for Missouri. Again, you can use the form included in this newsletter or call 636-733-0088.



Amendment 1 will be on the ballot in 2006 for the renewal of the parks-and-soil sales tax. This one-tenth-of-one-cent statewide sales tax is critical to our state parks, soil conservation and clean water.

We need your help in spreading the word. Please complete this form and return it to the address below as soon as possible. With all of us working together, we can assure that our state parks, soil conservation and clean water programs are good for Missouri.

I CAN HELP BY *(check all that apply)*:

- ☐ Talking to groups in my community
- ☐ Stuffing envelopes, other clerical work
- ☐ Distributing materials at community events
- ☐ Posting flyers on community bulletin boards
- ☐ Posting yard signs
- ☐ Making phone calls

Name _____
 Address _____
 City/State/Zip _____
 Daytime Phone _____
 Evening Phone _____
 Email Address _____

☐ Making a contribution toward the MPA's educational initiative on behalf of Amendment 1. Check enclosed, payable to MPA Good for Missouri Education, in the amount of \$ _____.
 Other: _____

Please return this form as soon as possible to **Good for Missouri Distribution Center, Missouri Parks Association, P.O. Box 1468, Ballwin, MO 63022**. If you have questions, call 636-733-0088. All materials are provided at no cost by the Missouri Parks Association for educational purposes and have been approved for distribution by any group, including 501(c)3 organizations and state agencies.

Vacationing in August? Vote Absentee

If voters will be out of town or otherwise unable to vote at their local polling places on August 8, they can request absentee ballots by mail, fax, online or at their nearest county board of election commissioners offices.

Absentee ballot requests must be received at the appropriate local election authority by August 2. Contact information for local election authorities and an absentee ballot form may be found at these web addresses:

*Local Election Authority
Contact Information*

<http://www.sos.mo.gov/elections/countyclerks.asp>

Request for Missouri Absentee Ballot Form

<http://www.sos.mo.gov/forms/elections/absentee.pdf>

Voters can also cast absentee votes in the offices of the local election authority until 5:00 p.m. the night before the election.



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May, 2006

Return Service Requested

*Governor Sets August 8th As Date
For Parks & Soils Tax Renewal*

<http://parks.missouri.org>

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