

Talking/Comment Points for New State Parks

Missouri Parks Association, 12-1-17

Historically, new parks have not been immediately developed. The first parks acquired in the 1920's received their first significant development by the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Works Progress Administration in the 1930's. There were five undeveloped state parks when the Parks and Soils Sales Tax first passed in 1984. Any new parks need a period of assessment and planning. Development and staffing should follow in stages. Public access could occur within a relatively short time for activities that do not require extensive infrastructure, yet can be supported by the parks' natural environment.

State Parks are economic assets to the local communities, counties, and the state. Studies have shown they have profoundly positive economic impact. The parks attract visitors who spend money at local businesses. The state spends in the local area for operation and maintenance of the parks. The parks provide full and part-time jobs in the park and in businesses in the local area. These activities produce tax revenues for communities and counties. While it will take time for the lands to be developed and the tax benefits of tourism to be realized, this is an investment that should not be missed.

While state parks contribute greatly to Missouri's tourism economy, the increased opportunity for recreation in the local area is just as significant.

Lands of the natural qualities found in these four new parks are rare. The fact that these high quality natural areas still exist in today's world is something of a miracle. They offer unique opportunities to preserve, educate, and enjoy. Retention of the lands in State Parks for the benefit of present and future generations is an achievable goal, and should be considered necessary to the quality of life in Missouri.

The Missouri Park System has prospered for 100 years without resorting to the sale of its lands. Sale or disposal of these lands should not be an option. No one can answer where the funds received from such a sale would be spent. It is extremely doubtful that another use for the funds would benefit so many people in the state, or that any part of the funds would be spent for the benefit of the local communities and counties in the areas of these new parks. Sale of these new park areas is a loss for every citizen of Missouri and a dangerous precedent for the future of the system.

Jay Nixon State Park was acquired as an addition to the existing Taum Sauk Mountain State Park, and should not be considered a separate park requiring a separate name. MPA has passed a resolution recommending that Missouri State Parks develop a naming policy for new areas and avoid naming properties for incumbent elected officials. As is the case with this property, naming for incumbents tends to politicize the acquisition and involve state parks in partisan issues.

Natural resource management and restoration on these properties should begin in 2018. These are seasonal activities that could be supported at low cost with part-time personnel led by regional park staff. While the impact of these activities is long term, they are also a necessary step to prepare for public use.

Planning for public use should begin immediately. Planning activities are typically led by regional and central office staff. The choice to begin planning activities is a choice of priorities rather than cost. Initiating a public planning process should begin with these public meetings.

Planning for public access and park development should consider activities that are compatible with the natural and cultural resources of these park areas. As the Missouri State Park System Mission requires, recreation and public use of these new parks must be balanced with preservation and interpretation of the areas' natural and cultural resources.

A survey form and information will be available Dec 4 to Jan 5 on the Missouri State Parks website to submit comments: <https://mostateparks.com/page/70456/closed-state-park-properties>