

**MISSOURI
STATE REPORT**
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Financial Update

The Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 budget for the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) continues to represent 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 \$121 million, and permit sales and federal reimbursements, at about \$64 million. Total receipts for FY 2019 were \$196.7 million.

Conservation pays by enriching our economy and quality of life. In Missouri each year, more than 1 million individuals go fishing, 576,000 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 October 2019, MDC began transitioning to a new organizational structure to include a Statewide Resource Management Branch Chief, Assistant Deputy Director – Resource Management, and eight Regional Administrators. MDC is implementing a multi-year market-based pay plan and performance management approach. The director, deputies, and branch 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

COVID-19 Response. Understanding the physical and mental benefits nature provides, conservation areas, nature center trails, and boat accesses remain open to the public with physical distancing requirements in place. MDC facilities were closed to the public, programs were canceled, and telework policies implemented to protect the health of the public and staff. The Missouri Conservation Commission temporarily waived fishing permit and daily trout tag requirements for residents and nonresidents whose fishing privileges were not otherwise suspended.

Implementing the Strategic Plan. The MDC 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: take care of nature; connect people with nature; and maintain the public trust. Through 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 be used to track progress.

International Recognition for Sustainable Forest Management. MDC is proud to maintain its Sustainable Forestry Initiative® (SFI) certification for management of public lands. Managing forest resources in a sustainable manner is critical to providing habitat needed to maintain fish and wildlife populations.

Tree Seedling Program. The George O. White Nursery grows and distributes about 2.3 million low-cost seedlings every year to Missouri citizens. Each year, it processes nearly 10,000 customer orders. It provides free seedlings to approximately 95,000 fourth-grade students for Arbor Day and assists the Monarchs Collaborative with hundreds of milkweed root stock to be planted by Master Naturalist and Master Gardener groups.

Hatchery Program. MDC manages nine fish hatcheries (5 cold water and 4 warm water). In the past year, we stocked approximately 1.7 million trout, 11.1 million warm water fish, and 66,000 fish that are considered species of conservation concern to help maintain quality fishing and restore native populations of selected species.

Mobile Applications. Staying on the forefront of technology, MDC 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, MO Fishing allows anglers to buy fishing permits and see fishing structures in Missouri water bodies. MO Hunting allows hunters to buy permits and check-in animal harvests, such as turkey or deer. In the fall of 2019, hunters made 141,301 telechecks for their animal harvests using the MO Hunting app.

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 2019-2020 season, MDC tested over 32,000 deer, including approximately 18,800 deer sampled by MDC staff on opening weekend of fall firearms season and over 9,300 deer sampled by 160 partnering taxidermists and meat processors throughout the season. MDC worked cooperatively with approximately 1,400 landowners on a voluntary basis to remove and test an additional 2,399 deer after the close of regular deer seasons in localized areas where CWD has been found. A total of 46 new cases of CWD were detected. This latest tally brings the total number of free-ranging Missouri deer detected with the disease to 160 out of over 162,000 tested since sampling efforts began in 2001.

Invasive Species. MDC is actively engaged in and serving in leadership roles within key invasive species collaborations, including the Scenic Rivers Invasive Species Partnership, Missouri Invasive Plant Task Force, Missouri Invasive Forest Pest Council, and Missouri Feral Hog Elimination Partnership. MDC's internal Invasive Species Coordination Team (InSCT) uses the principles of the Comprehensive Conservation Strategy (CCS) to prioritize invasive species to

be addressed, locations of focus, 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. MDC, the Missouri Prairie Foundation, and the Missouri Department of Transportation have partnered to spray roadside invasive plants in priority conservation landscapes in southeast Missouri. In addition, MDC enhanced and refocused outreach efforts to motivate Missouri's citizens to help remove invasive species.

Eliminating Feral Hogs in Missouri. MDC is part of a very productive network of federal and state agencies called the Missouri Feral Hog Elimination Partnership (Partnership). All members of the partnership are dedicated to total elimination of feral hogs from the state and worked together to remove 10,495 hogs from Missouri's landscape in 2019. On December 7, 2019, the U.S. Forest Service passed an order prohibiting feral hog hunting, except for incidental take of feral hogs during turkey and deer seasons, in the Mark Twain National Forest (MTNF). As a result, the Partnership dedicated significant resources to greatly expand efforts to strategically scout for and eliminate feral hogs in and around the MTNF while still maintaining elimination efforts elsewhere in the state. The Partnership set up the first Incident Command Structure in 2020. As of March, that effort combined with the continued normally scheduled feral hog removal efforts, culminated in 340 landowners assisted, 2,904 feral hogs removed, and nearly 669,000 acres scouted.

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. 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. This year's MoNASP State Tournament was cancelled due to concerns about the coronavirus (COVID-19).

Protection. One call to *Operation Game Thief*, a hotline sponsored by MDC and the Conservation Federation of Missouri (CFM), led to a litany of charges in Miller and Shannon counties for a man suspected of killing deer and removing only the heads, tenderloins, and other parts. Conservation Agents also investigated the poaching case of a female adult elk that was shot in Carter County on National Park Service property. Operation Game Thief is offering a \$20,000 reward for information leading to a conviction in this case.

Listening to Missourians. In the recent fiscal year, there were numerous public engagement opportunities, including open house meetings, annual hunter and angler surveys, conservation area plan comment periods, regulation committee comments, and Ask MDC contacts.

MDC held open houses around the state to gather input on CWD management zones, proposed crappie regulations on two large reservoirs, the future elk hunting season, 2021-2025 waterfowl hunting season framework, and Missouri's black bear management plan. MDC also hosted its third annual Missouri Conservation Partners Roundtable event, a gathering of over 200 partners representing 131 organizations. The event provided partners an opportunity to hear from each other, voice unique perspectives, and strengthen or develop collaborative efforts while discussing the importance of Healthy Lands and Waters, Healthy People, and Healthy Partnerships in Missouri.

Conservation Volunteers. In calendar year 2019, Master Naturalist volunteers contributed 74,538 hours of service to conservation projects and activities in their local communities. In addition, 2,690 volunteer members of the Missouri Forestkeepers Network contributed 6,159 hours monitoring forest health and taking care of trees. During the first half of FY20 staff volunteers at nature centers, interpretive sites, and shooting ranges, along with hunter education instructors, and Discover Nature Fishing instructors, recorded 26,956 hours. Stream Team volunteers contributed 232,687 hours conducting water quality monitoring, removing trash and invasive species, planting trees, and stenciling storm drains.

Communicating with Missourians. All MDC social media channels, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, continue to have increased numbers of followers. Facebook is MDC's largest social media channel with more than 290,000 followers. MDC's website has 5.45 million unique visitors annually. MDC utilizes email communications to reach 721,794 subscribers, and the free *Missouri Conservationist* and *Xplor* magazines, mailed to more than 750,000 individuals, to share the value of fish, forest, and wildlife resources. The MDC Wild Webcast series highlights key conservation topics and provides a unique opportunity to ask live questions of MDC experts. MDC launched a new podcast in late spring 2020.

Comprehensive Conservation Strategy (CCS). Conservation agencies will only meet future fish and wildlife commitments to the public within a system of healthy and connected habitats. MDC is being proactive with habitat and species conservation programs by integrating the conservation priorities of our agency and conservation partners into a common framework, which includes the identification of a prioritized network of lands and waters. The focus of the habitat-based portion 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, Forest Action Plan, and other conservation priorities into a comprehensive plan to be submitted to both 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, 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 neighborhood residents and students through community events.

Private Land Partnership Programs. MDC has matching fund agreements with the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) for the Audubon Conservation Ranching-Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), the Regional Grassland Bird and Grazing Land Enhancement RCPP, and the Restoring Glade and Woodland Communities RCPP. The Conservation Ranching RCPP annually provides \$80,000 of MDC match for \$290,000 of financial assistance from NRCS. The Regional Grassland Bird RCPP helps cattle producers 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. Through the Restoring Glade and Woodland Communities RCPP, MDC provides approximately \$64,000 annually, in combination with NRCS' annual financial assistance contribution of \$272,000, directly to private landowners to assist in the management and restoration of glades, woodlands, and forest habitats.

Technical Assistance for Landowners. MDC's Private Land Services Division provides landowners with technical assistance to benefit fish, forest, and wildlife conservation. Over 25,000 contacts were made last year helping landowners with \$2.3 million in funding for conservation practices and program cost-shares. MDC implemented the Missouri Outdoor Recreational Access Program (MRAP) to enhance habitat management and public access to outdoor recreation opportunities on private land. Currently, 60 property owners have signed agreements to provide recreational access on nearly 15,000 acres. The MRAP is funded through the USDA Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program. Missouri's Call Before You Cut program provides information to forest landowners who may be contemplating a timber sale. To date, over 4,100 landowners who own over 452,000 acres have received a free packet of information.

Permit Delivery Approach. In 2019, MDC launched a Permit Auto Renewal System to allow customers to enroll eligible permits in a service that automatically renews their permits prior to the start of the next season or permit year. More than 22,000 individuals enrolled prior to the beginning of the 2020 hunting and fishing permit season. Permits can be purchased at retail stores, by phone, online and from smartphones through the free MO Hunting mobile app. The app lets users upload electronic copies of all their permits to the mobile device to show, as needed, eliminating the need for paper permits.

Stream Team. The Missouri Stream Team Program celebrated its 30th Anniversary in 2019. This statewide volunteer program is a cooperative effort sponsored by MDC, Missouri Department of Natural Resources, the Conservation Federation of Missouri, and citizens who care for Missouri streams. More than 6,000 Stream Teams comprised of nearly 800,000 individuals have volunteered over 3.1 million hours connecting with and improving our stream resources through a multitude of education, stewardship, and advocacy activities.

Helping Communities One Tree at a Time. In FY20, MDC funded 38 Tree Resource Improvement and Maintenance (TRIM) grants totaling \$438,000. This funding helps communities with urban forestry projects, such as master plans, tree inventory, education, hazard tree removals, pruning, and planting. MDC continues its partnership with Beyond Housing in north St. Louis by providing funding to employ a community forester who assists underserved communities with community forestry needs, including outreach and education, technical assistance, grant writing, and management plans. The partnership helps citizens access and enjoy the benefits of trees.

Assisting Communities Improve Wildfire, Prescribed Fire, and Emergency Response. MDC awarded \$404,802 in Volunteer Fire Assistance grants to 172 rural fire departments to purchase wildfire clothing, small equipment, and provided vehicles and emergency response equipment through its Federal Excess Property programs. Federal Hazard Mitigation funds assisted 12 rural communities with the development of Community Wildfire Prevention Plans to provide outreach on how to minimize the threat of wildfires. Funds also aided in training and equipping Prescribed Burn Cooperatives for habitat restoration on private lands. New this year, MDC funded 47 grants to volunteer fire departments to purchase workman's compensation coverage, protecting 928 volunteer fire fighters.

Missourians for Monarchs Collaborative. MDC is working with Missourians for Monarchs, a collaboration of more than 40 conservation and agricultural organizations, state and federal agencies, utility companies, agribusinesses, academia, volunteer organizations, and cooperatives, to carry out a collaborative monarch and pollinator conservation plan for Missouri. This collaborative has 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 over 370,000 acres of new pollinator and monarch habitat and is in the process of updating their plan to guide efforts for the next three years.

Agriculture Partnerships. In partnership with MDC, the Missouri's Corn and Soybean Associations, and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, a position was established to develop and oversee efforts that promote soil, water, and wildlife conservation approaches to Missouri corn and soybean farmers. A similar position has been established with the state's largest landowner cooperative, MFA. The position is instrumental in piloting precision conservation using the cooperatives crop consultation to analyze ag producer yield and determine areas of the farm that would be more profitable to convert to conservation buffers for pollinators and bobwhite quail. Agreements were implemented with MFA and University of Missouri Extension to promote native grass forage systems through workshops and demonstrations resulting in hundreds of livestock producers being trained on native grasses forage establishment and management.

Widespread Flood Damage. 2019 was another wet year as many conservation areas, fish hatcheries, wetland areas, river accesses, levees, and construction projects were negatively impacted by major flooding along the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers.

Deep Roots KC. Deep Roots is a network of more than 60 private, public, and nonprofit organizations in 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 are expanding their efforts to engage the communities surrounding MDC's Anita B. Gorman Discovery Center and increase program attendance.

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 viable ruffed grouse population in Missouri. The three-year project (2018-2020), involving the translocation of 300 grouse, continued in 2019 with another 100 grouse from Wisconsin that were relocated to the River Hills Region of east-central Missouri. Extensive habitat management has been conducted to make the area suitable for grouse.