

Parks, Soil and Water Tax on November 8 Ballot

Renewal of the State Parks, Soil, and Water Sales Tax is up for a vote of the citizenry at the general election November 8 as Amendment #1, and supporters of the measure are urging strong citizen support.

Amendment 1 asks: Shall Missouri continue for 10 years the one-tenth of one percent sales/use tax that is used for soil and water conservation and for state parks and historic sites, and resubmit this tax to the voters for approval in 10 years?

This is a continuation of a tax that was initially submitted to a vote of the people by a 1983 General Assembly resolution. It was a time of financial crisis, when the state park budget was reduced to less than half what it had been only three years earlier and there was talk of closing parks or transferring them to other agencies. At the same time, Missouri had the second-greatest rate of soil erosion in the nation.

The Missouri Parks Association, founded only months earlier in response to the funding crisis in state parks, advocated strongly for the resolution in the legislature and then convened leaders of conservation and agriculture groups to establish what became the Citizens Committee for Soil, Water, and State Parks to mount a public educational effort prior to the statewide vote in 1984.

The measure barely passed that first time, and it would have to go to another vote of the people by 1988 because of a



Governor Nixon and leaders of the Citizens Committee at the state fair August 18 discuss the benefits of the tax and the need for its continuation. Missouri Farm Bureau photo.

five-year sunset on the tax. When cross-currents prevented action by the legislature, the Citizens Committee had to mount an arduous initiative petition campaign to place renewal of the tax on the ballot in 1988, this time with a ten-year sunset. Fortunately, both the parks and soil conservation programs in the Department of Natural Resources had demonstrated good stewardship of the new funds so the public could see the results—campground upgrades, new visitor centers, infrastructure rehabilitation, and restoration of historic buildings in parks as well as effective soil and water conservation practices on Missouri farms—so the vote was an overwhelming two-to-one in favor. Each time since then, in 1996 and 2006, the margin of victory was even greater, most recently 71 percent.

Unfortunately for parks, the state general revenue that had traditionally provided for staff salaries and other basic operating costs was "temporarily" reallocated by the governor and the General Assembly to other agencies during another financial crisis in 1990, and it has never been restored. So the

tax revenue that had led to a veritable renaissance of the park system by that time now had to support basic operations of the parks with very little left over for major repairs and improvements. The result has been the buildup of a nearly \$400 million backlog of infrastructure rehabilitation and other facility needs that will have to be addressed through other means.

The sales tax is now more critical than ever, because it provides 75 percent of total park operations, with the other 25 percent coming mostly from fees for services like camping, lodging, boat rentals, and the like. So our parks are now utterly dependent

(See "Tax" on Page 4)

How You Can Help

- Visit <https://soilwaterparks.com/> to view and download articles, videos, and a toolkit for the campaign.
- Talk about the importance of state parks and the soil and water conservation program at meetings of conservation, civic, business, or other groups you attend and urge support for their continuation. To get printed handouts or arrange for a speaker, call the Citizens Committee, 573-893-1468.
- Donate or ask your organizations to donate to the Citizens Committee to help get the message out more widely. Send check to the Citizen's Committee for Soil, Water, and State Parks, P.O. Box 658, Jefferson City, MO 65102.
- Write letters to the editor or use social media to ask your friends for support. For help, contact holly.neill@tnc.org.
- Vote and ask your friends to vote.

President's Message by Steve Nagle:

Grand Opening — Echo Bluff State Park

“Eventually, all things merge into one, and a river runs through it.” Quoting the words of Norman Maclean, State Park Director Bill Bryan reflected on the new Echo Bluff State Park in his remarks at its highly anticipated opening. It was a heartfelt fitting reference for many of us who appreciate Missouri's outdoor legacy.

On a warm, sunny July 30, Governor Nixon officially cut the ribbon in front of the new Betty Lea Lodge, named for his mother who was a counselor at the old Camp Zoe that predated the park. Park rangers estimated that about 2,000 visitors came on opening day to see the park nestled in the Current River hills of Shannon County with the pristine waters of Sinking Creek flowing cold and clear through its heart. Many special guests were on hand including Cathy Brown, Facility Management, Design and Construction for the Office of Administration, and Sara Parker Pauley, Director of the Missouri Department of Natural Resources, both of whom recognized and thanked the many state and local contractors and the construction industry workers who worked tirelessly with great skill to build the park facilities in record time. Congressman Jason Smith was there too to hear the long list of contractors from his district in the Ozarks.

As Bill Bryan says, “With yearly attendance at more than 18 million, the park system's most compelling challenge is to remain relevant for future generations.” From my viewpoint, Missouri's 88th state park will fast become an outdoor destination in the Ozarks. It is all there at Echo Bluff with its stone and wood “contemporary rustic” lodge, walk-in tent campsites amid the trees above Sinking Creek, and 62 full-service campsites for RV campers. Across from the lodge are nine modern cabins, ranging from a four-bedroom rental to four duplex cabins. But there is so much more to offer, including day-use areas with open-air picnic shelters, a bluff-top pavilion offering a panoramic view of the 430-acre park, and hiking trails connecting to Current River State park, the Roger Pryor

Pioneer Backcountry, the Ozark Trail, and eventually Round Spring;

One cannot look at the new park development without an appreciation for its cultural history, reflected in many of the place names. The site as early as 1929 was a camp for girls from all over the state known as Camp Zoe, which flourished as a youth camp until 1986. Thousands of lucky youngsters spent happy summer hours of adventure canoeing, swimming, hiking, camping, and horseback riding at Camp Zoe. The grand opening of Echo Bluff brought many former campers and staff who reminisced and traded memories of their experiences. Several Camp Zoe alumni have formed a growing non-profit group called *The Friends of Camp Zoe* with the avowed purpose of safeguarding and interpreting the camp's buildings and artifacts for current and future generations. The original Camp Zoe stone lodge built in 1929 is still standing! Fund-raising efforts and a long-term maintenance plan are underway. To donate, see www.friendsofcampzoe.org.

The development of Echo Bluff State Park has brought many people together, despite the sometimes rough political discourse. As Norman Maclean writes, “all good things...came by grace; and grace comes by art; and art does not come easy.” In the very near future, as the new park matures, we will look with pride and appreciation on the new opportunities Echo Bluff State Park will provide.



Governor Jay Nixon officially opened Echo Bluff State Park.

MPA 34th Annual Gathering at Echo Bluff, October 14-16, 2016

Join us as Echo Bluff, Missouri's newest state park, and share in the amazing things this area has to offer. We will kayak on Sinking Creek, hike in the Roger Pryor Pioneer Backcountry, view elk on an early morning tour in the elk restoration zone, visit the old grist mill at Alley Spring, participate in the dedication of the new Centennial Trail at Current River State Park, and of course tour Echo Bluff State Park. Families with children will enjoy wading and swimming in Sinking Creek and we'll all enjoy the view of the bluff and creek from the lodge's inviting deck.

Book your lodging ASAP as this will be peak color season and MPA's special rates will end September 8. Call 1-573-858-3059 or go to echobluffstatepark.com to reserve a room in the lodge or a cabin. Use the code MPA101416 when reserving. After Sept. 8 the rooms will be released to the public and full rates will apply. To reserve a campsite, go to mostateparks.com. **Also note October 1 cut-off date for registration with meals.**

Friday, October 14

- 11am-1pm** Registration in the lodge lobby; lunch on your own
- 1-4pm** Kayak on Sinking Creek or hike to Laxton Hollow in the Roger Pryor Pioneer Backcountry
- 5-6:30pm** Echo Bluff SP tours: Meet at the Bluff Top Pavilion (parking available)
- 6-9pm** Dutch oven treats, other snacks, and beverages with music at the Bluff Top Pavilion.

Saturday, October 15

- 6-8:30am** Elk restoration zone tour; leave lodge promptly at 6am, breakfast on the bus
- 8:30am** Travel to and tour Alley Spring (former state park), Ozark National Scenic Riverways
- 10:30-12n** Travel to Current River state park; lunch at the park
- 12-1pm** Centennial Trail dedication and hike
- 1-2pm** Return to Echo Bluff State Park; Registration in Lodge lobby
- 2-5pm** Welcome to the park (Nixon-Wheeler Meeting Room): Jim Newberry, park manager
State of the Parks Address: Bill Bryan, Director of State Parks
Other speakers: ONSR Superintendent Larry Johnson and DNR Director Sarah Pauley (invited)
Questions and discussion
- 6-7pm** Happy hour with cash bar (Nixon-Wheeler Meeting Room)
- 7-9pm** Dinner and keynote speaker: Governor Jay Nixon

Sunday, October 18

- 7-8am** Breakfast on your own in dining room (\$2 discount coupon for MPA registrants)
- 8:30am** Annual meeting of members, including UPOP & Seniors to Parks reports: (Grand View Room)
- 9:30am** Meeting of MPA board of directors (all are welcome to attend)
- 12:00n** Adjourn

Flat Rate Registration with Event Counts for Planning

Name(s) _____ Full (meals, tours) _____ #Persons@\$80 \$ _____

Address _____ Children (to age 10) _____ #Persons@\$40 \$ _____

Phone _____ Email _____ **TOTAL \$ _____**

Event Counts:

#Persons _____ Friday—Kayak on Sinking Creek #Persons _____ Saturday Morning Tour Meals

#Persons _____ Friday—Hike Backcountry _____ #Adults Saturday Lunch

_____ #Saturday Kids Lunches

#Persons _____ Friday—Social at Bluff Top Pavilion _____ #Adults Saturday Dinner

_____ #Non-Meat Options

_____ #Saturday Kids Dinners

Make check payable to **Missouri Parks Association** and mail with form **postmarked by October 1** to Marian Fleischmann, MPA Manager, 32875 Mount Hope Rd., California MO 65018. Registration is also available on-line at MPA website: <http://parks.missouri.org>. For questions, email Marian: mpa.manager1@gmail.com.



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*Parks, Soils & Water Tax on November 8 Ballot
Meet with MPA Oct. 14-16 at Echo Bluff*

<http://parks.missouri.org>

("Tax" from Page 1)

on the tax to keep the doors open for visitors. This they do very well with superb management by devoted staff, increased help by volunteers, and creative partnerships for special projects.

Missouri is one of the few states without any entrance fee for state parks, since citizens pay through the sales tax. It is a bargain, amounting to only about \$7 per year for each of us. Our parks now welcome more than 19 million visitors a year, the tenth highest state park attendance in the nation, and these visits provide more than \$1 billion a year in economic impact statewide, according to a 2012 study. For every \$1 invested in our parks, some \$26 return to our economy, most of it through private enterprises near the parks.

Moreover, we enjoy a truly exceptional system of state parks and historic sites in Missouri, one that is remarkably representative, both naturally and culturally, of our diverse state. The quality of resources and excellence in planning and management of Missouri's system have been recognized nationally by its selection seven times, far more than any other state, as a finalist in the Gold Medal Award of the American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration. Missouri also recently was selected as Best Trails State and as Favorite State for Camping.

The state's program for soil and water conservation, supported by the other

half of the tax, has also garnered national attention. Missouri has gone from the second greatest rate of erosion to the greatest rate of erosion reduction through cost-shared implementation by landowners of soil and water conservation practices such as buffers, sediment basins, cover crops and grazing systems.

Other states are looking to the Missouri model of cooperation between state park and soil and water conservation interests as well as to the highly successful programs funded by each half of the tax. The Citizens Committee has been working for more than a year to prepare educational materials, lay the groundwork, and plan the campaign that will kick into its public phase in early September for the November vote. To see articles and videos and download campaign materials, visit <https://soilwaterparks.com/>.

Polling conducted earlier this year shows strong support for state parks and soil and water conservation programs and for the continuation of the tax, but there is no substitute for getting the word out widely about the need to support Amendment #1 on the ballot November 8. Everyone can help (see the box). Together, we can ensure the future of programs vital to our quality of life, our health, and our economy.

Park Briefs

Tram tours this fall : A tram funded through a bequest by Ben and Betty Breeding for MPA's Seniors to Parks program is now available to help seniors see the Katy Trail and parks around the



state. Park staff will host a series of Tuesdays on the Trail Tram Tours this fall: Sept 6, Jefferson City to Hartsburg; Sept 13, Marthasville to Augusta;

Sept 20, Rocheport to McBaine; Sept 27, New Franklin to Rocheport; Oct 4, Rhineland to Portland; Oct 11, Clinton to Calhoun; and Oct 18, Windsor to Leeton (on the new Rock Island Trail). Call 1-800-334-6946 for more information.

Plans and more plans. A draft plan with alternatives for roads and trails in the **Ozark National Scenic Riverways** is expected to be issued for public comment late this fall. The Riverways needs your help, so stand by. Also expected in late fall is the long-delayed revision of the plan and environmental statement for the **St. Johns Bayou-New Madrid Floodway Project**. MPA and numerous other organizations, agencies, and officials have expressed grave reservations about the proposed project (see *Heritage*, August 2013), so it may be a busy fall.