Urging leaders to grant renowned parks critical funding

Missouri’s state park system is consistently recognized as one of the nation’s best. Each year, 18 million Missourians head to our state parks to experience the natural beauty and rich history of our state, and to spend time with family and friends.

But our state park system is in a funding crisis, now facing $400 million in critically needed rehabilitation—from aging water and electrical systems to bridges and cabins in need of repair. For years, leaders in Jefferson City have looked the other way while the crisis has escalated.

Fully and permanently

Environment Missouri is working to ensure that our state park system is funded fully and permanently. Last year, we pushed legislation in Jefferson City that would provide millions of dollars for repairs to the Katy Trail and to our other great state parks. We made progress on the bill and built support from a new crop of leaders.

This spring, we collected hundreds of postcards from across the state and generated more than 50 calls to legislators asking them to fully fund the parks. This summer, we’ll continue building grassroots support for the parks.

“We’ve been building tangible momentum on this campaign to save these places that we care about,” said Stuart Keating, advocate. “We can only hope that our leaders start to see our parks as they incredible assets they are.”

Upcoming ballot initiative

This year, we’ve got a real shot at repairing some of the most outdated infrastructure in our state park system. The Third Building Bond, which will be on the ballot in November, would allow the state to raise almost a billion dollars in bond funding. These funds would go to infrastructure repairs and capital improvements for schools and mental health facilities around the state, and a minimum of $40 million will hopefully go to the parks.

“These parks are a point of pride for Missouri, since they allow us to showcase Missouri’s natural charm, her recreational opportunities and her rich and varied history,” said Keating. “It’s so important that we make sure our parks stay in tip-top shape and remain the best in the nation.”

For more information on our efforts to restore funding to our state parks, visit www.EnvironmentMissouri.org or follow us on Facebook at www.Facebook.com/EnvironmentMissouri

press conference in St. Louis in support of funding Missouri’s state parks
Recent action

President commits to tackle global warming
In his inaugural address, President Obama committed to do more to tackle global warming in his second term, building on the strong foundation his administration laid over the last four years.

The President’s commitment comes after increasing climate related disasters, including the severe droughts and heat waves felt here in Missouri.

“We will respond to the threat of climate change, knowing that failure to do so would betray our children and future generations,” said President Obama. “Some may still deny the overwhelming judgment of science, but none can avoid the devastating impact of raging fires, and crippling drought, and more powerful storms.”

Several successes this legislative session
Quite a bit happened in Jefferson City this session, and Environment Missouri is happy to report that we were at the helm of building some important momentum for the places we love and values we share.

We stood up alongside educators, unions, chambers of commerce and businesses for a bond issue that would guarantee a minimum of $40 million for critically important repairs and infrastructure for our state parks. Also, along with coalition partners from across the state, we fought to prevent legislators from passing a utility-sponsored bill that would have eliminated voter-passed renewable energy standards.

We also worked with senators from both sides of the aisle to remove language from a ballot initiative that, if passed by voters in November, would have granted corporations a constitutional right to place factory farms on floodplains, in our communities and right next to our family farms.

To our members

It’s great to be fighting for Missouri’s environment anytime of the year, but I’m particularly inspired during the spring and summer, when I’m canoeing on the Current River, swimming at Johnson Shut-Ins and bicycling between the breweries on the Katy Trail. All of these activities really highlight the importance of clean air, clean water, and our beautiful natural spaces. And that’s exactly what we’ve been fighting for throughout this winter and spring.

We’ve worked hard to increase wind power in Missouri, make sure that our amazing state parks remain in tip-top shape, and protect voter-enacted renewable energy standards from attacks by coal-loving utilities. And this summer, we’re looking forward to some of that action paying off, with a new and strong management plan for the Current River, and building more support for keeping the state parks we love open and protected.

Thanks as always for being with us.

Stuart Keating
Advocate

Toward a greener future

Environment Missouri and Environment Missouri Research & Policy Center gratefully accept bequests, beneficiary designations of IRAs and life insurance, and gifts of securities to support our work to build a cleaner, greener, healthier future.

For more information, call 1-800-841-7299 or send an email to: PlannedGiving@EnvironmentMissouri.org.

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Extreme weather hits home in Missouri

After a year where we were hit by scorching heat and devastating drought, a new report from our sister organization, the Environment Missouri Research and Policy Center, documents how global warming could lead to certain extreme weather events becoming even more common and severe in the “Show Me State’s” future.

The report found that already, every Missouri County has been hit by at least one federally declared weather-related disaster since 2007.

“The findings of this report really drove home what Missourians have been seeing and feeling across our state for some time,” said Stuart Keating, state advocate. “The record temperatures and severe storms have affected us all.”

Four out of five Americans
Since 2007, federally declared weather-related disasters in the United States have affected counties housing 243 million people—or nearly four out of five Americans. The breadth and severity of weather-related disasters in the United States—coupled with the emerging science on the potential for global warming to exacerbate some types of extreme weather—suggest that the United States should take urgent action to reduce emissions of global warming pollution.

“Extreme weather is happening. It is causing very serious problems, and climate change increases the likelihood that we’ll see even more extreme weather in the future,” said Congressman Emanuel Cleaver II, representing Missouri’s Fifth District.

Costing Missourians $2.5 billion
These disasters are also an economic issue. In 2012 alone, the near-record drought is projected to cost us more than $2.5 billion. Nationally, 11 weather disasters inflicted economic damages of $1 billion or more.

The report also documents the many actions that can reduce global warming pollution and hopefully mitigate a future of extreme weather.

What we can do
Federal and state governments should adopt and implement caps on global warming pollution capable of reducing emissions by at least 35 percent below 2005 levels by 2020 and by at least 85 percent by 2050, and put in place the clean energy solutions needed to make these reductions a reality. Decision-makers should also avoid making the problem worse by rejecting new carbon-rich fuels such as tar sands, as well as infrastructure projects, like the proposed Keystone XL tar sands pipeline, that facilitate the development of these carbon-rich fuels.

“There are many things that we can and should be doing now so that these weather disasters don’t become the new normal in Missouri and across the country,” said Keating. “We can’t keep on like this and cutting dangerous carbon pollution is a big step.”

Interview with NPS Superintendent Bill Black
Last summer, Bill Black came to Missouri to serve as the acting superintendent of the Ozark National Scenic Riverways. In April, we had a chance to sit down and ask him a few questions:

When did you start with the NPS, and what inspired you to a career of protecting national parks?

I started in June of 1974 as a seasonal park technician in Cumberland Gap National Historic Site. I had wanted to work in natural resources since the seventh grade and over time I decided the best places in the country were the national parks even though I had been to very few of them at that time. However, I believe my greatest inspiration came from my college job at a chemical plant. When the “old guys” asked me what I was studying and I told them I was in Wildlife Science; without exception, they all got a melancholy look in their eyes and said “I wish I had done that.” I knew then that I had picked a good career field.

What’s your favorite thing (so far) about the Ozark National Scenic Riverways?

Besides the opportunity to return to a large natural park, my favorite thing (so far) about the Ozark National Scenic Riverways is the large cast of characters I interact with and the feeling that I can make a positive change here.

The NPS’ new management plan for the Current River is expected to be released this summer.
For the past two years, Environment Missouri has been proving to the National Park Service that Missourians want bold reform to restore the Current River back to health. And this summer, the draft management plan that we’ve been working so hard toward is finally set to be released.

Last year, we delivered over 10,000 postcards to the National Park Service urging them to take action on behalf of Missouri’s best. We will participate in a last push for public support of the park this summer by releasing a “Citizen’s Guide to the Current River,” chock full of facts and stories about the park.

“The Current is a truly special place and one of our state’s finest natural resources,” said Stuart Keating, Environment Missouri state advocate. “We know that Missourians from all walks of life are looking forward to this river becoming our gem again.”

more inside

Extreme weather hits home in Missouri; President commits to tackle global warming; Renewing critical funding for renowned state parks, and more.

Current River