

## Legislative Travail for Parks

It was another chaotic legislative session for state parks and their supporters, with twice as many bills introduced this year as last that would hobble the system. This time our parks did not escape unscathed, though the toll could have been much worse.

Fueled by the anger of several legislators against Gov. Nixon for his use of funds from federal natural resource damage settlements to acquire new parks in the southern Ozarks (see *Heritage*, Dec. 2016), lawmakers in both houses introduced some two dozen bills that would force the sale of the new parks, constrain the acquisition of new park land, or otherwise hamstring the system, seven by Rep. Robert Ross (R-Yukon) alone. They also took aim, as in previous sessions, at the state park budget.

No matter that Gov. Nixon was no longer in office, or that his successor, Gov. Greitens, and new DNR director Carol Comer had signaled a moratorium on land acquisition, coupled with an intent to deal with the longstanding backlog of infrastructure rehabilitation and a reset of relations with legislators toward greater transparency.

No matter either that Missouri-ans had given a resounding 80 percent "Yes" vote to renewal of the Parks, Soils, and Water Sales Tax with majorities in every county of the state in the general election last November, or that our state parks return an amazing \$26 in local sales,

more than 40 separate tracts over several years) it would not be possible to complete the project at fair prices with local publicity and hearings on the early acquisitions.

Similar bills in the house (HB698) and senate (SB382) prohibited the acquisition of any new

park land, even by donation, until all maintenance and infrastructure rehabilitation had been completed in all existing parks—something that will never happen, especially after \$55 million for that purpose, sought for years, had been stricken from the budget in the 2015 session (see *Heritage*, July 2015), and there were no new funds in sight.



*State park employees gather for a Centennial photo at the Capitol.*

taxes, and jobs for every dollar in state funds invested, or that the award-winning system was celebrating its centennial year.

Among the bills that left the gate earliest was a Senate measure (SB35) requiring public notification and local hearings for any land acquisition. This would be problematic for parks because many private landowners won't even talk with the state without a pledge of confidentiality, and on multi-tract projects (Taum Sauk, for example, involved

Other bills, some in multiple versions, would remove the normal property tax exemption from state park lands, require state parks to pay the entire cost for fencing along the Rock Island Trail (the current policy, which has worked well, provides for cost sharing with adjoining landowners), change the name of the new Nixon State Park to Proffit Mountain, prevent parks from offering goods or services (e.g., canoe or

*(See "Legislative Travail" on Page 5)*

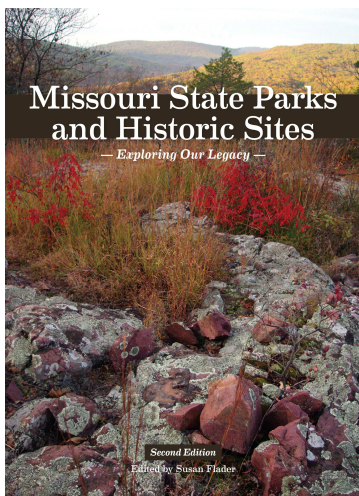
President's Message by Steve Nagle:

## Missouri State Parks—100th Anniversary

We Missourians are in the midst of celebrating 100 years of Missouri State Parks. The Missouri Parks Association and many other organization and citizens from the public and private sectors came together for a day of activities recognizing the centennial on April 10 in Jefferson City. Highlights included a ceremony in the capitol rotunda headlined by Lt. Gov. Mike Parson and other speakers who told the history of the park system and honored our special park users, current and retired staff, and other centennial supporters.

We then congregated in the Harry S. Truman Office Building for the premier showing of a documentary produced by Nine Network Public Media on the history and highlights of the park system. The film is an outstanding and beautiful account of our state parks and historic sites featuring different regions of the state and interviews with park employees and Carol Comer, the newly appointed director of the Department of Natural Resources. It will be shown on public television stations and at special events throughout the state beginning in June.

Following the film Missouri Parks Association and the Missouri State Parks Foundation sponsored a luncheon for park staff and centennial supporters. For more information on upcoming events during the centennial year be sure to visit [mostateparks.com](http://mostateparks.com).



Also, as a reminder, if you have not yet picked up a copy of *Missouri State Parks and Historic Sites: Exploring Our Legacy* (2016) be sure to get yours this summer. The 416-page large-format book is illustrated with over 500 full color photographs and features essays on every park and historic site. It is the apotheosis of Missouri's natural and cultural heritage and is regarded as

the finest state park book in the nation. The book is available at state park visitor centers, select bookstores, the MPA website ([parks.missouri.org](http://parks.missouri.org)), where MPA members get a 20% discount, and at special events.

## Come to MPA's Annual Gathering: Arrow Rock, October 6-8, 2017

In recognition of 100 years of Missouri State Parks 1917 – 2017, our annual fall gathering returns to the place where it all began. As Missouri's first historic site, Arrow Rock holds a special place of honor in the state park system. There is so much to see and do in and around this quiet village, one of my favorite re-



*Huston Tavern at Arrow Rock.*

treats in the park system. The entire village has been designated a National Historic Landmark because of its prominence in Americas's westward expansion, the Santa Fe Trail, and the home of Missouri artist George Caleb Bingham.

We are planning a three-day event for October 6, 7, & 8 with a slant toward the cultural attributes of the area, including a tram tour (on the MPA tram!) of the nearby Katy Trail from the Rocheport trailhead Friday afternoon, an in-depth tour of Arrow Rock Saturday afternoon, and on Sunday afternoon a visit to the American Indian Cultural Center at nearby Van Meter State Park. The high point will be the dinner Saturday evening in the Huston Tavern, the first facility in the state park system. The "State of the Parks" address Saturday morning and annual meeting Sunday morning will be in the exceptional park visitor center and museum. Hikers may also enjoy the adjacent Big Muddy National Wildlife Refuge with trails to the Missouri River. This 35<sup>th</sup> MPA gathering promises to be a memorable visit to Missouri's past and its intersection with our state park legacy.

**See registration information on page 5.**



## Carol Comer Heads DNR

Gov. Eric Greitens in January appointed Carol S. Comer, former commissioner of the Indiana Department of Environmental Management under Gov. Mike Pence, as director of the Missouri Department of Natural Resources. With a joint master's and law degree from Indiana University, she previously served as IDEM's general counsel and chief of staff and earlier as an attorney in private practice and as an administrative law judge. She takes over from Sara Parker Pauley, who resigned in October to become director of the Department of Conservation, and interim director Harry Bozoian (see *Heritage*, December 2016).



*Carol Comer*

Although she has had no prior experience with state parks, which are in a different department in Indiana, Comer is enthusiastically exploring the Missouri system, having already visited more than forty parks and historic sites since February. The new administration, while supporting the new state parks added for the centennial, has indicated its intent to pause land acquisition and emphasize infrastructure rehabilitation, but they have made an exception for acquisition of the Green Tree Tavern in Ste. Genevieve, which was already under contract at the time Comer took over.

## Green Tree Joins MSP

The historic Janis-Ziegler House, commonly known as the Green Tree Tavern, in Ste. Genevieve was purchased by the state in March for addition to the Felix Valle State Historic Site, with partial funding provided by Les Amis, a friends group. Thought by some to be the oldest remaining building in town, perhaps dating to about 1790, it served as both a home and an inn, and it is considered to have the least altered interior of any French vernacular vertical-log structure in the city. It was meticulously restored by Hilliard and Bonnie Goldman, who long hoped it would one day enter the state park system.



*The Green Tree Tavern in Ste. Genevieve.*

With federal legislation in the works in both houses of congress to establish a National Park unit in Ste. Genevieve that would incorporate both of the state's two other vertical log buildings, the Beauvais-Amoureux and Delassus-Kern houses, the addition of the Green Tree would leave the state park system with one of the most distinctive of the town's more than two dozen such structures for which Ste. Genevieve is internationally known.

## Historic April Floods Ravage State Parks

Record flood levels on the Current, Meramec and other Ozark rivers and along the Great Rivers from torrential rains during the last week of April ravaged virtually all state parks in their path, more than twenty in all. At Montauk the trout hatchery flooded, allowing virtually all fish to escape; the lake pavilion at Current River State Park flooded to its roof while the pump house washed away; Meramec and Onondaga were hit hard; the spillway at Finger Lakes breached; and campgrounds, cabins, picnic areas, boat launches, electrical, water and sewer systems, trails, and other facilities at numerous parks were damaged by floodwaters.

Most of the affected parks had to be completely closed for a time, but intrepid staff managed to get the debris cleaned up and enough of the facilities in operating condition to be able to reopen most parks by Memorial Day weekend. Many trails, a few visitor centers, and a number of cabins and campgrounds will take longer to bring back into service. The tab is expected to run to more than \$1 million, but the White House has now approved a federal disaster declaration, so some of that may be reimbursed.

**Arlin Epperson**, who taught in the Parks and Recreation Department at the University of Missouri and served for a year as state park director in the 1970s, died on May 16. He served also on the faculty at Columbia College and as a missionary in Africa. **Joe Goedde**, a 32-year state park veteran and supervisor of the design section of the planning and development program, died on May 28. Every major construction project during his years, of which there were hundreds, was touched by Joe's hand whether it be a wastewater project, a cabin renovation, or a new visitor center. Joe was one those dedicated employees who worked in the background and made the park system what it is today, one of the best in the country.

# New Leadership Team for State Parks

Ben Ellis, former director of the Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation in the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, began his tenure as director of Missouri State Parks on June 15, with a new team of deputy directors, David Kelly and Mike Sutherland. The appointments are welcome news to leaders of MPA and also to state park staff, who have been making do since January without key leaders through one of the most challenging legislative sessions and biggest flood events in state park history.

Former state park director Bill Bryan and Deputy Director Brent Bayer, who had been closely associated with the previous administration, were relieved of their positions after the new administration took over, while longtime park staffer and deputy director Denny Bopp had previously announced his retirement (see *Heritage*, December 2016).

Another longtime park employee, 30-year veteran David Kelly, who has now been appointed deputy director for operations, re-



*David Kelly*

markably managed to hold things together for the division by working three jobs since January: his regular post as head of facility and visitor services, a temporary position as acting deputy director for operations, and in the absence of a new or interim director of the agency, many



*Ben Ellis*

essential functions of the director as well, including budgetary matters and other legislative issues in the general assembly. Kudos to David Kelly.

The new director of state parks, Ben Ellis, has some Missouri experience, having earned a masters degree in journalism at the University of Missouri and taught high school journalism at Smithville. He also worked in Hong Kong for the Asian Wall Street Journal and as a journalist in New York, Colorado, and Alaska before moving into various policy-related positions with the Institute of the North, the Department of State, the Alaska SeaLife Center, and the Kenai River Sportfishing Association. He served as director of state parks from 2011-2017.

Alaska has nearly 3.4 million acres of state parks and recreation areas in 134 units (compared with Missouri's nearly 160,000 acres in 93 units), but its annual visitation is less than 4 million compared with Missouri's 20 million and its operating budget is also considerably smaller than Missouri's, having undergone sharp cuts in recent years.

So Ellis will likely appreciate the relative stability of Missouri's state park sales tax. His challenge will be funding the looming backlog of needed infrastructure rehabilitation. But he comes with a reputation for entrepreneurship as well as for commitment to resource conservation.

The new deputy director for administration, Mike Sutherland, has a background in communication and earned a masters degree in public affairs at the University of Missouri. He represented the Warrenton area in the Missouri General Assembly from 2002-2010. A Republican, he served as chair of the House Ways and Means Committee, and more recently has served as policy director with the Missouri Budget Project and in other consulting roles. He is a strong state park advocate, and has served as a member of the MPA board of directors.

MPA welcomes the new state park leaders, thanks DNR Director Carol Comer for appointing them, and looks forward to working with them on the challenges facing Missouri State Parks. We also thank Bill Bryan for his nearly eight years



*Mike Sutherland*

of service as director of state parks, during which nearly 14,000 acres of high priority, high quality land, including six new parks, were added to the system and state parks garnered many national awards.



(“*Legislative Travail*” from Page 1)

kayak rentals) if a private firm offered the same; and most damaging, force the sale of all lands acquired with natural resource damage funds, including the four new parks in the Ozarks and key additions to many others.

For park supporters, the session was extremely frustrating because bills were often assigned to committee—ten different committees this session, many with newly elected members—and then heard immediately, with only the required 24 hours notice, if that. Bill sponsors often had enough advance knowledge to arrange for local witnesses, while citizen park supporters, struggling to keep up with more than two dozen different bills, plus the budget, were hard pressed to find more than one or two people to testify. Moreover, with the release of State Park Director Bill Bryan by the new administration in January and the delay in appointing a new director, there was no one to defend parks or talk with lawmakers in that official capacity.

In the end, parks benefited from all the infighting among legislators and with the governor on an array of issues having nothing to do with parks, which severely limited the number of bills passed by the deadline. But that increased the frequency with which measures that were otherwise stalled, such as bills mandating the sale of the new parks, were amended onto other bills that were moving.

In the closing days of the session, Rep. Ross unexpectedly amended language requiring the sale of all park land acquired with settlement funds to a senate bill (SB22) providing for a buyout of contaminated homes near the West Lake landfill in St. Louis, the proceeds to be used for the buyouts. Ross had been maintaining for years that the settlement funds should have been used in the immediate areas

damaged by lead mining. Now he was proposing that public park funds be diverted to St. Louis for the buyout of private homes. It was almost certainly illegal, yet the House budget committee approved it.

Citizen park supporters responded to last-minute alerts from several organizations by calling their representatives while others walked the halls of the capitol talking one-on-one with any lawmaker they could find, and several legislators prepared floor amendments. An amendment to strip Ross's language from the bill received

end, the Trails Center amendment was stripped out in conference committee, since it was already in another bill (SB421), and both bills subsequently passed. On each bill, there were more than sixteen separate actions back and forth between the two houses in the last three days, an indication that lawmakers were determined to get at least these two bills passed.

The end game for the budget was equally unpredictable. The operating budget for parks was approved without much problem, as were two of the capital improvement budget bills. But in HB19, a bill devoted to new projects, in which the park division had some \$4 million for needed projects, the budget committee zeroed out a \$650,000 appropriation for emergency acquisition of in-holdings. This was a critical item that had regularly been in the budget since the 1980s, usually at \$1 million a year, to provide for unforeseen opportunities to acquire long-sought lands already in park development plans. Park officials managed to get \$150,000 restored for a water project at Elephant Rocks.

But then in a house-senate conference committee at the last minute, the entire HB19 simply disappeared, apparently without any official report or other mention. It is likely that the conferees realized when they got to HB19 that the budget as a whole did not balance, as it must by law, and that the quickest way to bring it into balance was simply to let the entire bill die. So parks and other agencies lost all the appropriations assigned to HB19, including (for parks) the Elephant Rocks well, funds to fill a gap in the Katy Trail in Sedalia, a new lighting system in Onondaga Cave, and repair of flood damages.

What can we say about this session? It was unpredictable, often dis-

### What You Can Do

Did you receive legislative alerts from MPA late in the session? If not, it's probably because we don't have your email address. To sign up for alerts and other MPA messages, email our membership coordinator, Gary Freeman, at [gfreeman46@gmail.com](mailto:gfreeman46@gmail.com) and ask him to add you to our MPA email list.

Then look for opportunities to talk with your state senator and representative about state parks at coffee hours, county fairs or other events in the district, and follow up with them whenever you receive alerts. If you don't see eye to eye with your representatives, talk with them anyway, and look for other candidates to support.

If you have time to volunteer to help in the halls of the capitol or with social media, let Gary ([gfreeman46@gmail.com](mailto:gfreeman46@gmail.com)) know that too.

bipartisan support, though it ultimately failed, but on the final vote for passage of the bill, the whole measure went down to defeat.

Meanwhile, SB35 (requiring local hearings for land acquisition) was saddled in the house two days before the end of the session with language providing for transfer to the city of Independence of state park property at the National Frontier Trails Center, which had long been leased to the city for operation. Officials agreed the transfer made sense, since the city planned to invest millions in the property if it could acquire ownership. Park supporters were in the uncomfortable position of opposing the main bill, but not the amendment. In the

(See “*Legislative Travail*” on Page 6)



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*Legislative Travail for Parks  
New State Park Leadership  
MPA Annual Gathering Oct. 6-8 at Arrow Rock*

<http://parks.missouri.org>

*("Legislative Travail" from Page 5)*

heartening, and enormously taxing for the small band of park supporters who were trying to fend off what they viewed as an unwarranted attack on Missouri's state parks. As they talked one-on-one with legislators, they were encouraged to hear expressions of strong support for parks by members from both parties. And there were more legislators this year than last willing to speak up in committee hearings in defense of parks and against unnecessary and damaging bills, which undoubtedly helped stall some bills.

But there were other bills, equally damaging, that gained a surprising amount of traction, perhaps reflecting the multiplicity of committees with many members who simply hadn't dealt with park issues before and were willing to follow the lead of bill sponsors and other members

still piqued by the previous administration. Since that administration is gone, they seemed to assume there were problems within the park system itself that required stern legislative treatment.

In this era of term limits and increasingly polarized politics, one thing is certain. We need more citizens willing to speak with their representatives about parks *in the district* and to follow up with them when issues arise during the session. More who are willing to volunteer their time to help in the halls of the capitol at critical times. And some who are willing to volunteer to help MPA and other park support organizations organize more effective citizen action efforts. There is no substitute for an alert, engaged citizenry.

## MPA 35th Annual Gathering at Arrow Rock, October 6-8, 2017

Join us at Arrow Rock as we celebrate the 2017 centennial of Missouri State Parks. The Huston Tavern, site of our annual dinner, was the very first property acquired for the state park system. See page 2 for the general schedule for the gathering. We will have a more detailed agenda in the August issue, but **we urge you to register and book your lodging right away**, because Arrow Rock is a popular place, and its wonderful B&Bs fill up fast.

**To book a B&B, go to [www.arrowrock.org/directory.php](http://www.arrowrock.org/directory.php) and scroll down to lodging.** A block of campsites is being held for the MPA gathering until September 1, after which sites will be released to the general public; **call 660-837-3330 by Sept. 1 to reserve a campsite.** There are also motels in Boonville and Marshall, about 13 miles away; **we suggest Holiday Inn Express at I-70 Exit 101 in Boonville (MPA rates \$139/night; call 660-882-6882 through September 21).**

## Flat rate Registration with event counts for planning (by September 21)

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Full (meals, tours) \_\_\_\_persons@\$65 \$\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Children (to age 10) \_\_\_\_persons@\$40 \$\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_ TOTAL \$\_\_\_\_

### Event Counts:

#\_\_\_\_ Friday Tram Tour on Katy Trail #\_\_\_\_ Saturday Box Lunch  
#\_\_\_\_ Friday Evening Reception with food #\_\_\_\_ Saturday Dinner

Make check payable to **Missouri Parks Association** and mail with form **postmarked by September 21** 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](mailto:mpa.manager1@gmail.com)