Campaign to save state parks launched

State parks face $200 million in repairs

From Lake of the Ozarks, where visitors can observe bald eagles, to the Katy Trail, which stretches 225 miles from St. Charles to Clinton, Missouri’s state parks rank among the nation’s best and most visited. Nevertheless, the parks are in a funding crisis, facing a backlog of $200 million in critically needed repairs.

For too long, our legislators have looked the other way while some of our most loved state parks have fallen into disrepair. That’s why Environment Missouri launched a new campaign this spring, urging decision-makers in Jefferson City to make state parks a priority.

To date, we’ve seen encouraging progress. When a bill to fund improvements to state-owned buildings and lands was introduced in the Legislature this spring, Environment Missouri seized the opportunity to press our leaders for dedicated state park funding in the bill. An amendment was added that would provide at least $25 million for repairs to our state park system. Now we’re working to make this funding a reality.

Looking ahead to the summer

In preparation for Environment Missouri’s summer canvassing efforts, our staff have identified 35 key officials who can help tip the scales in favor of our parks.

Environment Missouri will reach out to more than 10,000 households to help us convince our leaders that they can’t let another summer slip by without pledges to make our state parks a priority.

No dedicated funding for state parks

Missouri’s 85 state parks and historic sites receive no general revenue from the state. Instead, they are funded primarily by a small sales tax. While these funds keep our parks afloat, a dedicated funding source is needed to address our parks’ mounting backlog of infrastructure repairs and rehabilitation projects.

“We need our legislators to get serious about restoring our state parks,” said Ted Mathys, advocate for Environment Missouri. “These are some of Missouri’s best-loved spaces, and unless our leaders take action now they could slip further into disrepair.”

more online

Without funding for maintenance, parks face problems from cabins and bridges in need of repair, to aging water and electric systems.

To read more, visit our website at: www.EnvironmentMissouri.org
Summer brings a flurry of activity to Environment Missouri. Every day, our teams of canvassers are out speaking with citizens to build support for fixing up our state parks; our staff is lobbying our political leaders; and with the support of members like you, we’re making inroads into some of the key environmental challenges facing our state.

Harnessing Missourians’ energy and passion for our environment is what we’re all about. This spring we held an activist workshop in St. Louis to equip citizens with the skills they need to make their voices heard in local and state debates about the quality of our environment and our lives. I find our summer canvass and events like this workshop so gratifying because we’ve seen time and again that when citizens come together and stand up for the issues we hold dear, we can make real change.

Thank you again for your energy, your ideas, and your partnership.

Sincerely,

Ted Mathys
Advocate

Program will spur clean energy in Missouri

In a move that will spur clean energy jobs across Missouri, Environment Missouri and our national federation successfully lobbied the federal government for an extension of a grant program that helps clean energy businesses get new solar, wind and other renewable energy projects off the ground.

The program has already provided $195 million for projects in Missouri, like the Lost Creek Wind project, which is the biggest wind farm in the state.

“It’s time to repower Missouri and America with clean, renewable energy,” said Ted Mathys, advocate for Environment Missouri. “We can solve our dead-end dependence on oil and other fossil fuels, reduce skyrocketing energy costs, and stop global warming by increasing efficiency and shifting to clean, homegrown, renewable energy.”

President pushes for conservation funding

Margie Alt, the director of our national federation, joined President Barack Obama at the White House in February for the announcement that he’d seek the renewal of the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund.

What’s the Land and Water Conservation Fund? For the past 45 years the federal government has put a fraction of the revenue from offshore drilling into a trust fund to expand national parks, protect hunting and fishing areas, and aid local conservation and recreation projects like city parks and playing fields.

Our staff is currently building support for the approval of the conservation funding in Congress.
For a healthy future, update the Clean Air Act

There’s no doubt that the Clean Air Act, which turned 40 in 2010, has improved the health and well-being of millions of Americans. Its protections are credited with saving the lives of 160,000 Americans in 2010 alone.

Of course, air pollution remains a pressing health threat in Missouri and across the country, a stark reminder of the work still left to do. 13,200 Americans lost their lives as a result of heart attacks, strokes, asthma attacks and other fatal conditions brought on or exacerbated by air pollution from power plants. It’s estimated that one in six women of childbearing age has enough mercury in her bloodstream—a byproduct of coal power production—to put her child at risk should she become pregnant.

Thankfully, the Obama administration has announced it will seek to strengthen and update portions of the Clean Air Act in the coming months.

An assault on our health

This spring, Environment Missouri pressed the EPA for new standards to clean up mercury pollution from power plants. And on March 16, the EPA announced the first-ever national standards for mercury and air toxics pollution from power plants. Once implemented, the new standards are expected to reduce mercury and other hazardous air pollutants by 91 percent, prevent 12,200 trips to the hospital, and save 17,000 lives.

In February, we released a report showing that Missouri ranks 11th in the nation for mercury pollution from power plants. More than 30 rivers, lakes and streams in Missouri are now impaired by mercury.

“Mercury is a potent toxic chemical that affects our children’s ability to walk, talk, read and write,” said Environment Missouri Advocate Ted Mathys. “Missourians do all they can to protect their children, and we are pleased that the EPA has heard our call and is now stepping up to do their part.”

A taste of things to come?

The Obama administration’s updates to the Clean Air Act face great uncertainty, with polluting industries and their allies in Congress launching an all-out assault.

In February, the House of Representatives attached a provision to a federal funding bill that would have blocked the EPA from cutting mercury pollution from cement plants, cleaning up soot pollution, and reducing carbon dioxide from coal-fired plants.

After this setback, Shelley Vineyard—who works for Environment America, our national federation—joined others to convince dozens of newspapers across the country to editorialize in support of the Clean Air Act. Environment America held rallies outside of the offices of those representatives that voted for the bill.

Less than a month later, the Senate rejected the funding bill, with many senators citing the environmental and public health attacks within the bill as one of the reasons for their opposition.

Is nuclear power worth the risk?

Our hearts go out to the people of Japan who, after seeing a massive earthquake and tsunami strike their country, were forced to contend with an escalating nuclear crisis.

At press time, the consequences were still unfolding: Drinking water samples in Tokyo were contaminated with radioactive iodine at a level dangerous to infants; the sale of a dozen types of produce from the Fukushima region were banned due to potentially dangerous levels of radioactivity; hundreds of thousands of people were evacuated from the area around the reactors; and high radiation levels were found in the nearby ocean waters.

Should we be concerned about another nuclear reactor in Callaway County, and do America’s 104 nuclear plants pose similar risks to our children’s health and our environment? Based on our analysis, yes. At its most basic level, Mother Nature proved stronger than the best safeguards that Japan could design. Why would we be different?

Environment America is urging the Obama administration and others to improve the safety of existing nuclear plants, declare a moratorium on new plants, and begin to responsibly phase out our use of nuclear power in favor of clean, renewable energy, like wind and solar power. For more, visit www.EnvironmentMissouri.org.
Over the last decade, polluters have been able to chip away at key protections in the Clean Water Act, leaving the Meramec River, and the wild streams flowing through the Ozarks, in need of stronger protections from pollution.

The good news is that the Environmental Protection Agency is moving to update clean water standards and restore critical protections. It’s an important advance for our waters, but far from a done deal, given opposition from polluters and attempts by some members of Congress to block the EPA from doing its job.

Environment Missouri, along with our sister groups across the nation, will build support on behalf of increased protections for all of Missouri’s waters. By bringing together thousands of Americans, we hope to show the EPA the backing it needs to forge ahead and update protections for our waters—despite attempts by polluters and their allies in Congress to block this progress.