

Most Threatening Bills Stopped In 2003 State Legislature

by David Bedan, MPA Legislative Chair

Current trends in the Missouri General Assembly are very disturbing for anyone concerned about the conservation of Missouri's natural resources. Dozens of bills and budgetary proposals were introduced which would have rolled back the gains in environmental protection and the conservation of natural resources that Missourians have made over the last 30 years. Some of these bills threatened the Missouri Division of Parks; others would have weakened the Missouri Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC). However, when the 2003 legislative session

ended on May 16, nearly all of the worst bills were defeated. Some of the worst were defeated in the Senate on the last day of the legislative session. The most damaging bills that passed related to DNR's General Revenue Budget and to its earmarked environmental funds.

Cuts to DNR's Budget

The budget process is being used to drastically weaken the DNR which is responsible for the implementation of most of Missouri's existing environmental protection laws. There is no doubt that Missouri, like many other

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Back to the Current

by John Karel

The official slogan these days of our Division of Tourism is "Missouri...Where the Rivers Run". Although most such slogans are largely salesmanship, this one happens to be a bona fide reflection of the central role of freshwater streams in the human and natural history of our crossroads state. From the continent-draining giants of the Missouri and Mississippi, to the rivulets of clean clear water bubbling from thousands of hidden springs, Missouri's rivers and streams have defined our landscapes, shaped our vegetation and wildlife, and determined the patterns of settlement, exploration, and transportation ever since humans ventured onto this land. It is arguable that no state has a more intimate relation to its rivers or retains a more impressive abundance of free flowing streams than Missouri.

Of this wealth of streams, many would argue that none are more emblematic, beloved, or beautiful than the Current River and its tributary, the Jacks Fork.

Known even in colonial times to French trappers as La Riviere Courante, "the Running River", the Current River is a classic and choice embodiment of the deep Ozarks: largely spring fed, flowing through a steep valley cut into the ancient Ozark plateau, curving between sharp meanders defined by tall sheer bluffs of dolomite and limestone, with caves, shelters and

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Photo courtesy of Greg Iffrig

Looking downstream at the Current River from Bee's Bluff

“Meramec”

Miracles & Milestones –The Rebirth of a River

By Ron Coleman and Dan Drees

Twenty-five years ago on August 8, 1978, Missouri voters made the decision to allow the Meramec River to remain a free flowing stream and de-authorized a project to impound the river. Stopping the dam project has led to the permanent protection of some of the Meramec River’s most significant natural wonders and has created an emerging greenway rich in conservation and outdoor recreation benefit.

This summer Missouri citizens of all ages will have a special opportunity to hear the truly unique and historic story from experts of how a dam was stopped and a river was saved. They will also be able to get their feet wet and participate in numerous river related activities and events to celebrate the renaissance of the Meramec and its natural qualities.

The headwaters of the Meramec River begin in the Ozarks near Salem and the river travels for 228 miles to join the Mississippi River south of St. Louis. The Meramec’s spring-fed waters have provided a summer haven for many canoeists, fishermen and water-lovers in general. What some do not realize is that the Meramec River is home to the greatest variety of aquatic life in the Midwest. New native species are still being discovered in the river.

Thousands of acres of public land border the Meramec River today. Following the de-authorization of the dam, the Missouri Department of Natural Resources created Onondaga Cave State Park near Leasburg. Onondaga Cave has been designated a National Natural Landmark because of the abundance and quality of its cave speleothems. Also now protected in Onondaga Cave State Park are

Vilander Bluffs, the tallest and most spectacular bluffs along the river. In Meramec State Park near Sullivan, the 90-foot-tall riverside entrance to Green’s Cave, is now protected.

The 6,225 acre Huzzah Conservation Area managed by the Missouri Department of Conservation near Leasburg offers an abundance of outdoor recreation opportunities such as hunting, fishing and hiking. The Department of Conservation also manages many conveniently located river accesses along the Meramec making the river inviting and accessible to all users.

Just a short distance from the doorsteps of millions of Missourians, the Meramec Watershed has become a backyard playground that accommodates a wide variety of recreation pursuits while offering tens of thousands of acres of healthy habitat for fish and wildlife.

To commemorate the river’s 25 years of hard earned freedom numerous events along the Meramec River are planned this summer to recognize some of the miracles and milestones that have led to its renaissance. Participants in these events will learn more about the river’s restoration and the unique character of the natural wonders that survive in and around the Meramec.

- July 26: *A Wade in the Meramec*, Meramec State Park, Sullivan, (573) 468-6072. The Meramec River contains 120 (21 percent) of the 574 native freshwater fish species in North America, including a darter that is only found in the Meramec. Join park staff in a refreshingly wet exploration of the Meramec River from a large gravel bar island.

- July 26: *Watershed Celebration*, Meramec State Park,

Sullivan, at (573) 468-6072. The 7th Annual Meramec River Watershed Celebration is scheduled for Saturday, July 26, 2003 at Meramec State Park. The celebration includes educational programs, exhibits, award presentations and family activities to recognize Stream Team volunteers and greenway supporters’ hard work and dedication over the past year. A special evening program, 6:00-9:00 p.m., “*Meramec-Past, Present & Future*,” this year will include entertainment, refreshments and a program on how a dam was stopped and a river saved. Call 866-983-9900 to register for the evening event

- Aug. 2: *Mussels in the Meramec*, Castlewood State Park, Ballwin, (636) 227-4433.

Freshwater mussels were once numerous and diverse in most rivers in Missouri but now are one of the most threatened animal groups in North America. Freshwater mussel experts will be at one of the gravel bars in the park to show visitors these overlooked animals that clean our streams.

- Aug. 8, “*Meramec*” *Miracles & Milestones-Rebirth of a River*, 6:30 to 9:30 p.m., Powder Valley Conservation Nature Center, Kirkwood. The evening will feature an entertaining program, music, refreshments, exhibits by local & state artists and organizations and the premier of a new Meramec River video. Hear first hand the story of how a river was saved by those who worked tirelessly for years to halt the construction of the Meramec Dam. This event highlights the renaissance of the Meramec as a valued asset for all Missourians. A celebration of the miracles and milestones that have helped to

shape the destiny and the future of this beautiful free flowing stream. Call the Open Space Council at 866-983-9900 for more details or reservations.

- Aug. 8, **Meramec Freedom Canoe Trip**, Meramec State Park, Sullivan, (573) 468-6072. This five-mile interpretive canoe trip will explore the rich natural and cultural history of the Meramec River, including stops at Green's Cave and the proposed Meramec Dam site. Registration is required.

- Aug. 9, **What Could Have Been**, Onondaga Cave State Park, Leasburg, (573) 245-6576. The park will offer half-priced cave tours. The intertwined history of Onondaga Cave and the Meramec dam will be highlighted during the tours. Reservations are recommended.

- Aug. 23, **36th Annual Operation Clean Stream**, contact Pam Tomasovic at (866) 983- 9900 or e-mail her at openspace@accessus.net. The 36th Annual Operation Clean Stream is an event that works to promote clean rivers, anti-littering, river restoration and a higher standard of stewardship of the Meramec River Watershed. Each year nearly 2000 volunteers participate in what has come to be recognized as one of the longest and largest ongoing river restoration projects of its kind in America today. The Open Space Council and Monsanto sponsor the project annually.

- Sept. 19, **Meramec River Expedition**, Greentree Park, Kirkwood, Call the Open Space Council at 866-983-9900. Local businesses and political leaders and conservation enthusiasts are invited to hike, bike or float the Meramec River, from Castlewood State Park to Greentree Park, and learn more about the conservation and outdoor recreation value of the Meramec River Greenway.

For more information about these events, contact the Division of State Parks, Department of Natural Resources at 1-800-334-6946 (voice) or 1-800-379-2419 (Telecommunications Device for the Deaf) or the Open Space Council at (866) 983-9900, openspace@accessus.net. The Sierra Club will also be hosting a series of hikes and floats throughout the months of June and July to celebrate the Meramec River Greenway. For more information please contact the Sierra Club Eastern Missouri Group at (314) 644-0890 or visit www.missouri.sierraclub.org/emg.

MPA Presents Five Awards

Four employees of the Missouri Department of Natural Resources' Division of State Parks received State Park Employee of the Year Awards at the MPA board meeting on February 5, 2003.

In addition, President **Ron Coleman**

presented **Susan Flader** with a special award for her outstanding service as past president of MPA.

Don Fink, natural resource manager at Route 66 State Park, was named field employee of the year. For about six months, Fink stepped in as superintendent at Sam A. Baker State Park, essentially doing two jobs simultaneously and handling them both in a thoroughly professional manner.

Jane Lale, director of the Operations Program, was recognized as outstanding facility head for her work at Lake of the Ozarks State Park. For more than a year, Lale left her job in the central office to run the park after the retirement of the superintendent.

Larry Newman, park maintenance worker at Table Rock State Park, won the award for maintenance/construction employee of the year. Despite a labor shortage, Newman completed several large projects, including construction of a boat launch and picnic area.

Larry Grantham, archaeologist in the Cultural and Natural Resource Management Program, was singled out as the central office employee of the year. In addition to archaeological investigations, he authors and reviews many components of the General Management Plans and serves on several Conceptual Development Plan committees.

MPA chose the award winners from employees who had been nominated by their peers to receive the division's Masterpiece Awards.



l-r Larry Newman, Susan Flader, Don Fink, Jane Lale, Larry Grantham, Ron Coleman

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overhangs around every curve and up every tributary hollow. The river is surrounded by some of the wildest and most scenic hills in the south central United States, with ancient and diverse forests of oak and shortleaf pine, with remnants of bottomland forest and open hillside glades and with abundant wildlife including many species endemic to the Ozarks. The human history of these valleys is likewise of great interest, with an especially strong survival of folkways characteristic of the frontier upland South.

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states, is facing a severe budget crisis. But the cuts to DNR's general revenue (GR) funds have been greater than those of any other department. While DNR depends on relatively little GR (most of DNR's funds are earmarked fees and taxes or federal funds), these vital funds are often used to match federal funds and support innovative approaches to environmental protection. In recent years DNR has used GR funds to develop the Outreach and Assistance Center which includes staff that provide direct assistance and information to citizens, businesses, farmers, schools and local governments. This innovative and proactive approach which helps prevent problems before they occur, could be lost under the current budget cuts. General Revenue also supports DNR's Geological Survey and Resource Assessment Division which is an important part of the department's scientific expertise. DNR's General Revenue was slashed dramatically in this session.

Senate Bill 675 "sweeps" all or part of the balances in many special funds into general revenue. SB 675 did pass and will impact several DNR dedicated funds, including funds that are supposed to be used only for activities related to hazardous waste, air pollution, water pollution and drinking water supplies. The State Parks' funds were spared.

Another bill (SB 248) containing retirement incentives for state employees will impact all of DNR, including the Division of State Parks, because only one in four of the retirees' positions may be re-filled. The division could lose not only many skilled staff but their positions as well.

Threats to Environmental Protection

Many other bills would have rolled back the authority and capability of DNR to protect Missouri's environment. A "no stricter than" bill (HB 215) would have restricted Missouri's ability to develop laws to protect Missouri's unique resources, such our streams, caves, springs and wetlands. Another bill (SB 36) would have imposed extreme new requirements for "risk/benefit" analysis that would virtually paralyze DNR's ability to adopt rules to protect human health or the environment. These two bills would have entangled DNR's rulemaking ability in a hopeless maze of red tape. SB 360 would have allowed unregulated gravel dredging (up to 5,000 tons per year per business) in Missouri's streams.

Many of the worst provisions of these and other bills, including the gravel dredging provisions, were combined into one large bill (HCS SS SCS SB36) which many conservationists dubbed the "Environmental Destruction Act." SB 36 became the primary battleground regarding environmental issues. Amended many times, it was still alive down to the last day of the legislative session. Opponents of the bill in the Senate, led by Minority Leader Ken Jacob, finally killed the bill on the last day.

Threats to State Parks

Some bills posed more direct threats to the State Parks Division. SB 640 would have created a State Historical Monuments, Memorials and Markers Board. This new 12 member board would have put more stress on the staff and budget of the State Parks Division but would only duplicate much of the work of the existing State

Parks Advisory Board. SB 640 died in the Senate Financial & Governmental Organization, Veterans' Affairs and Elections Committee.

Another bill (SB 155) would have added the badly deteriorated Disney Studio in Kansas City to the state parks and historical sites system, but would provide no new funds for restoration, thus diverting potentially millions of dollars from the other state parks. SB 155 was voted "Do Pass" by the Senate Agriculture, Conservation, Parks and Natural Resources Committee, but died in the Senate.

Fish and Wildlife Conservation Jeopardized

Missouri's fish and wildlife conservation programs were also under attack in the General Assembly. When the 1/8 cent Conservation Sales Tax was first passed by the voters in 1976 Missouri ranked near the bottom in conservation programs. Using the sales tax funds, the Department of Conservation (MDC) has acquired valuable habitat from willing sellers for its ecological value and recreational importance to hunters, fishermen, and wildlife watchers. The tax has also supported the construction of heavily used nature centers in our major metropolitan areas.

A bill in the General Assembly (SJR21) would have jeopardized these funds by forcing a public vote on the 1/8 cent Conservation Sales Tax every four years. This would threaten the loss of about three fourths of MDC's funding. The public might be confused and become less willing to vote for renewal of the 1/10 cent Parks and Soils Sales Tax, which must be renewed every ten years. Citizens' resources would be split between defending the two taxes. Another bill (SJR23) would have diverted half of the conservation

tax for non-conservation purposes. Due to strong opposition, neither of these bills passed.

Conclusion: Citizens' Actions are Crucial

Anticipating the need to renew the Parks and Soils Sales Tax, the Missouri Parks Association (MPA) has hired the firm of Madsen and Wright to inform legislators of the needs of the state park and historic sites system and the fundamental role of the 1/10 cent tax. Phil Wright has kept us informed on the activities of the legislature and represented the MPA at hearings on several of these bills of interest. Wright also conducted several conference calls with our legislative committee members. MPA has also been cooperating with a new organization, Missouri Votes Conservation (MVC). Josh Campbell of MVC and Karla Klein of the Sierra Club both worked tirelessly and effectively to represent conservation interests before the General Assembly. MVC will also be developing an environmental scorecard on Missouri legislators to inform voters of their legislators' votes on conservation issues.

While the Division of Parks escaped the worst potential impacts, the retirement incentives bill will put more stress on all parts of DNR including Parks. DNR's environmental programs will lose some dedicated funds. The biggest losers in DNR could be the Outreach and Assistance Center and the Geological Survey and Resource Assessment Division. No doubt most of these ill-considered bills will be introduced again next year. To check on the details of these bills go to the web page of the Missouri General Assembly at <http://www.moga.state.mo.us/> and click on "Joint Bill Tracking."

MPA President's Message

"How do you Spell Relief"

By Ron Coleman, MPA President

I want to first of all thank you for your membership in the Missouri Parks Association and your support for our Missouri Division of State Parks. We have one of the very finest state parks systems in America today. I know, because like you, I have had the opportunity to visit many other states during my travels and our Missouri state parks and historic sites are simply unparalleled in their natural beauty, diversity and quality.

In a time when our state and nation face so many challenges with finances, high energy costs, a sluggish economy, homeland security and a war on terrorism, it is important that we not lose sight of the things in which we can take pride. Our Missouri State Parks are as much an asset today as they are in a period of peace and prosperity. In fact, it is in times like this that our state parks may serve a greater purpose in meeting a real public need.

In a period when gasoline prices are at an all time high and personal budgets tight, long distance travel becomes more complicated and individuals and families are stressed out. It is nice to know that our Missouri State Parks are not only working to protect our states natural and historical resources, but also offering quality affordable outdoor recreation so close to the homes of millions of Missourians.

A value added benefit of our Missouri State Parks is that they provide our citizens, young and old alike, the opportunity for mental and physical refreshment. Largely supported by a 1/10th of one per cent sales tax, our Missouri State Parks system strives in quality fashion to keep our Missouri citizens healthy and in the proper frame of mind. You might actually say that parks spell "relief", and this form of relief in the complicated world that we all must face each day in my opinion is tax dollars well spent!

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From early on Missourians have been drawn to them for their beauty, solitude, and recreational value. Particularly as we saw so much of the rest of our state developed, the Current and Jacks Fork became known for their capacity to restore worn urban spirits. When Missouri began to build its state park system, for example, it was natural that these rivers, and especially the huge springs that fed them would be a focus of attention. Four of Missouri's first state parks were along these rivers: Big Spring in 1924, Round Spring in 1924, Montauk in 1926, and Alley Spring

on the Jacks Fork in 1924. In addition, some of the first large scale purchases of state forest land were made in the vicinity of the Current River; a bit later sizeable tracts of related watershed land were also purchased by the U.S. Forest Service for addition to the National Forest System. Finally, the state's most important acreage of privately owned conservation land, Pioneer Forest, was assembled starting in the 1950's and remains centered squarely on the watersheds of the Current and Jacks Fork.

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In the mid-twentieth century, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers developed plans for large dams on the rivers as part of an overall scheme to control flooding on the lower Mississippi River. These proposals stimulated a very broad and powerful reaction from Missourians. It became apparent that regarding at least this natural resource issue, if on few others, there was a consensus among Missourians: these rivers and their valleys were too wonderful to be dammed, and they should be protected permanently for the benefit of all the people.

The consensus to save the rivers did not extend to agreement about how best to accomplish the goal. There were various and competing plans, but in 1964 Congress passed Public Law 88-492, which created the Ozark National Scenic Riverways. The nation's first federally designated river corridor park, it preceded by four years the 1968 National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, which protected the nearby Eleven Point River and a number of other rivers around the country.

The purpose of the Riverways was for "conserving and interpreting unique scenic and other natural values and objects of historic interest, including preservation of portions of the Current River and the Jacks Fork River in Missouri as free-flowing streams, preservation of springs and caves, management of wildlife, and provisions for use and enjoyment of the outdoor recreation resources thereof by the people of the United States." The Riverways is designated as a unit of the National Park System, with management by the National Park Service (NPS) under the Department of the Interior. As a completely new type of park unit, it was inevitable that the Riverways would present difficulties along the way, as NPS tackled the task of administering this long narrow corridor of precious public land.

Part of the plan for the Riverways was to accept the transfer of state lands along the rivers to the NPS. This never occurred for lands owned by the Department of Conservation, but three of our four state parks in the area, Alley Spring, Big Spring, and Round Spring were transferred into the new national park, which now consists of almost 65,000 acres along 134 miles of both rivers.

MPA has always maintained a strong interest in the condition of these parklands, and indeed in the Riverways as a whole. Many would argue that the Riverways, the largest and most natural unit of the National Park System in Missouri, is also the single most important unit of public land in our state. Unfortunately, there has been very little citizen oversight of the management of the Riverways, at least by MPA or other conservation-oriented groups.

In recent years, it has become apparent that the Riverways and its resources have suffered various

forms of degradation, and also that there has been a general decline in the quality of the outdoor recreation experience.

Among the more serious problems have been:

- Uncontrolled vehicular access to virtually all portions of the Riverways, away from as well as on the rivers themselves. This vehicular intrusion has resulted in soil loss and disruption, reduction and loss of some wildlife habitats, aesthetic degradation, and an almost total loss of significant opportunity for recreational solitude. It has become virtually impossible to find a gravel bar to camp on that is not accessible to four-wheel-drive and off-road vehicles. Many of these former canoe camping spaces have now been actually designated by The Park Service as "primitive campgrounds" for automobiles and pickup trucks. All of these impacts are contrary to the purposes for which the Riverways was originally established.
- Failure to defend or enforce protective provisions on property easements purchased by the tax payers, which were intended to protect key public resources on the Riverways, including scenery and aesthetics. As these easements have been neglected or ignored, private developments have increasingly intruded upon the scenery and solitude of the rivers, further degrading the resource, as well as the visitors' experience of the resource.
- Failure to define or enforce any reasonable regulations on the sometimes huge numbers of equestrian users in and on the rivers. Although most conservationists would acknowledge equestrian recreation as a valid use of the Riverways, the lack of reasonable limits on the numbers of such users has resulted in aggravated general resource damage, plus seasonal severe problems of water quality due to the large amounts of animal waste going directly into the rivers during periods of concentrated use.
- Other problems have included overcrowding, oversized motor and jet boats, excessive site development and site development design far below acceptable standards, and a general lack of will and energy on the part of at least some staff in protecting Park resources.

All of these problems are related to a failure to administer the Riverways up to the standards that apply to other units of the National Park System. Around the country, NPS has a generally good record, backed up by effective policies for resource protection; but for reasons sometimes beyond its control, it seems to have been unable to fully apply those policies at the Riverways.

In light of these developments the Missouri Parks Association is compelled to become more involved in the review of issues that affect the Riverways. We want to do so in a constructive manner, recognizing the dedicated efforts of many of the NPS staff, and in particular to encourage the fresh spirit which we

Annual Meeting To Be Along Current River At Montauk State Park

By Greg Iffrig

For centuries the fast-flowing, spring-fed water of the Current River has attracted visitors. They come for its beauty and to float, fish, and recreate in the river's wonderful natural setting. This fall our annual meeting centers on the headwaters of the Current River at Montauk State Park, situated along our nation's first national river park, the Ozark National Scenic Riverways, and within one of the finest and oldest of our Missouri state parks. In this setting, members of the Missouri Parks Association will have ample opportunities to see and discuss park issues on a broad front.

This park's 1353 acres capture the scenic valley of Montauk Spring as well as the beginning of the Current River, including the 40-acre Montauk Forest Natural Area, several foot-trails, a dining lodge, cabins, a campground, and a number of remnants of the earliest park construction.

Montauk was acquired as a state park in 1926. From 1933 until 1936, the Veteran Company 1770 of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) assisted in the development of this park. We will be able to see

firsthand the rustic architecture" in the Old Stone Shelterhouse, the Raceway Bridge, and the Spillway. The latter is a showpiece of stone masonry work. Each of these structures is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

This year's annual meeting, October 17-19, will bring each of us up-to-date on all of the issues facing our Missouri State Park System. Joining us will be many of the state park staff, including our long-standing tradition of hearing a 'State of the Parks' Report from State Park Director Doug Eiken. We will also have with us the new Superintendent of the Ozark National Scenic Riverways, Mr. Noel Poe. One of our special guests will be Mr. C.W. Gusewelle, a respected and honored writer and editor for the *Kansas City Star*. Among his many works, his latest documentary is "Water and Fire: A Story of the Ozarks." Mr. Guswelle will be our speaker for Saturday evening.

Our meeting will begin on Friday, and for those who can arrive early we are working to arrange a float on the Current River. Saturday's agenda will include an address by

Mr. Noel Poe along with our customary panels on the most important park issues. Saturday afternoon will focus on field trips within the park to see firsthand the management and the resources. For both the panel discussion and the field trips we are planning to integrate state and national park staff. Sunday morning will feature the Annual Meeting of the membership and election of new board members. The Annual Meeting will be followed immediately by a meeting of the Board of Directors, including the election of officers and a business meeting. All MPA members are encouraged to attend each of these meetings.

You can make your own room reservations. We have reserved a number of the parks' cabins and motel rooms, but you will need to call early in order to reserve one. To do that you must call the park's reservation line for rooms at 1.573.548.2434. Our weekend rate is \$55 per night for two, and \$63 for four.

Camping in the Campground.

You also may wish to camp in the campground, and there are both basic and electric sites. The basic sites are \$8 per night and are available on a 'first-come first-served' basis. We are told that these sites are the most likely to be available for those coming in without reservations. Advance reservations can be made for electric sites in the campground by calling 1.871.422.6766. Basic sites are \$14 per night and to reserve one for the weekend you will need to reserve two nights; the reservation fee is \$8.50 for each site.

So, mark your calendars now and plan to attend! More details will follow in the summer newsletter. We look forward to seeing you at Montauk!

detect from the newly installed management team at the Riverways. A new ad-hoc alliance of conservation organizations and individuals, the Friends of Ozark Riverways (FOR), is in the process of being formed, and we may decide to affiliate with this new group.

Since there is no better way to understand resource issues than to experience them at first hand, we are planning to convene our annual meeting this fall at Montauk State Park, at the headwaters of the Current River. We hope to be joined there by officials of the National Park Service, as well as by state park staff, as we reacquaint ourselves with these classic Missouri outdoor treasures.

The Missouri State Park System, always the primary focus of our concerns, was in part born in the valleys of the Current and Jacks Fork Rivers. Part of that legacy has now been recognized as of national importance by inclusion in the National Park System as part of the Riverways. It is time for us to revive and nurture MPA's natural linkage with these superlative rivers that are our heritage, and the heritage of all Missourians.

Popular UPOP Project Introduces Youth To Parks And Historic Sites

Kids in the core of Missouri cities can grow up and never experience or know about our state parks and historic sites— and Missouri has one of the top park systems in the nation! That's really sad!

Two years ago, the Missouri Parks Association established a pilot project — the Urban Populations Outreach Project. The "UPOP" program was launched in the summer of 2000 in Kansas City, working through agencies, which serve lower-income, urban populations. It was an immediate smashing success. Over the past three years, the program has provided 35 field trips for more than 1,300 urban youth; giving more than 8,500 contact hours of historical and environmental education — and the thrill of experiencing our beautiful state parks and historic sites for the first time in these kids' entire lives!

Last summer, the program expanded to St. Louis kids. Sponsored trips gave more than 200 St. Louis children their first experience outside an urban environment to experience first

hand the "tonic of wildness". Dedicated staff facilitated cultural exchange, helping children feel secure so they can connect with nature and feel the healing peace that pristine beauty offers. The desire to conserve, protect, make wise choices, keep the balance of nature and create harmonious relationships went home with them.

This year in St. Louis, each week a different group of about 30 children from social service programs will visit the Green Center for themed activities relating to wetlands, prairies or woods. Later that same week, they will visit a state park like Babler or Meramec State Park or a historic site like Mastodon State Historic Site to pursue activities targeted to deepen their understanding of the chosen theme.

In Kansas City, kids will visit Camp Pin Oak at Lake of the Ozarks State Park for an overnight camping trip. They will take part in scavenger hunts of area insects, reptiles and plants, create nature terrariums, tie-dye T-shirts, and

roast s'mores, banana boats and other delights. Others will visit Watkins Mill State Historic Site to tour the 19th Century mill, Watkins family house, heirloom garden, schoolhouse and museum. Staff dressed in 19th Century garb will coordinate old-fashioned games and demonstrate daily chores and school life. Naturalists will guide them on the hiking trail, teach about park ecosystems and identify native tree and birds. The group will then swim and have fun at the lake beach.

These are only examples of the activities planned. Most costs associated with the program are paid by MPA through special gifts from members. The rest comes from individuals, corporations and foundations interested in helping make a positive impact on the lives of our cities' youth.

UPOP has proven to be a great success. All gifts are fully tax deductible and the special gift support from MPA members for this innovative program is vital to its continuance.



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