

TEN PERCENT NEEDED FOR STATE PARKS!

Missouri is widely recognized as having one of the finest systems of state parks and historic sites in the nation, attracting 16 million visitors a year. This is a tribute to Missouri citizens who take pride in our state and its parks and have cared enough to support them over the years. In each of the past five biennia Missouri was one of the three or four finalists for the gold medal for state park systems, which each year went to a larger, better funded system. But this stature and the future quality of our state parks and historic sites are in serious jeopardy unless they receive a major infusion of capital improvement funds to maintain and upgrade aging facilities. Our parks have not received major capital project investment since the 1980s and the wear and tear is showing. Such

funds are available in this time of economic crisis and with your help we can ensure that our state parks and historic sites continue to be sources of enjoyment, pride, and economic stimulus. **Please act today to let your representatives in the state legislature know how much you love our state parks, and ask them to support "Ten Percent for State Parks" in any capital improvements bond issue for state facilities (including HJR 32) or any appropriation for capital improvements from federal stimulus funds.**

Reductions in Funding Have Hit Parks and Historic Sites

There is a general perception that state parks do not need additional funding because they receive half of the 1/10th cent parks and soils sales tax. But in fact the capacity provided by this tax, which was designed to provide substantial funding for capital improvements as well as enhanced operations, has been eroded over the past quarter century by the loss of general revenue and multiple diversions and sales tax exemptions to the point where it is no longer sufficient even for basic operations and the most minimal upkeep of facilities. The result is a backlog of more than \$175 million in deferred rehabilitation of facilities and infrastructure, such as water and wastewater systems, heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems in visitor centers and other buildings, Katy Trail bridges, culverts and resurfacing, group camps and campgrounds. The current economic crisis simply punctuates a grim reality that has become increasingly obvious to park system leaders and supporters during the past fifteen years.

Opportunity is Knocking

With crisis comes opportunity, and there are several options for dealing with the capital improvement needs of state parks and historic sites in the current session of Missouri General Assembly. One is securing an amendment to include parks in House Joint Resolution 32, which would establish a \$700 million Fifth State Building Bond and Interest Fund for buildings and other capital improvements at institutions of higher education. The bonds would be retired with a revenue stream in the state



Bridges like this on the Katy Trail are in need of repair.

Mark Templeton Named New DNR Director

It took a while, but Governor-elect Jay Nixon finally appointed a new director of the Department of Natural Resources, parent agency of the Division of State Parks, on January 10, Doyle Childers previously having announced his intent to resign before Nixon took over. Then it was March before the new director, Mark Templeton, could wrap up his affairs at the Yale Law School, where he was associate dean and chief operating officer, and move to Missouri to be confirmed and take over the reins. Joe Bindbeutel, formerly of the attorney general's office, served as acting director in the interim, and is now deputy director and chief counsel.



DNR Director Mark Templeton

Templeton met with MPA leaders April 7 to share something of his vision for the agency and hear MPA concerns and priorities—principally the need for better park funding, especially for capital improvements. With a background in global consulting on "green" technologies and sustainability strategies, he wants to help Missouri foster energy efficiency and develop new alternative energy solutions and green jobs while protecting our air, water, parks and cultural resources.

Templeton is young, only 39, and a Missourian. He grew up in Olivette, a St. Louis suburb, and was educated there and then at Harvard and Yale. He has worked for the U.S. Department of State, in various roles in New Delhi and Bangkok, and for McKinsey & Company management consultancy before returning to Yale as associate dean in 2005. He has now moved to Columbia with his wife and two young children.

He steps into the leadership of a troubled department that has had much of its funding and staff stripped by interests wishing to weaken its environmental regulatory functions, but which still has many dedicated, knowledgeable and able staff members. His predecessor, Doyle Childers, cared deeply about Missouri and was genuinely supportive of his staff and especially of state parks, but unfortunately he

worked for a highly politicized administration in which parks sometimes became entangled.

During his tenure, Childers helped secure renewal of the parks and soils sales tax and brought the park system back to the Current River with the acquisition and development of the new Current River State Park. He also oversaw the rebuilding of Johnson's Shut-ins after the devastating breach of the Taum Sauk Upper Reservoir in December 2005 and the protracted negotiations and settlement with Ameren that included some \$18 million to extend the Katy Trail from Clinton to the outskirts of Kansas City. The new facilities at Johnson's Shut-ins are expected to open sometime in summer 2009, but the park division is still trying to acquire lands along the right-of-way for the extension of the Katy Trail. It plans to begin construction soon on a three-mile segment that may help gauge whether the job can be completed with the funds available.

MPA had some differences with Childers on issues such as the protection of Arrow Rock and other parks from CAFOs permitted by DNR, his willingness to allow the removal of the historic Boonville Bridge that was part of the railbanked Katy Trail, and his priorities in the Ameren settlement, but MPA leaders appreciated that Childers was always friendly and willing to sit down and discuss various issues to the extent he could. The Missouri Parks Association thanks him for his leadership and wishes him well.



Doyle Childers

Mark Templeton takes the reins of DNR at a time of crisis but also of opportunity. Though his department has been seriously weakened, it will likely have significant new opportunities to help shape the green economy as a result of federal policies and stimulus dollars. Whether he can win support for new programs remains to be seen, but he appears to have the experience, skills, and determination to chart a new course. MPA wishes him well, offers its strong support, and looks forward to renewed effort in protection and restoration of our natural and cultural resources in state parks and historic sites.

("10%" from Page 1)

budget freed by the paying off of the \$600 million Third State Building Fund of the mid-1980s from which parks received ten percent of the total, the last major capital infu-



The Gray house at Battle of Athens State Historic Site (above) and the old hospital at Confederate Memorial State Historic Site (right) could both become visitor centers with bond issue support.

sion into the state park system. The Missouri Parks Association is supporting an amendment to increase the bond issue to \$775 million and include ten percent for state parks. The other option is including funds for state park needs in a capital improvements appropriation that may be crafted for use of some of Missouri's nearly \$5 billion share of federal stimulus and stabilization funds. Neither will happen unless citizens who care about parks voice their concerns to their state representatives and senators.

Impacts of A Thousand Cuts

The parks and soils sales tax, which was approved by Missouri voters in 1984 and began to produce revenue for parks in fiscal year 1986, was designed as a *supplement* to the general revenue that supported staff salaries and basic operations, and indeed the legislature maintained general revenue appropriations for a number of years. But at a time of

budget crisis following the first successful renewal of the tax by a 69 percent majority vote of the citizenry, general revenue of some \$11 million was stripped from the budget, an amount that in today's dollars would be more than \$20 million a year. There were also diversions ("transfers") to other state agencies for expenses such as administration, rent, staff benefits, and other services formerly budgeted through those agencies, amounting by fiscal 1994 to more than \$5 million a year. When all state facilities had to be upgraded to meet requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1991, the expenses of other state agencies were covered



from a special fund but the cost of more than \$12.5 million to state parks, with its many visitor facilities and historic buildings, was again assigned to the sales tax.

By 1994, as MPA leaders and others began planning for the second renewal of the sales tax, it was obvious that the sales tax would be stretched thin just to provide for basic operations, and there would be very little for capital improvements. There was already a growing backlog of deferred maintenance. But it was judged politically far too risky to change the 50:50 parks:soils split or to increase the tax, with basic park operations now so utterly dependent on it. This is when leaders began looking toward the inclusion of parks in another capital improvements bond issue, though retirement of the Third State Building bond issue was

still far off. All good state park systems, they realized, benefited from periodic infusions of major funds for capital improvements, often through bond issues.

Meanwhile, there have been an ever-increasing number of sales tax exemptions by the legislature and the courts that have cut deeply into the projected growth of sales tax revenues. And now, in the current economic crisis, sales tax revenues have already *fallen* seven percent, resulting in a \$3 million shortfall for parks and requiring a 15 percent reduction across the board in all park units. Projections for the next fiscal year are even more dire, with a \$7-10 million shortfall projected.

More than twenty permanent positions have been eliminated (on top of others cut in recent years), travel curtailed, even more maintenance deferred, and it is likely that more positions will be eliminated, visitor centers will be closed several days a week and some campground loops and group camps closed. The park system has benefited from superb management adept at wresting every possible efficiency in recent years, or the consequences of prolonged constraint and the current crisis would be even more obvious to our 16 million park visitors a year.

Stopping the Decline: Ten Percent for State Parks

If and when the economy improves, sales tax revenues will pick up, but park operations will continue to be constrained and the amount available for even the most basic maintenance and rehabilitation will continually decline, with ever increasing backlogs. That is why it is so critical that parks be included in any new capital improvement bond issue or state appropriation of federal stabilization or other stimulus funds.

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("10%" from Page 3)

As the successor to the third state building fund, which represented the greatest infusion of capital into the park system since the New Deal during the Great Depression of the 1930s, HJR 32's fifth state building fund is a logical vehicle for parks; there is logic also in the link with public educational institutions, since parks and historic sites are major public venues for non-formal education. If this joint resolution, which would have to be approved by a vote of the people, is passed by both houses, the enormous reservoir of citizen support for the park system statewide will help to secure its passage by the Missouri electorate. If HJR 32 does not pass the legislature this year, a similar bond issue will likely be proposed again in order to take advantage of the revenue stream from retiring the previous bonds, the current favorable interest rate for bond sales, and federal stimulus funds available to pay one-third of the interest payments for the life of the bonds.

The other and perhaps better option for funding the backlog of park system infrastructure and rehabilitation needs this year is an appropriation from federal stimulus or stabilization funds available to Missouri. There is no specific provision for parks in the federal stimulus bill, which is largely intended to support

transportation and technology investments, so the most likely source would be the \$2.1-2.3 billion in stabilization funds, about which there is considerable debate and contention in the state legislature. Appropriation bills must be passed a week before the May 15 adjournment of the General Assembly, so **it is critical to contact your representative and senator right away to ask for their support in amending HJR 32 to include state parks and including state parks in any capital improvements bill that will utilize federal stimulus/stabilization funds. Support ten percent for state parks.**

How to Take Action

Please **CALL your state representative and senator right away** (the earlier the better). If you don't have your rep's name or number, simply call **573-751-2000**, give the operator your zip code and ask to be transferred to your representative's office. If your rep is not available, leave a message.

For further information, see the attached longer statement. You can find more information about your legislative representatives, including their addresses and phone numbers, at www.house.mo.gov/ or www.senate.mo.gov/. For a take ac-

tion website with an easy-to-send email letter (it is always best to personalize it), go to <http://www.tinyurl.com/moparks>.

And for lists of representatives and senators with parks in their districts and other information, go to <http://parks.missouri.org/> and check under Government Links/State Legislature and other links.

Horse Bill is Troublesome

When you are talking with your state legislators, especially you senator, you might also mention MPA's concerns about HB250, which would allow access for horse and mule riders to all public lands and all types of trails within our state parks, whether currently designated for equestrian use or not. MPA leaders are concerned that the bill, which has already passed the House, would threaten visitor safety and quality of experience for non-equestrians users and potentially cause unacceptable resource damage.

Sixteen state parks already offer 170 miles of equine trails and other are being considered. Professional park staff should be making these decisions based on local conditions, so MPA is opposed to the bill.



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