

State Park Threats Revisited

At Johnson's Shut-ins, a park rebuilt at a cost of more than \$130 million after it was gutted by raging waters from the collapse of the Taum Sauk Reservoir on nearby Proffit Mountain, the Missouri Parks Association revisited the perennial and mounting problem of threats to the parks at its annual meeting in October.

The last comprehensive study of threats to the parks, published in 1992, identified 92 categories of threats to parks and historic sites, of which soil erosion was number one. In an informal 2009 analysis of natural resource management plans prepared for individual parks in the interim since 1992, as reported by John Cunning, park division chief of natural resource management and interpretation, ecosystem degradation emerged as the top threat. This has led to a restated goal: to preserve the native landscape for the long-term viability of its natural communities and features.

The situation is similar with respect to cultural resources in parks as well as at historic sites. Deterioration of historic fabric and loss of historic structures headed the list in 1992 and it is still of ma-

ior concern. Cultural resource management plans are now being developed for all parks, and significant advances have been made in the area of collections manage-

study in the field and public meetings around the state. Missouri's state parks contain the best, most representative samples of many Missouri ecosystem types, he said,



MPA members on field trip to Horseshoe Glade at Johnson's Shut-Ins State Park.

ment. The park division has just completed the relocation of the State Museum's collections storage from the basement of the capitol into a totally renovated and environmentally safe warehouse facility in Jefferson City and has developed a new archaeological curation facility for the whole system at Rock Bridge State Park.

Paul Nelson, ecologist on the staff of the Mark Twain National Forest, who oversaw the original

but they are threatened by homogenization owing to fragmentation, invasion of exotic species, and urban expansion.

There are more than 800 introduced plant species in Missouri, dozens of which are major invasives. Japanese honeysuckle, for example, was scarcely noted in the state as recently as four decades ago but may be found everywhere now, competing with and choking out many of our native species. Urban sprawl in the vicinity of many of our parks exacerbates the problem and makes it more difficult—and expensive—to buffer them from the burgeoning threats. Meanwhile, animals such as feral hogs, released in the woods presumably by people who enjoy hunting them, and even deer, a native species, are also multiplying

Annual Meeting at Battle of Lexington

Plan now to attend the MPA 2011 annual meeting at Battle of Lexington State Historic Site to commemorate the sesquicentennial of the September 1861 battle and the start of five years of Civil War events. Final arrangements for the MPA meeting are pending; in the meantime, hold open the weekends of September 16-18 and 23-25. Stay tuned for further details.

threats study in 1992, made the case for a new comprehensive study of threats to the parks, including

Q & A with Finger Lakes Superintendent Debbie Newby

Where did you grow up, and how did you get interested in the outdoors?

I grew up in the inner city of Little Rock, Arkansas. I became familiar with the outdoors through an inner city youth summer camp. The program was designed to bring under-privileged children out of the city each summer and into the outdoors for one week to learn outdoor living skills. I started the program at age 8 and continued until high school when I got my first job at the same camp. At that time I knew I wanted to work in the outdoors. I attended college at Central Methodist College in Fayette MO on a basketball and track scholarship and received a degree in Recreational Administration.

Why do you think the Missouri outdoors are special?

Missouri is special because there is something different in every part of the state. With the Ozarks hills in the south and the prairie land in the west, Missouri State Parks offer many different experiences that you can enjoy. What I love the most are the many different trails that take you through the varied areas within each park.

My favorite outdoor spot in Missouri is Hawn State Park with its pine forest. I love hiking in the woods where you can see for a distance, which makes hiking in the woods during the fall a great time to be outdoors any place in Missouri.

What's your favorite personal story about the Missouri outdoors?

One year, we hosted the third annual Shakespeare's Pizza Adventure Challenge here at Finger Lakes State Park. The event consisted of a paddle, bike and run. I entered the race but had never been in a one-man open kayak before. The race started out with the 3-mile paddle portion in a kayak. As the group started I found myself falling further and further back in the pack. By the time I had completed the paddle section I was in last place, though I did not know this at the time. I started the bike section of the event and began to pass a few people. I was feeling good. It was so beautiful moving through the off-road vehicle trails on a bike. I completed the bike section and was off to the run part. I once again began to pass a number of people. At this point I was thinking what a beautiful area was this place we called the Moon (it looks just like the surface of the moon). This was where the Peabody Coal Company had piled the overburden high, leaving large bodies of water with tall, bare mounds of soil. After completing the run I found out that I had placed second in the event. The

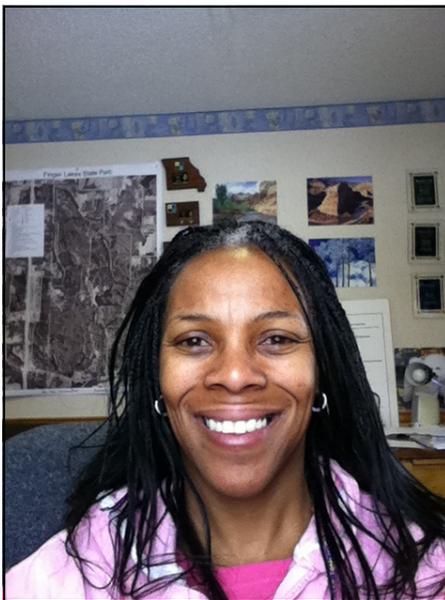
Moon is one of my favorite spots in the park. You can get to it by water or land.

With an ORV park, you have to balance a lot of things—access, impact to the environment—how do you accomplish this?

With any state park there are many things that you have to balance. I find enjoyment in the efforts we put in as a staff to educate people about the history of the park and why it is here. I am encouraged when I have to remind visitors that the last 20 years have produced less impact to the land than the years prior. Peabody Coal Company removed more than 1.2 million tons of coal from this site from 1964-1967, which is what makes this park attractive to off-road riders today. I like to tell people that it is very beneficial to have a facility that allows off-road riding; it reduces the impact on areas where we don't want ORVs to be. We would much rather have people ride here than trespass on places like Rock Bridge State Park and other sensitive areas. The most challenging part of my job is keeping up with the funding challenges to operate the park. We are doing much more with less, like so many other parks are doing.

What do you think every kid should have a chance to experience in the outdoors?

Every kid should experience time in the woods on a nice cool fall afternoon or an evening under the stars.



Debbie Newby

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and causing significant damage to park landscapes.

In discussion of the issue, MPA members agreed that the threats are indeed sobering but that Missouri, recognized nationwide as an exemplar of superb natural resource management in parks and other public lands, has a responsibility to be a leader in dealing with these problems.

State Park Director Bill Bryan concluded his annual "State of the Parks" address at Johnson's Shut-ins with a "20/20" vision for dealing with the threats and other problems facing the park system and moving confidently toward the future. By the year 2020, he said, state parks will see an increase in annual visitation to 20 million, up from about 17 million in recent years, and an increase in annual revenue by \$20 million. As part of its effort to attract more visitors and provide even more value, the park division has just inaugurated a newly revamped website: <http://mostateparks.com>. Check it out.

State Park Funding Effort Continues

Efforts to secure better funding for the state park system continue along several channels, including three different bills in the current session of the Missouri General Assembly: a bond issue for capital improvements, a bill relating to the State Park Earnings Fund, and a resolution regarding the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund.

A concurrent resolution for capital improvements for higher education with up to \$250 million for other state agencies has again been introduced by Representative Chris Kelly of Columbia, this year as HJR 9. Such a measure passed the House in 2009 and reached the floor of the Senate before being filibustered in the closing days of the session. Last year, Kelly secured more than fifty co-sponsors of the measure from both parties, but the speaker of the house refused even to assign it to a committee for hearing.

This year, after some delay, the bill has been assigned to the House Higher Education Committee, where it likely will be heard in early March. Although the bill was introduced in the same form as amended by the Senate Appropriations Committee two years ago, without specific reference to parks, MPA is seeking and Rep. Kelly has said he will support an amendment to specify ten percent of the total bond issue (\$80-100 million) for parks, the same percentage as state parks received from the Third State Building Fund of the mid-1980s, which this new bond fund would replace. A slide presentation on the park funding problem by MPA president Susan Flader to the House Committee on Tourism and Natural Resources in mid February occasioned considerable committee discussion and support for asking the speaker to assign the measure to committee.

A measure concerning the Park Earnings Fund, introduced by Rep. Don Ruzicka, chair of the Tourism and Natural Resources Committee, has already been heard by the committee and voted "Do Pass." It was amended to HB 89, a priority bill to extend DNR water permit fees, and in that form will likely soon reach the floor of the House. The measure provides that the interest on moneys collected from campground fees and other concessions and deposited in the Park Earnings Fund remain in the fund to be used for park purposes, instead of being swept to state general revenue (from which parks do not benefit). The amount in most years is expected to be less than \$100,000, but many legislators—and MPA as well—regard it as a matter of simple fairness as well as obvious need for the fund to retain its own earnings.

Another measure, HCR 31, introduced by Rep. Steve Cookson, calls on Congress to allocate at least 40

percent of the total appropriation each year be distributed to states for one-to-one matching grants for state and local projects to provide outdoor recreation where people live. But that intent was subsequently lost, and recently as little as 6-8 percent of the annual appropriation has gone to states, the rest being retained to help fund federal agencies.

Missouri benefited enormously from the LWCF in the early years, for a total of some \$85 million, but state assistance funds diminished to such a trickle by the 1980s that there was virtually none available for state parks. President Obama called for full funding of LWCF at its authorized level of \$900 million per year at a ceremony in late February issuing the report on his America's Great Outdoors initiative. Such appropriations with 40 percent for state and local programs could help significantly with Missouri's \$200 million backlog

of vitally needed state park improvements. But meanwhile, the U.S. House of Representatives approved a spending measure that zeroes out the state assistance program. Stay tuned.

In other funding news, the governor has announced that the highly successful State Park Youth Corps, initiated last year and feted with the President's Award of the National Association of State Park Directors, will continue this coming summer. It provides jobs in the parks for youths 17-21 years of age from April 1 through November 30 in a partnership between state parks, the Missouri Division of Workforce Development, and local Work-

force Investment Boards. The park division is holding a series of Youth Corps job fairs in March at parks such as Roaring River, Meramec, and Johnson's Shut-ins to explain the program to interested youths.

What You Can Do

Take every opportunity to talk with your state representative and senator about the park funding problem and ask especially for their support of the bond issue (HJR 9) for state parks and other state facilities.

Call, write, or submit on-line comments to Senators Claire McCaskill and Roy Blunt and your U.S. representative, asking them to support designation of 40 percent of appropriations from the Land and Water Conservation Fund for the State Assistance Program.

Respond immediately to email alerts from MPA regarding specific measures in the Missouri General Assembly that may require your expressing your views to your state representative and senator during the remainder of the legislative session. If you have not been getting email alerts from MPA, please send your email address to gfreeman46@gmail.com asking to be added to his MPA list.

percent of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) to the State Assistance Program for state and local park projects. The bill had not yet been assigned to committee when *Heritage* went to press. When Con-

Sara Parker-Pauley Takes the Helm of DNR

Sara Parker-Pauley won confirmation by unanimous consent of the Missouri Senate February 10 as the new director of the Missouri Department of Natural Resources. While this may seem ho-hum, there has been nothing normal about treatment of the MDNR and its leaders in recent years by some in the General Assembly who have sought to constrain the agency's regulatory functions by stripping it of budget and staff, so her confirmation was by no means a foregone conclusion. It is, rather, a testament to her multi-faceted qualifications for the job and the superb communication skills she demonstrated since her appointment by Governor Nixon in December.

Chosen after a nationwide search by a panel of leaders in business, agriculture, conservation, education and other fields, Pauley, 45, is a native of Missouri and a former deputy director of DNR who served as acting director for a few months at the end of the Holden administration. She grew up in Columbia and earned journalism and law degrees from the University of Missouri before working at various times for the Department of Conservation,



DNR Director Sara Parker-Pauley

as chief of staff to former Missouri House Speaker Steve Gaw, as director of conservation programs for the American National Fish and Wildlife Museum in Springfield, as executive vice president of a distributed power company, and as a project manager for a natural resources communications firm.

She will need to call on all her experience and skills in her new position, especially her knowledge of DNR and where it fits—or could fit—in the environmental and political landscape of Missouri. She replaces Mark Templeton, who resigned in August after a difficult tenure at the helm of DNR to take a position overseeing payments from the trust fund for those affected by the Gulf oil spill, and Kip Stelzer, who served as acting director in the interim before her appointment.

In discussion with the MPA board of directors at its January meeting, she noted the dilemma of a besieged agency, 70 percent of the budget of which actually passes through to communities, something that is not understood by the public

or even by many legislators. Nor do many appreciate the positive economic impact of parks and the need to maintain park infrastructure in order to secure those benefits. It is clear that communication of the varied roles of DNR as well as improving its functioning will be major pre-occupations of the new director. MPA has pledged to work with her and wishes her success.



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