

MPA Panel Urges Active Natural Resource Stewardship

A blue-ribbon panel spanning the pace-setting history and challenges of stewardship of natural resources in Missouri state parks urged rededication to active stewardship among administration officials and staff throughout the system. The three-member panel headlined the Missouri Parks Association gathering in Arrow Rock October 6-8 in celebration of the centennial of the state park system and the 35th anniversary of the association.

Missouri State Parks has been a leader nationally in both natural and cultural resource preservation and the active practice of natural resource stewardship since the 1970s. However, these early initiatives nearly faltered during the severe economic crisis of the early 1980s. At a time of double-digit inflation, the sudden withdrawal of federal funds and cuts in state funds left state parks with less than half the budget of the late 1970s. The park division of the then-new Missouri Department of Natural Resources was in danger of dismemberment, with the natural parks being considered for legislative transfer to the better-funded Conservation Department and no plans at all for the historic sites. This was the crisis that led to establishment of the Missouri Parks Association in 1982.

The first panelist, John Karel, who had been appointed director of state parks in 1979, reflected on an

acute crisis of understanding and self-confidence among state park staff at the time. It was necessary, as he saw it, to return to core values—to engage the staff in distilling from enabling statutes and the administrative history of the system a clear, shared understanding of the mission

, the staff was invigorated, confident, and motivated to convey their new understanding to legislators and the public, and to plan for a more active approach to stewarding the resources under their care.

Left unstated by Karel was his own prior role as the first director of natural history in the 1970s, during which he began to lay the foundations for natural resource stewardship by inventorying natural resources, establishing new designations for special areas such as natural areas and wild areas, and integrating the new focus on re-



Panelists (l to r) Paul Nelson, Ken McCarty, and John Karel.

sources into comprehensive planning for the park system. In 1977, in response to the creation of the inter-agency Missouri Natural Areas Program, which Karel helped establish, he recruited Paul Nelson as the first natural areas coordinator. Nelson's first task was to inventory the state park system for qualifying natural areas, but he expanded the effort into a comprehensive inventory of the entire system's significant natural features.

- to preserve and interpret the finest examples of Missouri's natural landscapes,
- to preserve and interpret its most significant cultural landmarks,
- and to provide healthy and enjoyable outdoor recreation appropriate to these resources for all Missourians and visitors to the state.

Missouri thus had a well-balanced system, emphasizing authentic landscapes, real history, and resource-based recreation, unlike some states that prioritized facilities such as golf courses, swimming pools, or big resorts, or others that allowed hunting or timber harvest in their parks. Having distilled a renewed sense of

When he was appointed state park director, Karel promoted Nelson to director of natural history. Nelson emphasized protecting, caring for, and characterizing the system's natural environments. Ecological restoration and active management were early visions that he nurtured into several landmark pilot projects. An experimental prescribed burn at the newly acquired Ha Ha Tonka

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President's Message by Steve Nagle:

President's Farewell

In keeping with tradition, faithful and dedicated members and friends of MPA came together for our annual meeting October 6-8 at Arrow Rock State Historic Site. There was much to celebrate at our 35th annual gathering, including the Centennial year of our state park system. The site's Huston Tavern was the first acquisition in the system.

We had other reasons to celebrate too, in spite of legislative harassment of state parks: the overwhelming 80 percent vote by Missouri citizens to renew the Parks, Soil and Water Sales Tax a year ago, and the addition of four new parks to the system. The MPA board of directors, I am proud to say, staunchly supports the new parks and also approved a strong resolution urging decision-makers to accept Ameren's pending donation of the Rock Island rail corridor from Beaufort to Windsor for addition to the state park system. You can see the full resolution on our MPA website: parks.missouri.org/.

Other highlights of the meeting were the State of the Parks address by newly appointed State Park Director Ben Ellis, followed by a riveting panel on Park Stewardship for the Next Century with John Karel, Paul Nelson and Ken McCarty, three who made Missouri State Parks a pace-setter in active stewardship of natural resources. Taking care of our natural and cultural resources is intrinsic to our state park mission and key to sustaining the health of the system.

We extend our deep gratitude to Deputy Directors David Kelly and Mike Sutherland and Arrow Rock Superintendent Mike Dickey for the tours and historic perspective of Arrow Rock, the Boone's Lick Country, and the KATY Trail. A big thanks also to Sandy Selby and Friends of Arrow Rock for their hospitality and tours. Saturday's dinner at the Huston Tavern with John Cunning's presentation on the history of Missouri's state parks made for a memorable evening and fortified us for our Sunday morning members and board meetings.

A farewell note: being your Missouri Parks Association president during the past five years has been an honor and a joy. Our membership of 3,300 is an all-time high. We have accomplished so much together and the years have flown by like a flock of geese. Our budget and policy-making process is sound and the success of MPA is the sole result of teamwork and the expertise of our dedicated members and board of directors. I am deeply grateful for all you have done. I plan to stay involved, but as your president I bid you an affectionate farewell.

I do leave you with one admonition and that is to work toward passing the torch to a younger generation, so please help to get more young people engaged in MPA activities and state park advocacy in order to sustain the success of our organization over the long term.

Most of you know Deb Schnack, who was elected MPA president at our annual meeting. Deb was Missouri's first female park superintendent, and then as trails coordinator she laid out and oversaw hundreds of miles of trails we all love, ending her service as Director of Planning and Development. She has been serving as MPA vice president for five years and brings consummate experience and energy to her new position. She has been indispensable to our legislative and policy work, and I pass the gavel to Deb with great assurance of MPA's future endeavors.

MPA Employee Awards

New MPA President Deb Schnack, a former awardee herself, presented MPA's Employee of the Year Awards to five outstanding park employees at a staff meeting at Echo Bluff in November. The awardees were selected by an MPA committee from nominations submitted by their supervisors or colleagues.

Mary Donze (Central Office—Planning), a 34-year veteran, designed the conceptual development planning process early in her career and has led or served on CDP teams for virtually every park in the system, including the rebuilt Johnson's Shut-Ins. She co-authored the 1992 expansion plan for the system, the 2005 Missing Masterpieces survey and plan, and is now engaged in the Missouri Experience initiative to analyze natural landscapes and recreational experiences missing from the system, as well as volunteering in her humble and selfless way for urban outreach and numerous other initiatives.

Eugene Vale (Interpreter), who has a passion for astronomy, alerted MSP staff two years ago to the impending August 21 solar eclipse that tracked across the state with forty-two parks and historic sites in its path. He conducted exten-

(See "MPA Awards" on Page 3)



l to r: MPA President Deb Schnack, Mary Donze, Eugene Vale, Kristen Burr, Wanda Doolen, Larry Newman.

Meet your Missouri State Parks Team

Laura Hendrickson – Ozarks District Supervisor *by Sue Holst*

“If service is beneath you, then leadership is beyond you.”

This quote is a favorite of Laura Hendrickson and her life reflects that. “I’ve always been service oriented – in parks and recreation, we work while others play,” Hendrickson said.

That life of service has taken her a long way. Her first job at 14 years of age was working at an archery range at a city park in her hometown of Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Today she is district supervisor of the Ozarks District, the largest one in Missouri’s state park system. The district includes 26 state parks and historic sites, including Ozark Caverns, Trails of the Roger Pryor Pioneer Backcountry, and Nathan Boone Historic Site. It has the system’s largest park, Lake of the Ozarks; all three trout parks – Bennett Spring, Montauk and Roaring River; the recently opened Echo Bluff State Park; and three of the new undeveloped parks – Bryant Creek, Ozark Mountain and Eleven Point. This means the Ozarks District has the most employees, acreage, shoreline miles, trails, and concession contracts.

Her job, along with assistants Kim Todey and Adam Enboden, is to work with state park and historic site staff to oversee the operation of the facilities. This includes personnel issues, fiscal matters, project planning, and customer



service and concession contracts. Concession contracts range from food service and watercraft rentals to marina and horse operations. Her days vary as well; one day she may be dealing with cultural resource management, giving a tour for a group at Echo Bluff, or assisting with a controlled burn.

Her work experience has been just as varied. She received a volleyball scholarship to attend the University of Florida, where she graduated with a degree in Parks, Recreation and Tourism with a minor in Forestry. After graduation she worked for the Tennessee Valley Authority, the U.S. Forest Service in Florida, and a private consulting firm where she helped hydro-

electric power companies resolve land management and public access issues.

She met her future husband Michael on RAGBRAI, an annual bicycle ride across Iowa, and they moved to Missouri. Her first job with Missouri State Parks was at Prairie State Park as natural resource manager. From there she moved to Jefferson City to oversee the landscaping and maintenance of the Capitol Complex, which at that time included the Capitol grounds, Governor’s Garden and Governor’s Mansion. She then became facility manager at Pomme de Terre State Park, which also included oversight of Ha Ha Tonka and Harry S Truman state parks. And then she became supervisor of the Ozarks District.

In addition to her work responsibilities, Hendrickson has a busy family life. She and her husband, a circuit judge, have three children – Hanna, 18, Birdie, 16 and Landon, 15.

So why does she keep doing such a big job? “I enjoy figuring out complex issues that make you look at so many angles,” she says. “It keeps everything challenging and interesting. The Ozarks District has so many great resources, from the natural and cultural to the people who operate our parks and sites on a daily basis. I’m proud to work for Missouri state parks.”

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sive research on the eclipse, trained interpreters and Master Naturalist volunteers statewide to present public programs, and had the foresight to reserve the south lawn of the Capitol over a year in advance for what became a nationally significant three-day event (see *Heritage*, Sept 2017). As a result, some interpreters have begun to offer more astronomy programs in their parks.

Kristen Burr (Field—Eastern District Office) has been an energetic force for cost savings and efficiencies. She sparked efforts to identify unnecessary phone and fax lines in the districts, improve communications, streamline the process for routine repairs, properly recycle fluorescent tubes, and address telephone charge carryovers, all of which save money and time. She is constantly looking for more ways to help, always with a positive attitude and a friendly smile.

Wanda Doolen (Facility Head, Sam Baker SP) was honored for her months-long leadership, long hours, and stead-

fast commitment to successful recovery from the devastating flood that wreaked havoc of historic proportions in the park in late April. She was first into the park as waters began to recede, and never wavered as more and more debris and damage were revealed, putting in as much as 30 hours of overtime some weeks without even a day off, and balancing the demands of visitor services in the popular and iconic park with continued cleanup, all without an assistant superintendent to help.

Larry Newman (Maintenance and Construction, Table Rock SP) was the lead worker on construction of the park system’s first full service ADA-accessible yurt that opened in May. He led construction of the 700-square foot structure even while training new maintenance staff, owing to turnover, and used his own electrical and plumbing skills. The completed facility has been fully occupied and greeted with amazement by many guests. Newman then completed two large platforms with tents for occupancy by mid-season.

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State Park in 1982 laid the foundation for expanding prescribed burning throughout the system. With a \$90,000 grant from an economic stimulation program of the Small Business Administration he was able to institute landscape-scale restoration of savannas and glades at Harry S Truman, Knob Noster, Pomme de Terre, and Long Branch State Parks.

Meanwhile, his characterization of landforms, geology, flora and fauna, champion trees, caves and other resources became the building blocks for developing scientific research, protective policies, and park interpretive themes. His Ecological Stewardship Policy set the stage for the development of natural resource management plans for key parks, launching state parks into a new era of restoring natural communities and addressing many other natural resource needs.

This new emphasis on active stewardship and restoration in the early 1980s required more knowledgeable staff, more sophisticated inventories and monitoring, and more comprehensive planning for individual parks and for the system as a whole. Karel assembled what he considered the strongest team of interpretive naturalists of any park system in the nation, virtually all assigned to field positions in key parks. As a mark of state park leadership in Missouri and beyond, Nelson wrote the outstanding *Terrestrial Natural Communities of Missouri*, produced in 1985 by the Missouri Natural Areas Committee and since revised three times. During these years, Karel also filled major natural and cultural gaps in the park system with the acquisition of ten new parks including Prairie, Onon-

daga and Grand Gulf, all later to become nationally recognized natural landscapes through stewardship.

Wanting to expand these fledgling programs to restore and manage natural communities beyond the experimental and demonstration phases, Nelson in 1985 searched for



Prescribed burn in a woodland at Ha Ha Tonka State Park..

and finally found a new natural areas coordinator, Ken McCarty, to further develop the park system's ambitious programs and better integrate education and interpretation with the process and results of natural resource stewardship. Together McCarty and Nelson worked with the staff to plan for and greatly expand the use of prescribed fire and other stewardship practices in parks throughout the system. Most of the system's notable glade, woodland, prairie and wetland restorations began at this time. They also undertook a study, *The Challenge of the 90s: Our Threatened State Parks* (1992), a comprehensive analysis of some 1,500 threats to the system. The threats study recommendations led to integrated natural resource planning, land acquisition, and prioritization of stewardship efforts system-wide.

By the late 1990s, more than 67,000 acres—half the acreage in the entire park system—were benefiting from regular ecological stew-

ardship practices; these included not only prescribed fire but removal of invasive species, restoration of more natural hydrologic function, and reintroduction of native herbivores, plus all the requisite inventory, planning, and monitoring.

By then it was abundantly clear that Missouri's state park system represents the best of the best in Missouri in terms of natural landscapes. The system's blend of natural communities included 85 percent of all native vertebrates and 68 percent of native plant species found in Missouri, and its resource stewards were second to none.

When Nelson was promoted to deputy director of operations and then retired from parks in 2002, McCarty continued as chief of natural resources management, including planning and oversight of ongoing stewardship and dealing with vexing problems at places like Big Oak Tree, Pershing, Johnson's Shut-Ins, Confluence Point, and other parks along the Big Rivers.

By 2017, as McCarty detailed in his slide presentation, the 150,000-acre system contained 12 wild areas totaling 23,000 acres, 41 natural areas totaling more than 20,000 acres, and 39 parks with nearly 63,000 acres of ecological management areas (with some designations overlapping). Fifty-one parks had burn units totaling some 38,000 acres and requiring 80-120 burns each year.

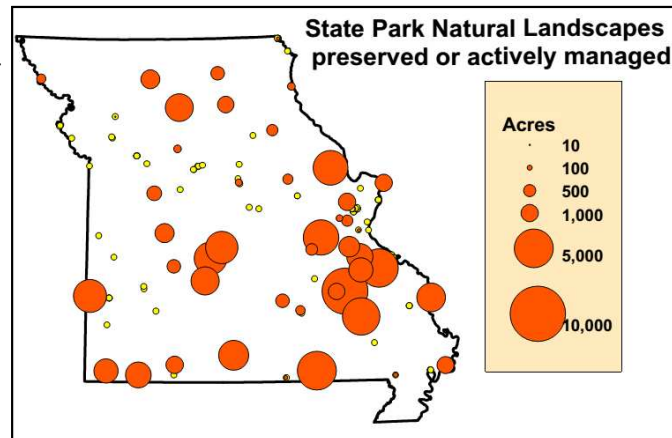
To accomplish this work, the natural resource stewardship budget in 2017 was only \$170,000 for equipment and contracted assistance from AmeriCorps, other contractors, volunteers, and inmates, and \$124,000 for seasonal workers.

There were only three field-based natural resource stewards whose primary job was resource management, plus interpretive resource staff, facility heads, maintenance staff, and seasonals, as time allowed. Crews in 2017 were able to conduct only 47 of the 100 or so burns required, and more removal of invasive species, from bush honeysuckle and garlic mustard to deer and feral hogs, was needed in virtually every park.

The Missouri Parks Association organized the stewardship panel at its 2017 gathering because it had become clear from visits to parks, especially in conjunction with work on the 2016 revision of the state park book, and from talking with leaders of other support organizations such as The Nature Conservancy, Audubon, Missouri Prairie Foundation, Master Naturalists, and various park friends groups that active stewardship, despite its extraordinary leadership, was losing ground. In the view of many, the need for managing park natural resources was outgrowing the capacity of the system to respond.

As the park system expanded since the threats study a quarter century ago, the threats expanded out of proportion to the acreage. Urban encroachment now surrounds many park boundaries, new exotic invasive species are rapidly spreading within parks, extreme weather events and other natural disasters are increasing. One after another, all of the initial group of remarkable naturalists devoted to restoration and stewardship of their respective parks had retired. Owing to the con-

sequences of administrative and operational reorganizations and compounded by the loss of twenty



percent of park staff during the economic crash of 2008, they weren't being replaced in the numbers and with the requisite skills of the earlier hires. There didn't seem to be as strong a sense of mission as in the 1980s and early '90s among park staff in general. And administrative



A woodland at Ha Ha Tonka with 300-year-old post oaks maintained by periodic fire.

priorities in recent decades had shifted among several key emphases including revenue generation, visitor services, interpretation, and special events to increase park attendance. These were each important in their time, but their success highlights the need for a similar focused priority for park natural resources.

During the discussion following the panel, attendees expressed amazement at what natural resource

staff had accomplished, shock at the minimal budget, suggestions for increasing volunteer efforts, and insistence that the story be more widely shared. New park director Ben Ellis also expressed support; in his "state of the parks" address preceding the panel he had indicated that in addition to prioritizing maintenance and repair of facilities in existing parks he intended to place renewed focus on active stewardship.

In its annual board and members meeting the next day, MPA directors approved a resolution "that the reinvigoration of active stewardship and preservation of the specific resources of each park be integrated into all agency planning, hiring, training, performance evaluation, allocation of human and financial resources, and public involvement in Missouri State Parks so that the system's natural landscapes and cultural landmarks may be restored and preserved for the future." The resolution also endorsed an appended list of proposed actions at administrative, field, and public levels regarding natural resource stewardship, and indicated an intent to focus on the cultural realm at an upcoming meeting. (For the full resolution, see <http://parks.missouri.org/Issues/Action/ResourceStewardship.aspx/>.)

MPA intends to monitor progress on the stewardship front. Indeed, State Park Director Ben Ellis told a group of conservation leaders meeting with him about the subject last summer that he would like to have another meeting next year to discuss progress.



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*Panel Urges Active Natural Resource Stewardship
Public Meetings on New Parks—Your Turn!*

<http://parks.missouri.org>

Public Meetings on New Parks

Missouri State Parks has announced public meetings to provide information and seek comment on the future of three of the newly acquired state parks—Ozark Mountain, Bryant Creek, and Jay Nixon State Parks—during the first week of December. There will also be opportunity to submit comments online at mostateparks.com from December 4 to January 5.

Now is your opportunity to make your voice heard. Because there are some who would like the state to sell the new parks, it is important for those who love the parks and want the state to keep them to attend the meetings or at least submit comments.

MPA is committed to defending the new parks as quality lands in areas where parks have been sought for decades in park system plans, and that have basic resources capable of being restored at modest cost. Indeed, funds were earmarked for restoration in the grants provided for their acquisition. For more information about these parks, see the December 2016 *Heritage* and talking points soon to be posted on the **MPA website: parks.missouri.org**.

Park officials will be seeking comments also on the uses of the parks and amenities desired. MPA supports interpretive panels, hiking trails, and basic parking, picnic, and sanitary facilities, but cautions that funds are not likely to be available in the near term for more elaborate infrastructure.

The new Eleven Point State Park will not have a public meeting or comment period until pending legal action is resolved. Jay Nixon State Park is a special case, since the land was acquired several years ago for its natural resource values as an addition to Taum Sauk Mountain State Park and there is no public access by road; access could be made available only via a spur from the Ozark Trail. MPA leaders believe the best course for this land would be to return it to Taum Sauk State Park.

Public Meetings, 6pm - 8pm:

- Ozark Mountain SP, Monday, Dec. 4. Dewey Short Visitor Center, 4500 State Hwy 165, Branson, MO 65616
- Bryant Creek SP, Tuesday, Dec. 5. Ava Community Center, 108 Northeast 2nd Ave., Ava, MO 65608
- Jay Nixon SP, Thursday, Dec. 7. Johnson's Shut-Ins SP, 148 Taum Sauk Trail, Middlebrook, MO 63656

If you want to secure the future of these important park lands, make your plans now to attend and comment at one of the public meetings, and to comment on the other parks during Dec 4 - Jan 5 through the MSP website: <https://mostateparks.com/>.

Note: If you did not already receive an email alert from MPA about these meetings, it is probably because MPA membership coordinator Gary Freeman does not have your email address. Email him at gfreeman46@gmail.com to receive other alerts and important MPA announcements.

MPA to Host Regional Gatherings

At our annual meeting in Arrow Rock, MPA director Lisa Groshong proposed a series of MPA gatherings at parks around the state for MPA members and other guests, including families. She has been appointed to chair a committee to work on the concept. Lisa intends to organize the first such event at Finger Lakes State Park north of Columbia on a Saturday in the spring. It would include a welcome program with park superintendent Debbie Newby, tours of the park, a guided hike on the new Kelley Branch Trail, and kayaking on the lake; state park books would also be available at the special MPA rate.

If you are interested in serving on the committee or would be willing to organize a similar event at a state park in your area, please contact Lisa at lisagroshong@yahoo.com.