

Big Summer In State Parks!

State Parks have experienced an extraordinarily big summer, headlined by the presence of 1,000 Youth Corps workers in the parks, a governor who has visited 64 parks and historic sites so far this year alone, a whole series of special events, and some devastating losses to severe weather—all superbly managed on a constricted budget by a permanent staff greatly reduced in size from a year ago.

The State Park Youth Corps (SPYC) workers in their green t-shirts and tan "Think Outside" hats, could hardly be missed by visitors to state parks this summer. They were in virtually every park, building and repairing trails, painting buildings, removing invasive

species, leading tours, assisting in offices and visitor centers, mowing lawns. The young people aged 17-24, a third of them in high school, a fourth in college, and the rest recently out of school, but nearly all otherwise unemployed, were paid \$7.25 per hour minimum wage for six weeks (some extended to twelve weeks) to work in parks near home. Collectively they blazed and signed more than 660 miles of trail in 58 parks, spread more than 1,500 gallons of paint, and reroofed more than 25 structures.

Reminiscent of the Civilian Conservation Corps of the Depression '30s, the SPYC combined some \$3.3 million in federal stimu-

lus funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act with recruitment and counseling through regional centers of the state Department of Economic Development and supervision, materials and equipment from the park division. The program, brainchild of Governor and Mrs. Nixon and state park director Bill Bryan, earned top honors from the National Association of State Park Directors at its meeting in Santa Fe, when on September 9 it was granted the President's Award for "an extraordinary contribution . . . furthering the goals of a state park system."

Special anniversaries and other events abounded this summer, many of them attended by the governor,

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Governor Nixon congratulates youth corps workers on their efforts to reroof five cabins at Camp Pin Oak, Lake of the Ozarks State Park.

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who by September 11 had visited 64 different parks and historic sites in less than a year—he hopes to complete visits to all 85 yet this year. One of the most eagerly anticipated was the grand opening on May 22 of the new Johnson's Shut-ins, where MPA will hold its annual meeting October 22-24. Also in May was the 20th anniversary of the Katy Trail. There were four major Mark Twain anniversaries this year—the 175th anniversary of his birth, 100th of his death, 125th of the publication of *Huckleberry Finn*, and the 50th of the dedication of the futuristic Mark Twain birthplace "shrine," all celebrated September 4 at Mark Twain Birthplace State Historic Site.

A week later the Pershing Boyhood Home SHS in Lamar celebrated the 150th anniversary of General John J. Pershing's birth, complete with a military band and visiting dignitaries from six nations. This was on top of countless other annual special events at nearly every park. There were also anniversaries of several organizations with which MPA works, including the 75th anniversary of the Conservation Federation of Missouri and the 40th of the Missouri Rural Crisis Center. Still to come is the national Natural Areas Conference, hosted by the park division October 26-29 at Lake of the Ozarks.

For all the celebration, the summer also saw more than its share of devastation. Heavy rains in north Missouri during June and July led to 29—and possibly 9 additional—counties being declared federal disaster areas. Most parks in the area sustained damage, but none more than Big Lake along the Missouri River in Holt County, which was almost entirely inundated, in-



Booker Rucker relives the good old days with 101-year-old Ralph Gregory, the first site administrator at Mark Twain Birthplace State Historic Site, as Mark Twain looks on during the centennial of his death and the 50th anniversary of the historic site.

cluding its campground, cabins, motel, dining lodge and store, when a nearby levee gave way. The park division made cleanup, repair, and rebuilding of the park a priority, and by Labor Day weekend enough work was completed to reopen to the public (up to 75 percent of certain repair costs will likely be eligible for federal disaster reimbursement). The Ted and Pat Jones Confluence Point State Park was underwater and closed to the public most of the summer, but reopened in mid-September. And of course there is always some damage along the Katy Trail when the water is high, as it was again this summer.

This year the park division began a policy of weekly news releases announcing the closure of state park

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AGO Youth: The America's Great Outdoors youth listening session in the St. Louis region.

Park Funding: The Federal Connection

Park supporters saw a glimmer of hope this summer for possible federal help in funding capital improvements in state parks in the form of a bill that would provide full funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF).

The LWCF was authorized by Congress in 1965, at a time of burgeoning post-war recreational demand. It was recognized that this demand could best be met by a system of national, state, and local parks and other open space and heritage areas, so 60 percent of the total appropriation each year was to be distributed to states for one-to-one matching grants to state and local agencies, in order to make recreational opportunities more available where people live.

This fund provided for the second great renaissance of Missouri state parks during the 1960s and '70s—the first having been the Civilian Conservation Corps program during the Great Depression in the 1930s. LWCF funds helped the state to purchase ten new parks and to accept donations and develop facilities in others that it would otherwise not have been able to develop—parks like Rock Bridge, Onondaga, Towosahgy, Ha Ha Tonka, Castlewood, and Lake of the Ozarks.

By the late 1970s the fund was authorized at \$900 million per year, using proceeds from oil and gas leasing on the outer continental shelf, but only once (in 1979) did Congress actually appropriate the full amount. In the early 1980s appropriations were zeroed out, and when they resumed later that decade they were at such a low level—considerably less than \$1 million per year for Missouri—that the state decided to pass all LWCF funds through to local governments; state parks at the time had nearly \$60 million from the Third State Building Fund for capital improvements.

Ever since the 1980s, full funding of the LWCF has been a dream of park supporters nationwide. It became something more than a dream when the Obama administration launched its America's Great Outdoors Initiative in April—designed to encourage agencies and organizations at all levels to develop programs to encourage outdoor recreation, especially for young people. Full funding of LWCF was included in an energy bill (the CLEAR bill) that passed the House just before the August recess. In this highly political season, the bill has yet to be taken up by the Senate, but action could come at any time.

The joker in the bill was the failure to specify that at least half the appropriations be directed to state and local governments through the state assistance program. Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar apparently asked that such an amendment be withdrawn, in effect saying "trust us" to provide for the states. But the record in fact shows a declining percentage of LWCF appropriations being directed to states, down to 16 percent last year, and organizations

such as the National Association of State Park Directors and the National Recreation and Park Association are trying to get such an amendment included in the Senate.

When Interior Secretary Salazar and National Park Service Director Jon Jarvis came to St. Louis August 20 for an America's Great Outdoors "listening session," MPA advocated for full funding of LWCF with half directed to the state assistance program. Such a measure could mean up to \$8 million per year for Missouri, which over time could make a significant dent in the park division's \$200 million backlog of deferred capital improvements or maybe even help to buffer some of our parks from mounting threats, as well as provide more help to local park systems. The state side of LWCF has been a wonderful program, because it requires proper planning and one-to-one matching funds, thereby doubling the federal investment, and it provides access to outdoor recreation where people live. It has been particularly important to states like Missouri that have large populations but relatively few national parks.

What You Can Do

Submit a comment to the America's Great Outdoors website by September 30, noting the importance of the Land and Water Conservation Fund, supporting full funding, and asking that half the appropriations be directed to the State Assistance Program: <http://www.doi.gov/americasgreatoutdoors/>. Click on the link to "submit your ideas and join the conversation." You will then have to choose from one of four links, any one of which could be relevant to LWCF.

Call, write, or submit on-line comments to Senators Claire McCaskill and Christopher Bond, your U.S. representative, and candidates for the U.S. Senate and House. Better still, talk with them at voter forums or any other venues in this critical election season.

Also, write or talk with your state legislators and candidates for election to the Missouri General Assembly about the funding crisis in state parks. For more information, check the MPA website: <http://parks.missouri.org>. State-level officials won't be able to do anything about LWCF, but it is critical to alert them to the funding crisis in state parks and ask them to support measures for parks in the state legislature. Ask them to include state parks in any state bond issue for capital improvements.



Swimmers revel amid the rocks at the reborn Johnson's Shut-ins, site of MPA's October 22-24 annual meeting.

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swimming beaches that tested high for E. coli, and there were always some beaches closed, usually related to rain events in the vicinity that brought sewage and agricultural run-off to park waters. The first weekend without a single beach closure owing to E. coli was September 10-11, but that was likely because most park beaches were closed for the year following the Labor Day weekend, so testing was not done. Attorney General Koster hosted a workshop on water quality problems at Lake of the Ozarks this summer, and Gov-

ernor Nixon announced that some \$28 million in federal funds will be available over the next five years to promote voluntary conservation practices on agricultural lands in 59 Missouri watersheds as part of the Mississippi River Basin Initiative, but it remains to be seen whether the frequency of state park beach closures will decline in the coming years.

Probably the most devastating event in state parks this summer was the complete loss of the historic CCC

dining lodge at Camp Pin Oak in Lake of the Ozarks State Park, which burned to the ground during a thunderstorm the night of September 3. The lodge was considered one of finest examples of Civilian Conservation Corps architecture in the park system, and it is fondly remembered by generations of Girl Scouts who camped there every year from its opening in 1938



Tom and Huck (of the State Park Youth Corps) scrape and paint a fence at Felix Valle House State Historic Site in Ste. Genevieve.

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until 2004. At a special event near the charred remains on September 10, Governor Nixon pledged that the lodge will be rebuilt and also that the State Park Youth Corps, which reroofed at least five cabins at Camp Pin Oak this summer, will be continued next year, though funds have yet to be identified.

In spite of all the rain this summer, which generally reduces park attendance, it is likely that attendance will at least equal that of 2009, which was up six percent

from the previous year. Also of note, this summer set an all-time record for the number of visitors contacted directly by park interpreters, despite the loss of a number of interpreters in the major economy-induced staff reduction last October. And, for what it is worth, the top three vote-getters for Best State Park in the Midwest among readers of AAA's *Midwest Traveler* magazine were all in Missouri: Table Rock, Lake of the Ozarks, and Ha Ha Tonka.



Governor Nixon and acting DNR Director Kip Stetzler view the charred remains of the historic CCC dining lodge at Camp Pin Oak as youth corps workers look on. The governor pledged to rebuild the lodge and to continue the youth corps next summer.



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MPA To Meet At Johnson's Shut-Ins*

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