A new plan to save the Current River

A defining moment for the Ozarks
Nestled in the Ozark hills, the sparkling Current River is often called Missouri’s river jewel. But last year, the Current was deemed one of the nation’s 10 most endangered waterways—and sadly, it’s not difficult to see why.

The Current is now threatened by a growing number of roads and torn-up trails, which contribute to the deteriorating water quality and threaten hundreds of native species found few other places in the world, including the endangered Ozark Hellbender.

Thankfully, the National Park Service is poised to release a new management plan that will guide the park for decades to come. In the weeks and months ahead, Environment Missouri will press the agency to adopt a strong, forward-looking plan that will protect the Current for the next 20 years.

A stunning beauty at risk
The Current and the Jacks Fork make up the Ozark National Scenic Riverways, Missouri’s largest national park. And it’s no wonder this was the country’s first national park established to protect wild rivers. But unfortunately, to date, the Park Service has not addressed the many illegal or unauthorized trails and roads that threaten the park.

It’s time for reform
Environment Missouri is bringing citizens and leaders together to urge the Park Service to come out with a bold new plan that addresses the proliferation of illegal roads and trails, among other problems. So far, our coalition has mobilized more than 5,000 Missourians to tell park officials to get it right. We’ve held media events in Columbia and St. Louis, and are making our case in the opinion pages. Our staff has also met with Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, National Park Service Director Jonathan Jarvis, and park officials in Missouri to urge swift action.

“A strong new plan can restore the Current River and chart a new course for the next 20 years,” said Ted Mathys, Environment Missouri advocate.

Runoff from unauthorized roads and trails contributes to the Current River’s deterioration.

Visitors to Big Spring, a tributary of the Current River.

To read more about our plan to restore the Current, visit our website at: www.EnvironmentMissouri.org.

more online
Anyone who has floated the Current River or marveled at Big Spring knows that the Ozark National Scenic Riverways are some of our state's best scenery. So as the National Park Service draws up their new plan to manage the Riverways for the next 20 years, my staff and I are redoubling our efforts to get them to address longstanding degradation.

It's been a joy to see so many Environment Missouri members join us in the fight, including the thousands who have contacted the Park Service. And with your support, we've hired a new State Field Associate, Sarah MacFarland, who will help see this critical campaign through to the finish in 2012.

There's still much work to be done to protect the places we hold dear. But I'm proud of what we've already accomplished together. I hope you are too.

Sincerely,

Ted Mathys
Advocate

Local foods initiative gaining steam

The food we eat is one of our closest connections to the natural world. So it follows that farms should be environmentally friendly and provide food that is safe and healthy. Unfortunately, here in Missouri, where agriculture is an $8 billion industry, factory farms account for much of the agricultural pollution that fouls our water, contaminates our air and degrades our soil.

In the weeks and months ahead, Environment Missouri will be working to change the way we bring food to the table. In particular, one of our top legislative priorities this year is to introduce a bill that supports a local “food hub” distribution infrastructure, which would help small farmers get their clean, healthy produce into more venues. We’ll be in Jefferson City this winter, working with lawmakers to shape this legislation and push it past the finish line.

Defeating attacks on Missouri’s waters

In 2011, as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency forged ahead with new rules to protect Missouri’s waters, lobbyists for mining companies, developers and Big Ag lined the halls of Congress, pushing for rollbacks that would block the EPA from implementing these new safeguards.

Fortunately, at the time of press, Environment Missouri and our national federation have successfully blocked these attacks by harnessing the power of public support. Our activists here and across the country sent in 170,000 supportive comments to the EPA, helping to ensure the agency has the broad support it needs to move forward with strong new protections for our waterways. With the Senate rejecting several of the worst proposals last fall, the tide may be starting to turn.
With the public’s attention focused on the economy, anti-environmental extremists in Congress have quietly launched an all-out attack on the laws that protect the air we breathe.

The reckless assault includes attempts to roll back existing protections against smog, soot, mercury, and other toxic air pollutants from power plants, and efforts to block the Environmental Protection Agency from updating critical air pollution standards.

But through it all, Environment Missouri and our national federation mobilized the public against the polluters. And our efforts are paying off—in December the EPA finalized the first-ever nationwide standards for mercury and air toxics from power plants. The new standards will cut limits for mercury and air toxics from power plants, and efforts to block the Environmental Protection Agency from updating critical air pollution standards.

Corporate scare tactics
The dirty coal lobby is using a media blitz and scare tactics to convince the public and Congress to oppose the EPA’s key public health protections. But the coal lobby’s assertion that these measures are too costly simply isn’t true. For every dollar invested in reducing power plant pollution, the American public and businesses reap $13 in health and economic benefits.

More important, the new clean air standards are literally life saving measures. In Missouri, 134,000 children suffer from asthma, and nearly 500 heart attacks were caused by air pollution last year.

Strong standards for soot and smog could save up to 12,000 lives and prevent up to 58,000 asthma attacks annually.

Missouri’s dirtiest power plants
With a series of in-depth reports and media events, we’re waging a counteroffensive for clean air by exposing the harm that coal-fired power plants are causing Missourians.

In September, we released a report revealing that St. Louis ranks as the nation’s seventh smoggiest city and detailing the health risks that accompany that title, including increased asthma attacks and exacerbated respiratory illnesses.

Then, in November, our report on mercury and other toxic emissions found that Missouri’s power plants emit more mercury pollution than those in 46 other states. In particular, Ameren’s plant in Labadie emits the second most mercury pollution of any power plant in the country. Both reports were covered in major media outlets, such as KMOV Channel 4, KSDK Channel 5, and St. Louis Public Radio.

Mobilizing Missourians for clean air
We’re mobilizing our activists to contact Sens. Claire McCaskill and Roy Blunt, urging them to protect public health. We’re also organizing community leaders to make a pledge to stand with the EPA on clean air policies. Already, leaders across the state have taken the clean air promise.

We’ll continue to expose these attacks and mobilize public support so our decision-makers will stand up for clean air.

Mercury quick facts

- One in 10 women has enough mercury in her bloodstream to endanger her baby, should she become pregnant.
- Ameren’s power plant in Labadie emitted 1,527 pounds of mercury in a single year, making it the second worst mercury polluter nationwide.
- The new mercury rule is expected to save 11,000 lives each year.

Environment Missouri’s national federation, Environment America, tracks votes in Congress and makes the information available to the public quickly through an interactive online scorecard. Visit www.EnvironmentAmerica.org/scorecard to see how your members of Congress are voting.

In 2011, Representative Emanuel Cleaver, II (Kansas City) voted for the environment 100 percent of the time, according to Environment Missouri’s Congressional scorecard.

At time of press, Rep. Cleaver had cast a pro-environment vote on every one of the more than 40 key environmental roll call votes that we tracked during 2011, from voting to preserve energy efficiency funding to standing up against attacks on our clean air and clean water laws.

The fourth term Congressman from Kansas City has also been a driving force behind that city’s “Green Impact Zone”—an initiative to direct federal stimulus funding to a struggling Kansas City neighborhood with the goal of weatherizing every home that needs it, improving mass transit, and putting people to work.

“At a time when Congress is undertaking an all-out assault on our environment and public health protections, it is more important than ever that the public understands who the real champions are and who are the natural disasters for environmental protection,” said Ted Mathys, Environment Missouri advocate. “We applaud Congressman Cleaver for his leadership and commitment to the environment.”
New protections won for state parks

Last year, Environment Missouri and our allies won protections for the State Parks Earnings Fund, a cornerstone funding source for the Katy Trail, Ha Ha Tonka, and the rest of our renowned state parks. At a time when our state parks face $200 million in critically-needed repairs, this was a crucial step.

The bill prevents the parks’ funds from being swept away into regular state coffers every few years. Unfortunately, over the protests from Environment Missouri and members across the state, legislators did not specify that the interest accrued on these funds would go to parks, leaving these dollars vulnerable to being siphoned off for other uses.

In the 2012 legislative session we’ll be back in Jefferson City, pushing our leaders to protect parks’ funding in its entirety—and give our park managers the resources necessary to keep our state park system one of the nation’s best.

Missouri’s state parks face $200 million in needed repairs. In the coming session, we’ll urge leaders to get serious about protecting these precious open spaces.