

Missouri Park & Recreation Association

2012 Legislative Platform

THIS IS MPRA . . .

Founded in 1959, the Missouri Park and Recreation Association serves as the voice for parks and recreation issues in Missouri at the local, state and national level. The nonprofit association, whose members work to provide opportunities for all of the state's citizens to enjoy quality leisure activities, is dedicated to promoting public support for parks and recreation and public awareness of the contribution of recreation to a balanced life.

The association works to ensure the growth and improve the quality and accessibility of urban and rural parks, open spaces and recreational lands, facilities and programs for all Missourians. It promotes research and information dissemination on park, conservation, recreation and leisure issues.

MPRA strives to maintain high standards of professional ethics and practices by promoting continuing education for its membership. The association encourages the support of college and university curricula to enhance research and assure a well-trained stream of future professionals.

MPRA cooperates with public, private and voluntary agencies to assure provision of quality park, recreation and conservation programs.

MPRA is governed by a board of directors elected by the general membership. The association maintains a headquarters office with a full-time staff in Jefferson City. MPRA is an affiliate member of the National Recreation and Park Association.

MPRA Legislative Issues – State

Building Healthy Individuals and Communities

Throughout Missouri there is a growing epidemic of obesity and associated health issues in both children and adults. A physically active lifestyle is critical to disease prevention and good health. Public parks and recreation facilities offer low cost opportunities for our citizens of every age, ability and income level to increase their level of physical activity, improve eating habits and better connect with natural environment thereby preventing chronic and costly health problems. Furthermore, there is increasing recognition of the critical social and economic value that public parks and recreation contributes to quality of life, security and livability in our communities, particularly in the area of youth development.

The State should take the lead in developing policies, practices and funding infrastructure to promote physical activity and healthy lifestyles that best utilize parks and recreation facilities that currently exist. We recommend support for making parks and recreation agencies eligible for any and all state programs that target youth and adults for healthy physical activities, development of life skills, environmental education and crime prevention/intervention programs. We also endorse initiatives that strive to create smoke-free environments for all citizens.

Trails

Missouri's Katy Trail State Park has encouraged communities to develop trail linkages, greenways and neighborhood greenbelts. Trail development contributes to conservation, promotes alternative transportation, and connects communities to nature and to each other.

MPRA, realizing the economic, recreational and historic benefits of the Katy trail which parallels the Missouri River, endorses the continued development of the trail from Kansas City to St. Louis, including full appropriation to develop, maintain, and staff this project. MPRA strongly encourage the trail's completion, specifically a link from Pleasant Hill into Kansas City near Arrowhead Stadium and any remaining portions in the St. Louis area. MPRA is strongly opposed to any action that would threaten the integrity and continued extension of the Katy Trail corridor.

The General Assembly is asked to support enabling legislation to allow first-class charter counties and contiguous counties in the Kansas City region to seek voter approval of a Regional Parks and Trails District similar to that granted to St. Louis area counties. The Kansas City metropolitan area has been working for a regional greenway trail system for over a decade, and support is increasing among area residents, community leaders and local government officials. The greenway trail system would preserve important natural areas along stream and rivers, provide alternative transportation corridors and greater recreational opportunities. In 1999, the Missouri General Assembly passed legislation (SB405) that allowed the St. Louis region to establish a regional parks and recreation district. Today, St. Louis city, St. Louis County and St. Charles County support a regional district that has resulted in new regional and local parks and trails investments with strong public support.

“Fair Tax” Initiatives

MPRA opposes the use of a higher sales tax rate to replace the corporate and individual income taxes. Missouri's cities rely upon sales taxes for general fund and park fund operations and capital improvements. If the state or local sales tax rate is dramatically increased, municipalities would be crippled in seeking voter approval of new sales taxes and Missouri businesses would lose retail to adjoining states and the Internet.

Parks as Safe Havens

Missouri citizens have long regarded their public parks as “safe havens.” Public parks and recreation agencies have always endeavored to remove any condition in their parks that might pose a threat or danger to its parks users, including sexual predators, drugs, bullying or other harassment, and illegal weapons. MPRA continues to vigorously support legislation that grants political subdivisions in Missouri the authority to ban or remove any condition or activity in their public parks that poses a potential danger to park user groups and individuals.

Scrap Metal Theft

MPRA's members have been deeply affected by the epidemic of copper and metal theft. Tremendous amounts of money are spent in materials and labor every day, resulting in a financial drain to citizens all over Missouri. MPRA encourages commitment of all available resources to the enforcement of current statutes regarding the theft and illegal purchasing of metal products on the state and local levels.

Prevailing Wage

Construction projects in nonmetropolitan areas are often severely limited or deleted when inappropriate prevailing wage rates are required. Often these regulations do not reflect the geographic labor force wage, and thereby significantly increase the projected construction costs to the detriment of local taxpayers.

MPRA strongly urges the realignment of prevailing wage regulations to more appropriately reflect the geographic locale, and supports the continuation and enlargement of the local prerogative for force account construction as appropriate. Additionally, MPRA supports amendments to the prevailing wage law that would exempt projects in third and fourth class counties from prevailing wage requirements.

Environmental Stewardship

The State of Missouri should help take the lead in supporting and implementing practices statewide which protect human life, preserve the environment and conserves valuable natural resources. These initiatives are integral to sustaining and improving the quality of life for all citizens into the future.

The State should include parks and recreation agencies in strategies, initiatives and projects that protect our natural resources and create recreational amenities through the use of “green solutions” such as stream buffers, stream restoration/protection efforts, native plantings, bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, storm water control projects, bio-retention facilities, energy efficiency measures, recycling programs, air and water pollution reduction and other measures that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve environmental quality.

Municipal, county, and state parks and recreation departments assist in promoting a commitment to clean air, water, the wise use of our natural resources, and stewardship of public and private lands.

The Missouri Park and Recreation Association encourages positive action on environmental issues. We especially recommend action that reminds all Missourians of the need for continued dedication to issues of improving open space, expanding recreation opportunities, and the wise use of all our natural resources.

Therapeutic Recreation Specialists Included as Qualified Health Care Professionals

MPRA recognizes the significant role Therapeutic Recreation Specialists/Recreational Therapists have in the health care field, providing quality services in public and private health care facilities. Therapeutic recreation specialists are principal treatment team members in physical rehabilitation programs, substance abuse treatment, and psychiatric rehabilitation. MPRA encourages the General Assembly to include therapeutic recreation as a vital, cost-effective component of building healthy communities through healthy citizens.

Inclusion & Americans with Disabilities Act

MPRA believes that diversity is the cornerstone of our society and culture and thus should be celebrated. Including people with disabilities in the fabric of society strengthens the community and its individual members. The value of inclusive leisure experiences in enhancing the quality of life for all people, with and without disabilities, cannot be overstated. As we broaden our understanding and acceptance of differences among people through shared leisure experiences, we empower future generations to build a better place to live and thrive.

In 1990, President George Bush signed into law the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This significant legislation extended civil rights protections to an estimated 49 million Americans with disabilities in much the same way that individuals are protected on the basis of race, color, sex, national origin, and religion. The ADA makes it illegal to discriminate on the basis of disability in the areas of employment, public services, public accommodations, transportation and telecommunications.

MPRA recognizes the right for persons with disabilities to work and recreate in the state of Missouri and supports programmatic access (as defined in the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and more recently the 2010 updates specific to Parks and Recreation) to all parks, historic sites and recreation areas throughout federal, state, county, and local parks and recreation sites.

Alcohol and Drug Abuse

Alcohol and drug use among young people in the United States is widespread and ranks as one of the nation’s most serious health problems. Alcohol and drug abuse has placed significant number of youth at risk for addiction. This warrants the attention of all levels of government. The problem should be addressed at the individual, community, state and national levels, working together to lessen the demand for alcohol and other drugs.

The National Recreation and Park Association has recognized the problem and believes recreation is a *partial solution*. They have established nationwide programs which promote the use of park and recreation facilities as a positive alternative.

The Missouri Park and Recreation Association supports local, state and national legislation similar to the Anti-Drug Act of 1988. This act promotes the establishment of community services and partnerships designed to develop community activities targeted at alcohol and other drug abuse prevention through education, training, and recreation projects. Any new legislation should promote the increased cooperation and formal linkages among alcohol and other drug abuse prevention, treatment and rehabilitation, juvenile justice, education, housing, employment, social welfare, parks and recreation, and physical and mental health programs within communities. The Missouri Park and Recreation Association stands ready to cooperate fully to assist our communities to promote a drug-free society.

Part-time Employee Health Insurance

Inadequate funding has always forced parks and recreation agencies to use a multitude of temporary, seasonal, and part-time workers to meet the demand for public recreation services as opposed to hiring necessary regular full-time personnel. State mandated health benefits invoke provisions of the Hancock Amendment requiring the state to pay added costs. Without supporting revenues, provision of health insurance benefits to temporary, seasonal, and/or part-time employees will have devastating budgetary impacts which will force curtailment of public recreation programs, closing of park lands and facilities, increased premiums, and loss of employment for the very people such proposals were intended to help.

MPRA strongly opposes any legislation or regulation mandating health insurance benefits for temporary, seasonal, and/or part-time employees who work less than 1,500 hours per year and who lack official budgetary status and designation as regular employees by their local political subdivision governing body.

Support of State Parks

Missouri’s State Park System is considered to be one of the five most magnificent collections of natural resources in the United States. MPRA believes they should be protected with the fervor they so richly deserve. Missouri’s state parks require careful stewardship.

Support for Higher Education

Missouri has been recognized as a national leader for its outstanding parks, recreation and tourism opportunities. MPRA strongly believes that the effective long-term stewardship of the many leisure-oriented resources, facilities and programs available throughout the state is extremely dependent upon the quality of both present and future parks and recreation professionals. It is with this belief that MPRA stresses the ongoing need

to provide strong nationally accredited parks and recreation program curriculums at the state's higher education level which creates a strong work force and important internship opportunities in the State of Missouri. In doing so, there is an acknowledgement of the critical role that superior parks, recreation and tourism opportunities play in the long-term economic health and well-being of the state.

MPRA urges the state of Missouri, General Assembly and Coordinating Board of Higher Education to maintain and support outstanding parks and recreation educational programs within the state. Special care should be given to provide nationally-accredited curricula that afford financial accessibility to the many students throughout the state.

Labor Relations

MPRA recognizes the right of municipal employees to join or form labor organizations and to present their grievances and requests through labor representatives. However, the employee's rights must be balanced by government's responsibility for assuring effective and orderly operations under responsible administration by duly elected representatives of the people or their appointees. MPRA supports Missouri's current meet and confer law and opposes any change to it

MPRA Legislative Issues – Federal

Urban Parks and Revitalization

There has been no dedicated federal funding to support urban parks for over eight years when the last round of grants under the Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Act were awarded in 2001. Since that time the need to rehabilitate deteriorating urban park infrastructure has grown exponentially. MPRA supports passage of the Urban Revitalization and Livable Communities Act, (HR3734), which provides matching federal assistance grants to rehabilitate existing and develop new, urban parks and community recreational infrastructure as well as for the continued investment in programs that improve public health, increase daily physical activity, reconnect children with nature, reduce crime, provide safe healthy alternatives for at-risk youth, encourage environmental stewardship and foster local economic development. In addition, the Livable Communities Act (S.1619) would provide funding for urban parks.

The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation and Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU)

In August of 2005, President Bush signed the new surface transportation law (SAFETEA-LU). Congress did not alter significantly formulas for distributing money. MPRA continues to support full funding for the program, the 10% set-aside for transportation enhancements and funding for the following programs: Recreational Trails Program, Safe Routes to Schools, CMAQ, Sport Fishing and Recreational Boating Act, Federal Land Highways, and Transit in Parks program. MPRA strongly opposes any changes to the protections of Section 4(f) for parks, wildlife, and waterfowl areas.

Land and Water Conservation Fund

The federal Land and Water Conservation Fund, since its inception in 1965, has made enormous contributions toward the adequate provision of outdoor recreation opportunities for America. When passed, the legislation authorized up to \$900 million annually for LWCF provided through OCS revenues collected on existing offshore energy leases. Unfortunately, over the last 45 years, LWCF has not received full-funding, and annual appropriations have been unpredictable and have seen a significant decrease from \$144 million in FY 2002 to \$40 million in FY 2010. MPRA urges increased appropriations for LWCF Stateside Assistance program in FY 2011 and also urges Congress to provide full and dedicated funding of \$900 million annually to the LWCF with \$450 million being allocated to the LWCF State Assistance Program. MPRA also supports a more equitable distribution of funds between the federal land acquisition program and the state assistance program. Over the last 25 years, almost 86% of LWCF funds have gone toward federal side programs and only 15% to state assistance. MPRA supports full, dedicated funding for LWCF between the state and local sides of the program.

Wilderness Act Protection for Mark Twain Forest Areas

There are seven areas of the Mark Twain Forest that have been identified since the 1970s as having important wilderness qualities and values: Big Spring in Carter County; Lower Rock Creek in Madison and Iron Counties; North Fork in Ozark, Douglas and Howell Counties; Smith Creek in Callaway and Boone Counties; Spring Creek in Douglas and Howell Counties; Swan Creek in Christian County; and Van East Mountain in Madison and Iron Counties.

MPRA urges the Missouri Congressional delegation to work together for the prompt introduction and passage of legislation to permanently protect these seven areas under the Wilderness Act of 1964.

Pending Authorizations

MPRA urges that parks and recreation agencies be included as eligible partners in future authorizations for environmental education, gang reduction and mentoring programs, youth sports and community health improvement programs.

The Americans with Disabilities Act

In 1990, President George Bush signed into law the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This significant legislation extended civil rights protections to an estimated 49 million Americans with disabilities in much the same way that individuals are protected on the basis of race, color, sex, national origin, and religion. The ADA makes it illegal to discriminate on the basis of disability in the areas of employment, public services, public accommodations, transportation and telecommunications.

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