

Big Oak Tree State Park Swamped By Flood

The big trees at Big Oak Tree State Park were all that protruded from an inland sea after the Army Corps of Engineers blasted a two-mile-wide opening in the Bird's Point Levee near Charleston, Missouri May 2, allowing the Mississippi River to reclaim 130,000 acres of its floodplain. It was an effort to lower flood waters on the river enough to protect Cairo, Illinois and other points downstream from even more disastrous flooding.

The Corps followed the first breach with two more, the third within a half mile of the park, then moved on to open three other floodways farther downstream. It was all part of a plan developed in the wake of the catastrophic Mississippi River flood of 1927, when locks and dams, levees, floodwalls and floodways were constructed to manage the river in the interests of navigation, agriculture, urban development, and flood control. The idea was that even though levees and floodwalls were known to constrict the river, thus raising the height of floods, the corps could reclaim the floodways for the river in times of extreme necessity, all carefully calibrated in the plan.

At Birds Point, the

new levee was breached during the flood of 1937, but it had never been breached since then. So the farmers—many of whom had bought or inherited their land from someone else who had once been paid for flowage rights—were largely oblivious of the plan. The record floods of 1993 and 1995 were severe above the mouth of the Ohio, but not below. When the corps began alerting floodway residents to the possibility of breaching the levee, the governor declared his solidarity with the local farmers by filing suit to stop the action. But it was all according to plan and perfectly legal, the judge ruled.

Big Oak Tree has flooded many times before. This, after all, was "swampeast" Missouri when bottomland hardwoods like those at

Big Oak covered virtually the entire bootheel. The trees there were adapted to seasonal inundation and slow drying. The first big change came when the gigantic trees of swampeast were leveled in an orgy of logging and land drainage after the advent of railroads. There were almost none left when local schoolchildren and others began contributing money to save the last 80-acre tract of virgin hardwoods slated for imminent harvest. The uncut tract buffered by 920 acres of second growth was established as a state park in 1938.

By then the levees and drainage ditches that would protect the bottomlands for agriculture were already beginning to disrupt the natural hydrological cycles that were the

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An aerial view of the devastating spring flood at Big Oak Tree State Park.

MPA Honors Employees of the Year

MPA Vice President Steve Nagle and Treasurer Eleanor Hoeft honored five state park employees of the year before their peers at a staff conference at Cuivre River State Park April 27, presenting each with a plaque and check. With 120 staff positions eliminated in fall 2009 owing to revenue shortfalls, most were honored for their performance of added duties.

Shanea Frederick was hired at the age of 18 as a park maintenance worker, immediately demonstrating trustworthiness and dedication. When the senior PMW suddenly left several years later, she personally saw to all maintenance duties at both Weston Bend and Lewis and Clark parks, connecting water lines and drains and preparing both parks for the on-season, then took on additional duties at shelters and campgrounds when another staff person left, and now is also directing Youth Corps workers in her parks.



Shanea Frederick



Jim Newberry

Jim Newberry, facility head of the new Current River State Park (not yet open to the public), was asked to simultaneously fill the vacant leadership post at Montauk for about three months, requiring an extraordinary number of extra hours. He was honored for outstanding creativity, leadership and team-building skills.

Charles Helton, park ranger at Johnson Shut-Ins, was called to rescue a 10-year-old trapped by swift waters on April 5, 2010, when water was flowing through the shut-ins at nearly five times the normal rate. In fact he found two boys in trouble, and was able to get one to safety with the help of a rope. The other lost his footing and was swept under, but Helton managed to reach him and push him to a rock while himself being swept downstream, putting the boys' safety above his own.



Charles Helton



Larry Webb

Larry Webb was honored in the interpreter category for ably fulfilling his park naturalist duties at Ha Ha Tonka while assuming numerous other responsibilities when the park lost several staff, including leading and working with the maintenance staff and taking on extra paperwork and reporting tasks. He also helped with controlled burns at Lake of the Ozarks, planned and coordinated four different field trips for the National Natural Areas Conference, and prepared the nomination for a 2000-acre expansion of the Ha Ha Tonka Oak Woodlands Natural Area.



Heather Rudy

Heather Rudy, in the Cultural Resource Management section in the central office, was honored for her excellent performance of unanticipated and increased job duties in 2010, including removal, inventory, and cleaning of over 300 artifacts during

emergency asbestos remediation in the cabin gallery at Mark Twain Birthplace State Historic Site and a major inventory and mandated move of over 10,000 artifacts from the Missouri State Museum to the new off-site Riverside Collection Facility.

MPA Wants You!

Our Nominating Committee is looking for energetic, knowledgeable, young members who would be interested in serving on our board of directors. We are certain that there are those of you within our membership who know about and have enjoyed our wonderful Missouri parks and would like to have a voice in the direction, support and protection of this unique park system.

We are looking especially for individuals with knowledge and experience in communications (including social media), membership, finance and fundraising, law, or general park issues. If you are interested or know of someone who might be interested and have the time and skills, please send a resume by email to MPA nominating committee chair Mary Abbott (mabb30@aol.com or marya@reeceandnichols.com).

If you would prefer to volunteer without being considered for the board, please contact MPA President Susan Flader (fladers@missouri.edu).

Legislative Status Quo for Parks

The 2011 legislative session was more active than usual for state parks, but with relatively little change from the status quo.

MPA, working with the Missouri Conservation and Environmental Alliance and other groups supportive of state parks, ramped up educational efforts about the park system to build support for solutions to the \$200 million backlog of infrastructure rehabilitation needs. With more than seventy members of the General Assembly term-limited out of office in 2010, there were more new members this session than any time in decades, except for 2002 when term limits first bit with a vengeance.

Until March it was not clear whether the best option, inclusion of parks in a general obligation bond issue for higher education, parks, and other state facilities, would even be assigned to a committee or given a hearing, in view of the decided reluctance of most in the majority party to consider any measure that looked in any way like a debt, a consequence of all the political emphasis on debt at the federal level. The bill was finally given a courtesy hearing by the House Higher Education Committee, which offered an opportunity for further education of members, but apparently by pre-arrangement it was not voted out of committee.

So most of the action focused instead on a modest measure to allow interest on money in the Park Earnings Fund—revenues from campground fees and other concessions as well as gifts and miscellaneous income—to remain with the fund rather than being absorbed into state general revenue, from which parks receive no appropriation whatever. Most legislators could see the logic and justice of retaining interest with the fund, and the amount was small anyway, in most years less than \$100,000, so the bill easily passed

the house and headed to the senate.

But then a more grave threat to the earnings fund appeared, an interpretation that by law the entire remaining corpus of the fund should be swept to general revenue at the end of each biennium, sweeps that had not previously occurred from this fund. Because earnings are collected disproportionately during the summer season and expended throughout the year or in subsequent years and because the funds from the settlement with Ameren over the destruction of Johnson's Shut-ins by the collapse of the Taum Sauk Reservoir had been deposited in the fund, the park division stood to lose millions unless the fund was exempted from such sweeps. So a provision to that effect was amended to another bill, which also passed the house.

In the senate the house bills were combined with numerous measures related to other functions of the Department of Natural Resources, some of them quite controversial, in an omnibus bill that went through many iterations before finally coming to a committee vote. As it happened, a minority Democratic senator insisted that one or the other earnings fund provision be stricken from the bill, arguing that the state had other needs besides parks, and threatened a filibuster on the floor. So, in

the end, the corpus of the fund was protected from sweeps but the interest on the corpus was not, in effect perpetuating the status quo.

Several other minor measures were heard, and one providing for petty cash funds in parks was passed, but overall there was very little substantive change for the park system. The only significant change, it was hoped by park supporters, was enhanced understanding of the park system and its funding needs by legislators who may be more willing to grapple with solutions in coming years. By one count there were more than 500 votes cast for parks and only one against, which ought to be worth something in the future.

Parks Briefs

True to form, the Missouri State Park System has once again been named a finalist in the national **Gold Medal Awards for Excellence** in Park and Recreation Management Program, as it has been each time the competition has been held in recent years. Results will be announced by November 1.

The National Association of Recreation Resource Planners has awarded the park system its **Excellence in Planning Award** for its planning effort in rebuilding Johnson's Shut-ins State Park after it was destroyed by the Taum Sauk Reservoir Breach.

June is national **Great Outdoors Month**, and Missouri state parks are offering numerous special events each weekend. The best way to find events of interest to you is to check out the new and much improved state park website at mostateparks.com.

The **White River Valley Trail** in Table Rock State Park near Branson, a joint project of the park division and the Army Corps of Engineers, has been recognized with the 2011 Coalition for Recreational Trails award in the Multi-Use Management and Corridor Sharing category.

A new exhibit on **Civil War Missouri: A House Dividing** opened in May at the Missouri State Museum in the State Capitol and will run through 2015 in commemoration of the sesquicentennial of

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lifeblood of the park. Still, the ecosystem and biodiversity values were so great that in 1986 the original 80-acre tract of virgin forest was designated a National Natural Landmark.

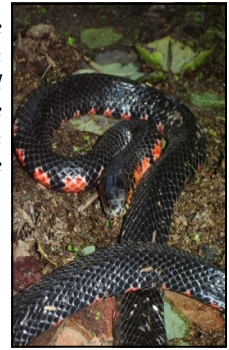
State park officials finally managed to secure a \$1.5 million legislative appropriation for a ring levee surrounding the park that could allow them to mimic flood cycles. But when Congress in 1996 appropriated funds for a massive project to further protect agricultural land in the New Madrid floodway by closing the last remaining 1500-foot gap that allowed some backwater flooding along St. John's Bayou, the state project was shelved in favor of a more elaborate plumbing project for the park, courtesy of the Corps of Engineers as mitigation for loss of wetlands. The Corps later proposed to reduce the extent of mitigation in an effort to try to show a positive benefit:cost ratio for the floodway project as a whole.

Conservation organizations opposed the Corps project, which would drain more wetland acres than all U.S. developers drained in an average year. A federal district judge in Washington, D.C. in 2007 agreed with Environmental Defense and the National Wildlife Federation that the environmental impact statement was flawed, and ordered the Corps to shut down the \$100+ million project and to undo some \$7 million of work it had already begun. The government decided not to appeal, the Corps undid its previous work, and then in 2009 began preparing yet another environmental impact statement, which is expected to be ready for public comment in spring 2012. Left in limbo was reforestation and hydrological work planned by the Corps on several tracts of mitigation land at Big Oak Tree. Meanwhile, the state appropriation for hydrological work at the park has long since lapsed.

Floodwaters had begun to recede at press time, enough for park officials to determine that buildings on the east side of the park, though all flooded, were probably repairable and that only a few trees were toppled, but it is too early to assess the extent of resource damage. On the plus side, they sighted a

western mud snake, a species that had not been seen at the park in a quarter century. On the west side of the park, waters were still too deep to know what happened, but it is known that water rushing through the breach in the nearby levee scoured a very large, fifty-foot-deep blow hole and left a large ridge of sand extending at least to the park boundary.

This rare western mud snake came in with the flood.



Many conservationists see an opportunity for wetland restoration in at least part of the floodway, especially in the lower-lying southern reaches where Big Oak Tree State Park is located. They will be looking for ways to redress the damage caused by the recent intentional breach as well as accumulated damage to natural resources owing to decades of federal policy.

Meanwhile, flooding continues. As waters slowly recede in the Bootheel and along the Lower Mississippi, floodwaters are moving down the Missouri. Big Lake State Park in northwestern Missouri, which was devastated by floods last summer, has already proactively been closed to the public so that it can be prepared as much as possible for the crests to come, and the Katy Trail and other parks along the lower Missouri are likely to be visited by rising waters. While officials do not expect a reflooding of the Bootheel from floodwaters on the Missouri, the future of Big Oak Tree State Park remains far from certain.



Forty-three deer, four turkeys and two coyotes cohabited the shrinking top of the highest mound at To-wosaghy State Historic Site, located in the New Madrid Floodway. The ancient Indians knew what they were doing when they built their mounds on a natural sand ridge along the Mississippi, out of reach of most floods. The Conservation Department dropped food to the animals, who disappeared when the water receded.

MPA 29th Annual Celebration at Knob Noster, September 23-25, 2011

Stay at a rustic group camp at Knob Noster State Park, learn what is involved in extending the Rock Island Trail to Kansas City, and visit Confederate Memorial and Battle of Lexington historic sites during the Civil War Sesquicentennial. All are welcome, especially MPA members, Missouri State Parks Foundation directors, park friends groups and supporters and UPOP coordinators. There will be outdoor skill-building activities for children to enjoy while parents are attending meeting sessions. Please bring the whole family!

If you prefer not to rough it with your own bedding, pillows, and towels in a group camp sleeping cabin at Camp Shawnee, motel accommodations are available at University Inn in Warrensburg (rooms being held for MPA at \$65.00 until August 23, phone (660) 747-5125 to reserve), other regional lodging, or at the park campground (reserve on-line at www.mostateparks.com).

Friday, September 23

3:30pm. Leave mess hall at Camp Shawnee for visit to the Rock Island Trail extension to Kansas City with park staff

5:30pm Meet at mess hall for tour of Knob Noster with park superintendent

6:30pm Bison Burgers n' Brats Dinner at the Camp, followed by a campfire get-together

Saturday, September 24

7:00am Breakfast on your own

7:30am Continental breakfast for group campers in mess hall at Camp Shawnee

8:00am Registration in mess hall at Camp Shawnee

8:30am Children's activities, Camp Shawnee play field (children's programming will end at noon)

8:45am Welcome and introduction to the park: MPA Pres. Susan Flader and Keith Peterson, Park Superintendent

9:00am State of the Parks Address and discussion: Bill Bryan, Director of State Parks

10:00am Break

10:30am Panel discussion on park system support and the funding crisis with representatives of MPA, Missouri State Parks Foundation, and other park support groups

12noon Leave in vans and cars for box lunch and tour at Confederate Memorial, followed by behind the scenes tour at Battle of Lexington State Historic Site and museum. Return to Camp Shawnee.

6:00pm Reception and barbecue, mess hall at Camp Shawnee. Speaker: Governor Nixon (invited)

Sunday, September 25

7:00am Breakfast on your own

7:30am Continental breakfast for group campers in mess hall, Camp Shawnee

8:30am Annual meeting of members: mess hall (includes UPOP discussion)

8:30am Children's activities, Camp Shawnee play field (children's programming will end at noon)

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

12noon Adjourn

Registration Form

Name(s) _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Registration Fee _____ persons @ \$15 \$ _____

Rock Island Tour _____ persons (free) _____

Dinner Friday _____ persons @ \$10 \$ _____

Lunch Saturday _____ persons @ \$10 \$ _____

Dinner Saturday _____ persons @ \$15 \$ _____

Group Camp Bunk _____ persons @ \$10 \$ _____

\$60

Total \$ _____

Make check payable to **Missouri Parks Association** and mail with form **by September 16** to Eleanor Hoefle, MPA treasurer, 1234 Hoyt Dr., St. Louis, MO 63137. For questions or late registration call Eleanor Hoefle, 314-869-6534. **Note: Motel rooms at the University Inn will only be held until August 23.**

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the Civil War. Numerous commemorative events and reenactments are also being held in various state parks.

The Boonville City Council by a vote of 7 to 1 on May 17 approved a transfer of ownership of the historic **Boonville Bridge** from Union Pacific to the City of Boonville. Save the Katy Bridge Coalition has been raising funds for restoration of the structure with the intent of making it part of Katy Trail State Park.

The state park system has **waived camping fees for victims** displaced by the flooding in the Bootheel and the tornado in Joplin at designated state park campgrounds nearby. Tornadoes in March also caused major damage at Babler State Park and along the Katy Trail, with numerous massive trees toppled and twisted.

Friends of Arrow Rock on June 12 celebrated its success in achieving its \$1 million goal in a capital campaign launched in 2009 in conjunction with its 50th anniversary. Donations are still being accepted.

MPA Park Celebration at Knob Noster September 23-25

Join the Missouri Parks Association, the Missouri State Park Foundation, and other MPA members and park supporters at Knob Noster State Park near Warrensburg to experience, learn about, and celebrate Missouri's award-winning state park system.

For MPA members wishing to experience a state park tradition that began in the years of the Great Depression – youth group camping – arrangements have been made for overnight stays in one of the system's most interesting and attractive group camps of the CCC/WPA era, Camp Shawnee.

The camp consists of primitive sleeping cabins, arranged in clusters around central toilet/shower house facilities. The cabins are different sizes and some can accommodate up to 8 campers. As many of the cabins as are needed will be set up for men and women, dormitory style. Any remaining cabins will be available for individual family use on a first come, first served basis. **Metal bunks with mattresses are provided, but campers must supply their own bedding or sleeping bag, pillow, and towel.** Please indicate on your advance registration (**by September 17**, but first come, first served) if you wish to stay in the group camp, so that space can be allocated. Plan now to come with your family for a very special weekend.

UPOP Kids Need Your Help

MPA's Urban Populations Outreach Program is all set to go this summer with educational field trips to introduce inner city kids to our state parks, working as usual with partners in Kansas City, St. Louis, Columbia, and even Joplin, where as you can imagine the need is especially acute this summer. To help us serve more UPOP kids, please write a check payable to MPA (for UPOP) and mail it to Missouri Parks Association-UPOP, c/o The Callaway Bank, P.O. Box 10, Fulton, MO 65251-0010



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