

## Meet MPA's First Executive Director

Meet Kendra Varns Wallis, who has just contracted with the Missouri Parks Association as its first executive director. Kendra will begin with MPA October 1, working from her home in Kansas City, and you will be able to meet her in person at our annual gathering October 5-7 at Watkins Mill.

After more than thirty-five years as a volunteer-led, entirely member-supported citizens organization dedicated to the protection, enhancement and interpretation of Missouri state parks and historic sites, it was high time that MPA step up to a new level with a professional executive director. Our loyal members, of whom we have more than 3,000, and our board of directors and other volunteers, who are smaller in number but incredibly effective, will be no less important under the new arrangement. Indeed, one of the reasons we need an executive director is so we can engage more of our members—you—as volunteers to help support our remarkable but only modestly funded state park system.

Kendra is a fortuitous match for the task. She first learned about Missouri State Parks as a young student in the University of Missouri's program in Parks, Recreation, and Tourism, when she landed a summer internship helping to organize and run the Katy Trail Ride Across Missouri. After completing her bachelor's degree in PRT with a minor in history—which gave her an appreciation also for the cultural resources in our parks and historic sites—she took a position with state parks in Jefferson City in facility and visitor services, where she became familiar with the system as a whole and visited most of the parks statewide.



In 2008 she was promoted to program coordinator in the Kansas City Outreach office, where she created, wrote funding proposals, marketed and implemented new programs for urban populations. One of those programs was MPA's own Urban Populations Outreach Project (UPOP), which she planned and coordinated with a wide and ever-growing array of social service organizations to introduce underserved youths to the wonders of our state parks, many for the first time.

In Fall 2013 she took a position with the American Diabetes Association in Overland Park, Kansas, as senior manager for programs and outreach. Here she gained experience with a non-profit, worked with a client-and-donor-tracking database, improved her public relations skills, discovered she enjoyed fundraising, and came to appreciate the vital connections between parks and community health.

Then in 2015, she returned to state parks as Kansas City area manager. In this role she was involved with MPA's new Seniors to Parks program

along with responsibility for planning, budgeting, volunteer recruitment, and direction of all area programs. On her own time, she volunteered on the 2016 Parks, Soil and Water Sales Tax campaign, as she had also done in 2006. She also had an opportunity to attend the State Park Leadership School in West Virginia, a two-year program of on-line and in-person sessions, during which she came to understand other state park systems around the country as well as hone her leadership and management skills.

Meanwhile, MPA learned that longtime membership coordinator Gary Freeman intended to retire at the end of 2018, opening the need and the opportunity to replace the services for which he contracted with a broader executive director position that, at least initially, would also include management of MPA's membership, with its large data-base extending back a quarter century. Kendra was among a number of highly qualified individuals statewide who applied for the position and one of five to be selected for interviews. She was the clear choice because of her broad knowledge and experience with state parks and park issues and her ability to hit the ground running, as well as her engaging personality and her interest in reaching out to and enlisting MPA members around the state. She plans to also reach the public and prospective members through social media, a skill for which MPA has long felt the need.

Plan now to attend our annual gathering of members at Watkins Mill October 5-7, meet Kendra Varns Wallis, and make your voice heard on new directions for MPA.

Meet Your Missouri State Parks Team:

## Kenda Sanders—Revenue and Attendance Section Chief

by Sue Holst

The Missouri state park system is very diverse and it takes staff with varied backgrounds and experiences to operate it in a way that provides quality customer service. A good example is Kenda Sanders, whose accounting degree and experience has proven to be important as the park system moves forward to meet new customer demands.

Sanders is chief of the Revenue and Attendance Section and has played a role in the evolution of the campground reservation system as well as revenue and attendance tracking. When she was hired in 2008 as assistant reservation administrator, it was at the beginning of the computerization of the campground reservation program.

Today, the system has gone from “pen and paper to an all-encompassing revenue system,” according to Sanders. All the money generated in state parks goes through one computerized system; this includes revenue from campgrounds, retail at park-operated stores, historic site tours, cave tours and the online store. The section also is in charge of tracking attendance, including camping and lodging numbers as well as day-use guests and numbers from traffic counters.

Since she started 10 years ago, she has seen things evolve quickly and much of it has been to meet customer demands.



Customers are not the only ones who have benefited – a consolidated system ultimately saves time for staff and helps the administration make decisions about such issues as staffing, hours and pricing.

Supporting the field staff is an important responsibility of the section, which includes four positions in addition to the chief. Working with field staff is one of the best parts of the job to Sanders. “Park staff are so good about trying to keep up with the changes and always have a ‘we’ll make it work’ attitude. It’s our job to make sure they have the tools to make it work,” she says.

Helping people has always been important to Sanders. She is currently serving as a member of the Belle School Board and is an active supporter of the school’s booster club. “I’ve always felt a need to serve and give back and this is an opportunity to do that.” She and her husband, Mike, have three children, Lane 19, Olivia 15, and Miranda 12, and live in the Belle community.

In her current position, she has many opportunities to give back and help others, whether it is field staff or the state park customer. She has seen many changes so far and expects to see many more. “Technology has changed quickly and it will continue to change. State parks must continue to change and evolve to keep up with customer needs and demands.”

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## Join Us at Watkins Mill October 5-7, 2018!!

*Join other MPA members for the interesting tours, social gatherings and informational presentations about Missouri’s great state parks and historic sites at our 36th Annual Meeting at Watkins Mill and other historic sites on October 5-7, 2018!*

*Watkins Mill State Historic Site.*



## MPA 36th Annual Gathering at Watkins Mill, October 5-7, 2018

Join us at Watkins Mill State Historic Site, the nation's best preserved 19<sup>th</sup> century textile factory—a National Historic Landmark—for a special focus on cultural resource stewardship in the state park system. Come early on Friday to see and discuss issues at Confederate Memorial and Battle of Lexington SHS en route to our evening reception and talks at the historic Elms Hotel and Spa in Excelsior Springs. We'll be at Watkins Mill all day Saturday, featuring the annual State of the Parks address and a panel on Cultural Resource Stewardship in the morning, a tour of the mill and park in the afternoon, and dinner at the visitor center with more on cultural resources. Note that the members and board meetings Sunday morning will be at the Elms Hotel in Excelsior Springs.

**Book your own lodging at the historic Elms Hotel by September 14** (call 1-816-630-5500 and ask for the special MPA rate of \$149), at a motel in Excelsior Springs, or the campground at Watkins Mill SP. **Also note the September 21 cut-off date for registration with meals** (Friday reception with food, Saturday lunch and dinner).

### Friday, October 5

- 1pm** Meet at the chapel at Confederate Memorial SHS in Higginsville at 1pm and at the visitor center at Battle of Lexington SHS in Lexington at 3pm for tours and discussion en route to Excelsior Springs
- 5:30pm** Registration at the Elms Hotel in Excelsior Springs
- 6-8pm** Reception at the Elms with heavy hors d'oeuvres and brief history talks

### Saturday, October 6 at Watkins Mill Visitor Center

- Breakfast on your own
- 8:45am** Welcome to Watkins Mill: MPA Pres. Deb Schnack and Site Manager Mike Beckett (Visitor Center) State of the Parks Address by State Parks Director Ben Ellis with related presentations by Natural Resource Mngt. Head Ken McCarty and Planning & Development Head Jon Fitch.
- 10:30am** Cultural Resource Stewardship for the Next Century: Cultural Resource Mngt. Head John Cunning, Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area Exec Dir Jim Ogle, and others
- 12n** Box lunch near visitor center
- 1-4pm** Behind-the-scenes tour of Watkins Mill SHS: Mike Beckett
- 5:30-6:30pm** Happy hour: Visitor Center lawn
- 6:30-8:30pm** Dinner and program (State Historical Society of Missouri Director Gary Kremer invited)

### Sunday, October 7 at the Elms Hotel, Excelsior Springs

- 7-8am** Breakfast on your own
- 8:30am** Annual meeting of members with new MPA Executive Director Kendra Varns Wallis
- 9:30am** Meeting of MPA board of directors (all are welcome to attend)
- 12:00n** Adjourn

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### Flat Rate Registration with Event Counts for Planning

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Full (meals, tours) \_\_\_\_\_ persons@ \$70 \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_ Total. \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Special Dietary needs (indicate) \_\_\_\_\_

### Event Counts:

#Persons \_\_\_\_\_ Friday Historic Site Tours      #Persons \_\_\_\_\_ Saturday Box Lunch

#Persons \_\_\_\_\_ Friday Evening Reception with food      #Persons \_\_\_\_\_ 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 the MPA website: <http://parks.missouri.org>. For questions email: [marianm8084@gmail.com](mailto:marianm8084@gmail.com).



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August 2018

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Annual Meeting Set for Watkins Mill*

<http://parks.missouri.org>

## Stewardship Moves to Front Burner

The Missouri Parks Association's blue-ribbon panel on natural resource stewardship at its annual meeting last October (see *Heritage*, December 2017) and MPA's related resolution on the topic, together with support from leaders of other Missouri conservation nonprofits, has encouraged state park director Ben Ellis and his new leadership team to move stewardship efforts to the front burner for staff in parks throughout the system.

The effort involves a number of key administrative changes with more to come, and has resulted in an unprecedented level of stewardship activity across the state already this year. By the April MPA board meeting, Ken McCarty was able to report that natural resource performance objectives, including minimum time standards for species inventory, monitoring, and resource management, had been prepared for all facility managers, interpreters, and resource stewards; the minimum standards for prescribed burns had already been exceeded with 20 percent of burn units totaling over 8,000 acres in more than 20 differ-



*Prescribed burns are an important stewardship tool.*

ent parks burned, despite very limited weather windows and with the burn season still ongoing. Exotic species control plans were due from all parks by May 31 for implementation starting in summer; annual natural and wild area inspections would begin in May; and resource training workshops and field days had been conducted or were scheduled for staff in all districts.

By August, McCarty was heartened to see many different staff step up to undertake exotic species control, facility heads participating in glade restoration, interpreters involved in monitoring projects, and volunteer work days held or scheduled in a number of parks. When he stopped in at Pershing, he was thrilled to see major infestations of

*Sericia lespedeza* all yellowed, having been recently killed by park staff.

At MPA's gathering at Watkins Mill October 6, Ben Ellis will highlight some of the organizational and other administrative changes in his "State of the Parks Address" and announce other related changes in the offing for cultural resources, of the sort already undertaken in

the natural realm. Natural resource management chief Ken McCarty will be on hand to review stewardship progress in the past year; new head of planning and development, Jon Fitch, will explain the system's new approach to tackling its backlog of infrastructure maintenance and repair; and head of cultural resource management John Cuning will headline a panel discussing stewardship of cultural resources in the historic sites and throughout the system. An afternoon behind-the-scenes tour of Watkins Mill and the talk that evening will also focus on cultural resources.

*Plan now to join us for an exciting day at Watkins Mill full of consequential new developments.*