**MISSOURI**

**STATE REPORT**

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Missouri Department of Conservation

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**Financial Update**

 The Fiscal Year 2017 budget for the Missouri Department of Conservation (Department) continues at less than one percent of the total state government budget in Missouri. The primary sources of revenue are the one-eighth of one percent Conservation Sales Tax, at about $115 million, and permit sales and Federal reimbursements, at about 63 million. Total receipts for Fiscal Year 2016 were $189,205,443.

 In Missouri, conservation pays its way, and is good for Missouri’s jobs, economy, and quality of life. In Missouri each year, more than one million fish, 500 thousand hunt, and 1.7 million view wildlife. Fish and wildlife recreation generate four billion dollars in economic impacts and there is an additional eight billion in economic impacts from the forest products industry, for a total of $12 billion in economic impacts. This economic activity supports 99,000 jobs and generates $507 million in state and local taxes. Conservation makes Missouri a great place to live, work, fish, hunt, view wildlife, and be outdoors.

**Organizational Changes**

 In November, 2016, Sara Parker Pauley began as the ninth Director of the Missouri Department of Conservation. She had previously served, since 2010, as the Director of the Missouri Department of Natural Resources. In May, 2017, the Department employed a new Assistant to the Director for Operational Excellence, Todd Sampsell, to lead continuous improvement efforts and transformation efforts for organizational operations and processes.

The Department of Conservation currently has 1,387 full-time salaried employees, several hundred part-time hourly employees, and benefits from the partnership of thousands of volunteers and many conservation and outdoor organizations.

**Highlights of Conservation Challenges and Successes**

**Refining the Strategic Plan.** A three-year strategic plan was approved for Fiscal Years 2017-2019 with updated Mission and Values statements, a new Vision statement, and six top-level Conservation Priorities. The plan is evaluated each year prior to the preparation of the expenditure plan for the following year and currently the Department is updating the strategic plan to include outcomes and measures that clearly link operational efforts with top level priorities. The Department’s mission is to protect and manage the fish, forest, and wildlife resources of the state; to facilitate and provide opportunity for all citizens to use, enjoy, and learn about these resources. The Department’s values include: excellent public service is essential—we work to deliver more than is expected; all citizens are important—we respect their opinions and value their trust; Missourians are partners to achieve conservation success—we communicate openly and look for ways to make it easier to partner; fairness, objectivity, sound science, integrity, accountability, and transparency guide our actions; and employees are the Department's most important asset—we all work to advance conservation by being results driven, working as a team, serving as ambassadors for conservation, and living out the conservation ethic through our actions. The Department vision is a future with healthy fish, forests, and wildlife where all people appreciate nature.

**Communicating With Missourians.** The Department continues both traditional and emerging communication efforts with the Missouri Conservation magazine, which is mailed monthly, free, to over 550,000 Missourians. The Department has a children’s magazine, XPlor, that has an online component. The Department also extends communication efforts with social media. The Department’s Facebook page has more than 233,000 “likes” and reaches an average of 250,000 people per week who share information with friends. The Department’s Twitter feed has more than 10,000 followers. The Department’s YouTube channels contain more than 1,300 videos and average about 100,000 views per month with more than 9.3 million total views. The Department has a weekly video update for Missourians called “Nature’s Calling.” More than 100,000 Missourians also stay in touch with Department news, newsletters, events, or other areas of interest through emails or texting sent directly to their phones. The Department uses text alerts at nature centers and interpretive sites to inform citizens of upcoming programs. A “Trees Work” effort has been integrated into communication efforts to increase awareness of the benefits provided by trees and forests. The Trees Work approach has been recognized by the Arbor Day Foundation with the Public Awareness of Trees Award. A research project showed that public awareness of the benefits associated with trees rose 13 percent in communities where we have targeted messaging over the last three fiscal years. The targeted messaging continued with paid advertising on Pandora radio, broadcast radio, and various print media. In addition, last year the Department conducted a communications audit with an outside company to determine how effective communication is with Missourians and employees and has included the findings in ongoing efforts.

**Listening to Missourians.** Delivering excellent public service means listening to and understanding what Missourians say about conservation programs and services. In the recent fiscal year, there were 147 public engagement opportunities, including deer management and chronic wasting disease meetings, annual hunter surveys, conservation area plan comment periods, regulations committee comments, and public use studies at conservation areas. The Department also offers a 30-day public comment period for all area plans for citizens to provide public review about management at Department areas. In this fiscal year, over 100 plans will be available for review. Plans are underway to celebrate the Department’s 80th Anniversary in 2017 by gathering input from citizens at several public meetings and events throughout the state.

**Mobile Applications and Award Recognition.** The Department developed the MO Hunting mobile application, which enables Missouri hunters, anglers, and trappers to purchase and view annual permits. Deer and turkey hunters also can Telecheck their harvests using the app, which provides an electronic permit stored on your mobile device. New regulations consider this to be a valid permit. The MO Hunting app received a Governor’s recognition award. The Department has also developed downloadable apps for MO Fishing, Fall Colors, and the Missouri Conservationist magazine. The Department’s efforts to enhance efficiency for citizens using technology has been promoted as an example for other State of Missouri Departments.

**New Permit Delivery Approach.** Hunters, anglers, and trappers in Missouri have been buying permits online through the Department website since 2011 and through the free MDC "MO Hunting" mobile app since 2014. The MO Hunting app has been uploaded to more than 252,000 mobile devices. Retail stores, convenience stores, and other places that sell permits transitioned to an online system in March, 2016. There are no processing fees when permits are purchased either directly online or from a permit seller. People can buy Missouri hunting, fishing, and trapping permits all around the state at many gas stations, convenience stores, sporting-goods stores, large retail stores, and other vendors, and at many Department offices and all Conservation Nature Centers. People can also buy permits directly online from the Department website at mdc.mo.gov/buypermits and from their smartphones through the free "MO Hunting" mobile app. One popular and convenient feature of the app is that no paper permits are needed. The app lets users upload electronic copies of all their permits to the mobile device to show as needed. People can also buy permits over the phone by calling 800-392-4115, using a credit card, paying a $1 fee, and waiting a week for permits to arrive by mail. Permit sales account for about 18 percent of Department revenue and support a wide range of conservation activities around the state. The Department has a new Conservation Permit Card, which looks like a credit card, to provide a durable alternative to paper or electronic permits. The permit costs $2 and does not expire.

**Conservation Volunteers.** Volunteers are important Department partners. Volunteer highlights include the over 1,000 Hunter Education volunteer instructors that contribute more than 13,000 hours of classes, certifying over 20,000 students; the 4,316 Stream Teams that conduct water quality monitoring, remove trash, plant trees, and stencil storm drains; the 12 community based Master Naturalist chapters that contribute more than 62,000 hours in conservation projects; the 59,000 hours of time contributed by nature center and interpretive center volunteers; over 6,000 hours of time from 126 protection volunteers; the more than 2,600 individuals, groups, and organizations that are involved in the Missouri Forestkeepers Network; and the Discover Nature Fishing volunteers that offered more than 300 classes.

**Comprehensive Conservation Strategy.** Conservation agencies will only meet future fish and wildlife commitments to the public within a system of healthy habitats. The Department is being proactive with habitat and species conservation programs by integrating the conservation priorities of our agency and conservation partners into a network of lands and waters.

**Chronic Wasting Disease.** Chronic wasting disease (CWD) is a deadly deer disease that has been found in northeast, central, and east-central Missouri. In the fall of 2016, the Department increased CWD‐testing efforts in 29 counties. The counties include those that touch a radius of approximately 25 miles from where the disease has been found. The Department required hunters to present their deer for CWD testing at a Department testing location if the deer was harvested in one of the 29 counties during the opening weekend of the fall firearms deer season, November 12 and 13. Over 1,000 Department employees assisted in the two-day sampling effort. The testing was free and hunters could test results through an online system. The Department also continued to work with meat processors and taxidermists in the 29 counties to provide free CWD testing during other parts of the deer‐hunting seasons. Through the 2016-2017 testing effort, more than 25,500 deer were tested. Nine new cases of the disease were reported, one in Adair, three in Franklin, one in Jefferson, two in Macon, and two in St. Clair counties. The two cases in St. Clair County were the first reported cases in the western part of the state. For the 2017 deer season, the Department will expand the CWD management zone to 41 counties, including counties near the Arkansas border. Mandatory sampling will be required in 25 counties during the first two days of the fall, 2017 firearms deer season. The Department has sampled more than 77,000 deer since sampling began in 2001. The total number of free-ranging deer confirmed to have CWD is 42.

**Science-Based Conservation.** The Department uses a science-based approach to manage fish, forests, and wildlife and research projects are one of the ways the Department obtains information for decision-making. For example, the Department is conducting a five-year wild turkey research project to monitor populations in several counties across the state. This research includes banding and putting radio transmitters on wild turkeys to determine gobbler and hen survival. More than 580 turkeys have been captured, banded, and released. The research will also determine what proportion of the banded wild turkey population is harvested by hunters. Another research effort involves efforts to propagate and restore the Ozark and eastern Hellbender. The Department has partnered with the Saint Louis Zoo to conduct captive breeding. At the zoo, 4,000 larval and juvenile hellbenders have been reared and will be released in their native Ozark rivers. The Department is also monitoring black bears. Black bear capture efforts for research purposes have included 109 individual bears and staff are monitoring 38 collared bears. Additional research efforts include harvest and attitude surveys, public use surveys at Department ranges and areas, deer survival and movements, pallid sturgeon sampling, and the long-term, landscape scale, Missouri Ozark Forest Ecosystem Project.

**Eliminating Feral Hogs in Missouri.** The Department continues to work with partners and landowners to eradicate feral hogs from the landscape. Following the experiences of other states and through monitoring trends in Missouri, the Department has eliminated hunting for hogs on Department areas, since hunting has not been demonstrated to help to eradicate hogs. The Department and other partners have increased feral hog eradication efforts this year through trapping. Citizens are being asked to report feral hog sightings or damage. Last year, the Department and partners removed nearly 6,000 feral hogs from Missouri’s landscape and have already eradicated over 3,000 in the current year.

**Helping Children and Families Discover Nature.** Helping children and families discover nature is a key part of the Department’s mission. Last year, the Department held eight Discover Nature Girls Camps for girls ages 11–15 to get young women excited about the outdoors, including an inner city St. Louis camp. Camp classes included hunter education, archery, canoeing, fishing, tree-stand safety, and Dutch oven cooking. The Department’s Discover Nature Schools conservation education curriculum, which is used in 99 percent of Missouri school districts for grades pre-K through 12, helps teachers engage students with hands-on, outdoor learning. In addition, the Discover Nature Fishing program helps children and families have fun in the outdoors by learning to fish.

**Archery in the Schools Program Builds Champions.** The Department provides Missouri National Archery in the Schools Program (MoNASP) grants to schools for equipment, as well as free teacher and staff training for those administering the program. More than 160,000 Missouri students from 600 schools participate in MoNASP. The MoNASP program promotes education, self-esteem, and physical activity for kids in grades four to 12. This year more than 2,200 youth participated in the two-day MoNASP State Tournament sponsored by the Missouri Conservation Heritage Foundation.

**Technical Assistance for Landowners.** The Department’s Private Land Services Division continues to provide Missouri landowners with technical assistance and coordination that benefits fish, forest, and wildlife conservation. The Division, with 74 full-time positions, had over 28,000 contacts last year and helped landowners with $1.6 million in funding for conservation practices and program cost-shares. Private Land Services is also implementing a Missouri Outdoor Recreational Access Program statewide to enhance habitat management and public access to outdoor recreation opportunities. Currently, 33 landowners have signed agreements to provide recreational access on 8,455 acres.

**Helping Communities One Tree at a Time.** The Department awarded $411,084 to 41 Missouri communities through its Tree Resource Improvement and Maintenance (TRIM) grant program. TRIM grants offer cost-share funding for government agencies, public schools, and nonprofit groups to manage, improve, or conserve trees on public lands. TRIM grants help recipients accomplish activities that keep their neighborhood trees healthy and thriving, including inventory, pruning, planting, and educational programs. The Department also awarded $338,490 in grants to 156 rural fire departments for the purchase of wildfire equipment.

**Shooting Range Renovations.** The Department continued construction of a new, state-of-the-art staffed shooting facility at Busch Shooting Range in St. Charles. The new range will incorporate the most current national shooting range design standards, including numerous improvements for user convenience, safety, and reduced waiting times. Originally built in 1975, the Busch range sees more than 40,000 shooters annually. The Department has five staffed ranges and over 65 unstaffed ranges throughout the state.

**Missourians for Monarchs Collaborative.** The Department is working with more than 30 conservation and agricultural organizations, state and federal agencies, and utilities, agribusinesses and cooperatives to develop a collaborative monarch and pollinator conservation plan for Missouri. The Missourians for Monarchs collaborative has representatives from agribusiness, conservation organizations, academia, state and federal agencies, volunteer organizations, and agriculture organizations with a goal of establishing more than 19,000 acres of pollinator habitat per year.

**Rod and Reel Loaner Program.** The Department makes fishing more accessible through the Rod and Reel Loaner Program, which is available in 78 locations across the state. People can check out fishing poles and tackle boxes for free at participating sites. The fishing poles are equipped with standard spin-cast reels. The tackle boxes are supplied with hooks, sinkers, and bobbers for basic fishing opportunities.

**National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation.** Department staff serve on the National Technical Workgroup for the 2016 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation. The 2016 survey for the 50 states has included a new contracted approach to reduce costs and increase the reliability of results. The national results continue to be conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau. The survey is the best source for participation information and economic impacts from fishing, hunting, and wildlife-viewing and these results are used by the Department to highlight the importance, value, and economic impact of fish, forests, and wildlife for Missourians.