

**MISSOURI
STATE REPORT**
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Financial Update

The Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 budget for the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) continues at less than 1 percent of the total state government budget in Missouri. The primary sources of revenue are the one-eighth of 1 percent Conservation Sales Tax, at about \$122 million, and permit sales and federal reimbursements, at about \$67 million. Total receipts for FY 2018 were \$194.7 million.

In Missouri, conservation pays its way, and is good for Missouri's jobs, economy, and quality of life. In Missouri each year, more than 1 million individuals go fishing, 576 thousand hunt, and 1.7 million view wildlife. Hunting, fishing, and wildlife recreation generate \$5.2 billion in economic impacts, and there is an additional \$10 billion in economic impacts from the forest products industry, for a total of \$15.2 billion in economic impacts. This economic activity supports 111,000 jobs. Conservation makes Missouri a great place to live, work, fish, hunt, view wildlife, and be outdoors.

Organizational Update

Sara Parker Pauley continues as the ninth director of MDC. In February 2019, Kendra Witthaus replaced Todd Sampsell as MDC assistant to the Director for Operational Excellence, to lead continuous improvement efforts and transformation efforts for organizational operations and processes.

MDC continues implementation of a multi-year market-based pay plan. MDC is implementing a new performance management approach by July 1, 2019. The director, deputies, and division leaders continue meeting with regional staff twice yearly in the eight administrative regions and the headquarters office to increase awareness and alignment of the strategic plan.

Highlights of Conservation Challenges and Successes

Refining the Strategic Plan. MDC's strategic plan, *Missouri Conservation: Design for the Future*, was unveiled in 2018 and developed to guide MDC during FY19-23. The plan outlines three simple goals for MDC: take care of nature; connect people with nature; and maintain the public trust. With input from the public and conservation partners, MDC has identified 6 desired outcomes, 17 strategies, more than 150 specific actions, and 42 measures that will help us track our progress.

International Recognition for Sustainable Forest Management. MDC is proud to be formally recognized as managing public lands to the standards of an internationally recognized sustainable forest management program by successfully maintaining our Sustainable Forestry Initiative® (SFI) certification. Managing forest resources sustainably is critical to providing habitat needed to sustain sensitive fish and wildlife populations.

Tree Seedling Program. The George O. White Nursery in Licking, Missouri grows and distributes over three million low-cost seedlings every year to Missouri citizens across the state. Each year, it serves approximately 10,500 customers with orders. It also provides a free seedling to approximately 95,000 fourth-grade students across the state for Arbor Day and assists the Monarchs Collaborative with hundreds of milkweed root stock to be planted across the state.

Mobile Applications. Staying on the forefront of technology, MDC has developed the free mobile app MO Outdoors, which enables users to find MDC conservation areas, fishing accesses, hiking trails, shooting ranges, and nature centers around the state based on their desired types of outdoor activities. MO Outdoors also connects users to area regulations and seasonal information, hours of operation, images, area closings, and interactive maps. In addition to MO Outdoors, MDC developed MO Hunting and MO Fishing. MO Fishing allows fishermen to buy fishing permits as well as see fishing structures in Missouri water bodies. MO Hunting allows hunters to buy permits and check-in animal harvests, such as turkey or deer.

Chronic Wasting Disease. Chronic wasting disease (CWD) is a deadly deer disease that has been found at low prevalence in 16 counties throughout Missouri since 2012. For the 2018-2019 season, MDC tested over 32,000 deer and detected 41 new cases of CWD, including nearly 21,000 deer sampled by MDC staff on opening weekend of fall firearms season and 7,663 deer sampled by 140 partnering taxidermists and meat processors. MDC also worked cooperatively with over 1,300 landowners on a voluntary basis to remove and test an additional 2,220 after the close of regular deer seasons in localized areas where CWD has been found. This latest tally brings the total number of free-ranging Missouri deer detected with the disease to 114 out of over 130,000 tested since sampling efforts began in 2001. The most up-to-date numbers and locations of CWD detection can be obtained at <https://huntfish.mdc.mo.gov/hunting-trapping/wildlife-diseases/chronic-wasting-disease-cwd/cwd-missouri>.

Invasive Species. The prevention and control of invasive species is significant to MDC. MDC formed the Invasive Species Coordination Team (InSCT) that uses the principles of the Comprehensive Conservation Strategy (CCS) to prioritize species to be addressed, locations, and timing of actions. The emphasis and strategic approach, complemented by increased partnerships, will hopefully lead to successes in control and eradication of priority invasive species.

Eliminating Feral Hogs in Missouri. MDC leads a very productive group of agencies called the Missouri Feral Hog Partnership. All members of the partnership are dedicated to total elimination of feral hogs from the state. The partnership completed and is implementing a Statewide Strategic Feral Hog Elimination Plan. Since implementing the plan, MDC and partners have increased feral hog elimination efforts. In 2018 a total of 9,365 hogs were eliminated from

the landscape and from January through March 2019 a total of 3,280 hogs were removed. The success is reflected in significantly reduced feral hog populations in parts of the state.

Helping Missourians Discover Nature. MDC's Discover Nature Schools (DNS) conservation education curriculum is being used in 1,621 (69 percent) Missouri schools to help teachers engage students with hands-on, outdoor learning from grades pre-K to 12. In addition, the Discover Nature Fishing program helps children and families have fun outdoors by learning to fish. MDC staff train experienced anglers from around the state to help others learn to fish. The statewide program provides lessons and events to help kids and families gain skills and confidence to fish on their own. MDC staff also provide formal nature-based educational programs to over 300,000 citizens yearly. These programs cover a diverse array of topics including but not limited to: hunting, angling, hiking, birdwatching, kayaking, shooting sports, and native plants. MDC is currently working with several conservation partners to implement a new R3 plan.

Archery in the Schools Program Builds Champions. MDC 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 200,000 Missouri students from over 700 schools participate in MoNASP. The MoNASP program promotes education, self-esteem, and physical activity for kids in grades 4 to 12. This year more than 3,200 youth participated in the two-day MoNASP State Tournament, sponsored and coordinated by MDC and the Missouri Conservation Heritage Foundation (MCHF).

Protection. *Operation Game Thief*, a hotline sponsored by MDC and the Conservation Federation of Missouri (CFM), led to the conviction of a Green County man in one of the state's largest ever poaching investigations, which involved approximately 100 state, federal, and Canadian wildlife officers. The convicted, along with two of his family members, are linked to the illegal killing of furbearers, fish, small game, and hundreds of deer over a three-year period. Lawrence County Prosecuting Attorney Don Trotter remarked, "The deer were trophy bucks taken illegally, mostly at night, for their heads, leaving the bodies of the deer to waste." More than 300 charges have been filed on the group in state, federal, and international jurisdictions. Their story has gone viral, resulting in an audience reach of over 1.2 billion people across the globe.

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 numerous public engagement opportunities, including open house meetings, annual hunter surveys, conservation area plan comment periods, regulation committee comments, and Ask MDC contacts. MDC also offers a 30-day public comment period for citizens to provide input on the management of MDC areas. In this fiscal year, over 25 plans were available for review. MDC also hosted its second annual Missouri Conservation Partners Roundtable event, a gathering of over 140 conservation partners to provide feedback on how we can keep nature relevant, reach new audiences, better connect with people our partners serve, and provide programs, events, or services that help people connect with nature.

During the first week of December 2018, three open houses were conducted to gather public input regarding possible elk regulations. Open houses held in Van Buren, Ellington and Eminence (the same communities where the first open houses were held in 2008 before the elk

were reintroduced). Respondents were most interested in providing comments regarding permit allocation, followed by hunting methods and season dates, then the elk management plan and landowner opportunities. Most agreed that all proposed regulations were reasonable.

Conservation Volunteers. Volunteers are invaluable MDC partners. Over 750 hunter education volunteer instructors contributed more than 10,000 hours of classes, certifying over 24,000 students. Twelve community-based Master Naturalist chapters contributed more than 68,500 hours in conservation projects. In addition, 50,000 hours of time were contributed by nature center, interpretive center, and shooting range volunteers; there were approximately 120 protection volunteers. Over 2,600 individuals, groups, and organizations are involved in the Missouri Forestkeepers Network. Discover Nature Fishing volunteers have offered more than 170 classes. Stream Team celebrated its 30th anniversary and contributed 141,045 hours in 2017 of volunteer labor to our aquatic resources by conducting water quality monitoring, removing trash, planting trees, and stenciling storm drains.

Communicating with Missourians. All MDC social media channels, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, continue to grow monthly. Facebook is MDC's largest social media channel with more than 272,000 followers. MDC's website has 5.1 million unique visitors annually. MDC utilizes email communications, which currently has 604,543 subscribers, and the free *Missouri Conservationist* magazine, mailed to more than 512,000 individuals, to share the value of fish, forest, and wildlife resources. The new MDC Wild Webcast series highlights key conservation topics and provides a unique opportunity to ask live questions of MDC experts. MDC's "Trees Work" outreach has expanded to a statewide effort to help Missourians understand the environmental, human health, social, and economic benefit of trees. Trees Work has been recognized by the Arbor Day Foundation and the Association for Conservation Information for its innovative communications plan and outreach tools.

Comprehensive Conservation Strategy (CCS). Conservation agencies will only meet future fish and wildlife commitments to the public within a system of healthy habitats. MDC 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. The focus of the work will be within Conservation Opportunity Areas and subset landscapes called Priority Geographies that have specific objectives to accomplish measurable goals at a landscape level. The CCS will integrate the Missouri State Wildlife Action Plan and Forest Action Plan into a comprehensive plan submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Forest Service.

Community Conservation. MDC celebrated the Urban Fishing Program's 50th year of bringing close-to-home fishing to our urban communities. Last year, MDC provided 76,744 channel catfish and 64,207 rainbow trout to the Kansas City and St. Louis urban lakes.

The Green City Coalition (GCC), a partnership between the City of St. Louis, MDC, Metropolitan St. Louis Sewer District, and St. Louis Development Corporation, addresses social, economic, and environmental issues surrounding vacant properties by working with member organizations and residents to convert vacant land to community green spaces. Over 200 vacant publicly owned parcels (23 acres) have been reimaged by Wells Goodfellow and Walnut Park East neighborhood residents and students through community events.

MDC has matching fund agreements with United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resource Conservation Service for the Audubon Conservation Ranching-Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) and the Regional Grassland Bird RCPP. The Conservation Ranching RCPP annually provides \$80,000 of MDC match for \$290,000 of financial assistance from NRCS. These funds are provided directly to Missouri cattle producers in Kansas City, Central, Ozark, and Southwest Regions to support conservation-friendly ranching practices. The Regional Grassland Bird RCPP is also targeted to Missouri cattle producers to help implement grazing practices that provide habitat for prairie chickens and other grassland birds while providing quality forage for cattle. MDC provides approximately \$100,000 annually to match NRCS' annual financial assistance contribution of \$192,000.

Technical Assistance for Landowners. MDC's Private Land Services (PLS) Division continues providing Missouri landowners with technical assistance that benefits fish, forest, and wildlife conservation. The division, with 74 full-time positions, had over 10,000 contacts last year and helped landowners with \$1.7 million in funding for conservation practices and program cost-shares. The division has implemented a Missouri Outdoor Recreational Access Program statewide to enhance habitat management and public access to outdoor recreation opportunities. Currently, 60 property owners have signed agreements to provide recreational access on 14,800 acres. Spring 2019 marks the 10th anniversary of MDC's Call Before You Cut program, designed to provide information to landowners considering a timber sale. Participating consulting foresters have provided site visits to 591 landowners, covering 59,000 acres.

Permit Delivery Approach. MDC facilitates permit acquisition by offering various purchasing options. People can buy Missouri hunting, fishing, and trapping permits statewide at many gas stations, convenience stores, sporting-goods stores, large retail stores, other vendors, and at many MDC offices and all conservation nature centers. People can also buy permits directly online from the MDC 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.

Helping Communities One Tree at a Time. MDC awarded \$378,231 to 40 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 provide educational programs and accomplish activities that keep their neighborhood trees healthy. MDC continues its partnership with Beyond Housing in north St. Louis by providing funding to employ a community forester who will assist underserved communities with community forestry needs, such as outreach and education, technical assistance, grant writing, and management plans. The partnership helps citizens access and enjoy the benefits of trees and nature.

Assisting Communities Improve Wildfire, Prescribed Fire, and Emergency Response. MDC awarded \$420,198 in Volunteer Fire Assistance grants to 184 rural fire departments for the purchase of wildfire clothing and small equipment; and provided vehicles and emergency response equipment through its Federal Excess Property programs. Federal Hazard Mitigation funds were

acquired to assist rural communities with the development of Community Wildfire Prevention Plans and to provide outreach and education on how to minimize the threat of wildfires to property. Funds also aided in training and equipping Prescribed Burn Cooperatives for habitat restoration on private lands. MDC provided 52 staff for wildfire suppression in western states in FY19.

Missourians for Monarchs Collaborative. MDC is working with more than 40 conservation and agricultural organizations, state and federal agencies, utility companies, 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 over the next 20 years or 385,000 new acres of habitat by 2034. To date, the collaborative has been successful at creating or improving 304,000 acres of new pollinator and monarch habitat.

MFA Partnership. MDC partnered with MFA, Inc. and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service to provide funding for a Natural Resources Specialist (MFA employee) to provide training and technical assistance to landowners, MFA employees, and agency staff on precision agriculture, cover crops, and other conservation practices that are amenable to profitable farming operations. This groundbreaking position provides MDC assistance with workshops, field days, and articles that promote soil, water, and wildlife management objectives on production acres; and identifies areas of common ground for future collaboration. The position also evaluates government processes needing improvement and provides solutions to help government work more efficiently with production landowners on their stewardship goals.

Flood-damaged River Accesses. March 2019 brought historic Missouri River levels through the northwest part of the state and extremely high Mississippi River levels along the eastern side of the state. Staff have begun the process of evaluating damage to many river accesses, levees, and impacted conservation areas.

Kansas City Native Plant Initiative (KCNPI). The KCNPI is a network of more than 60 private, public, and nonprofit organizations from the Kansas City Metropolitan area that have a shared vision – a future of beautiful, native landscapes connecting heartland communities where nature and people thrive together. The partners, with KCNPI, are expanding their efforts to engage the surrounding communities in the Anita B. Gorman Discovery Center’s outdoor spaces and increase attendance to the many programs and activities currently being presented. They will coordinate with KCNPI partners and others about customizing engagement opportunities and outreach targets and involve local elected officials.

Ruffed Grouse Reintroduction. In partnership with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Quail and Upland Wildlife Federation, and private landowners in the restoration area, MDC has been working to reestablish a ruffed grouse population in Missouri. The three-year project (2018-2020), involving the translocation of 300 grouse, began in 2018 with 100 grouse from Wisconsin that were released on Little Lost Creek Conservation Area in Warren county. Extensive habitat management has been conducted to make the area suitable for grouse.