

**MISSOURI
STATE REPORT**
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Department Revenues

For the first 10 months of the current fiscal year, which ended on April 30, 2010, the Department's total revenues were 8.0% or \$11.4 million lower than the first 10 months of last fiscal year. This decrease is a little skewed by a one-time \$2.3 million restricted donation received last fiscal year. The Department's largest revenue source is the Conservation Sales tax which was 4.3% or \$3.4 million lower than last year. Last year, the Department's total revenues were 1.7% or \$3.0 million lower with sales tax being 6.2% or \$6.4 million lower. It appears the current fiscal year will mark the third consecutive year, sales tax will be lower than the previous fiscal year. Prior to this period, the Conservation sales tax has never been lower in two consecutive fiscal years.

Staffing and Retirements

The Missouri Conservation Commission approved a staffing plan that significantly reduces expenses for the Department at their September 2009 meeting. The plan focuses on reducing personnel costs compared to other expenses. Like most other agencies and organizations, we are feeling the impacts from the ongoing economic downturn and this plan will help ensure a sound financial position during this continuing period of lagging revenues. The new staffing plan is expected to produce annual savings of approximately \$7.5 million.

Employee salaries and benefits are most organizations' biggest expenses and the staffing plan approved by the Conservation Commission ensures adequate funds allowing continued service to the people of Missouri. The majority of the expense reductions will be achieved by keeping vacant positions unfilled. The Department has been holding 39 full-time positions vacant since early 2009. We anticipate another 134 vacancies in full-time positions, largely through retirements, over the next 20 months. The total of 173 vacant positions represents 10.7% of the Department's staff.

The 173 vacant positions are a result of our Voluntary Payroll Reduction Program (VPRP) that was initiated in early 2009. Under this program, employees have three retirement options to choose from, one of which allows them to work a maximum of 450 hours temporary employment during the 12 months immediately following their official retirement date. The arrangement has proved to be a win-win situation for both the Department and the employees.

Chronic Wasting Disease

On February 24th the Missouri Department of Agriculture (MDA) informed MDC that a captive deer from a private hunting ranch in Linn Co, MO had tested positive for CWD. On Feb 25th National Veterinary Services Lab (NVSL) in Ames, IA confirmed that the index animal was CWD positive. The finding of CWD in a captive deer represented the first finding of CWD in Missouri, joining 16 other states and 2 Canadian provinces to have found CWD in a captive or free-ranging cervid. Since the finding of CWD an additional 50 deer from within the facility were tested with no additional cases of CWD. Thirty elk and red deer from other facilities on the ranch have also been tested with no positives.

On March 23rd MDC staff completed the collection of 153 deer (150 harvested, 3 road kills; 19 female fawns, 16 male fawns, 92 adult females, 26 adult males) from a 5 mile radius around the infected facility that includes parts of Linn, Macon, and Chariton Counties. Test results on the 153 samples submitted to the Southeast Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study in Athens, GA were all negative. Plans are currently being made for the collection of additional samples from hunter-harvested deer during the fall hunting season.

USDA, MDA, and MDC are currently working with the owners of the private hunting preserve to develop a herd plan. The herd plan calls for depopulation and testing of all cervids within the infected facility and will provide two different long term courses of action which will be dependent upon the test results of the depopulated animals.

White-Nose Syndrome

White-Nose Syndrome (WNS) is a disease caused by the fungus *Geomyces destructans* that was discovered in New York in 2007. Since its discovery, it has rapidly spread through six species of bats that hibernate in caves or mines, killing over 1 million bats, resulting in severe reductions in populations of species, including threatened or endangered species. This level of mortality threatens cave ecosystems that rely on energy inputs from bats, and will likely cause economic losses through the lowered predation on crop and forest pests. In anticipation of the approach of WNS toward Missouri from the nearest known location in West Virginia, the Missouri Department of Conservation completed an internal White-Nose Syndrome Action Plan to guide Department management of its caves. Signed in April 2010, the Department received notification within days that a little brown bat in Pike County in northeastern Missouri tested positive for *Geomyces destructans*, initiating 3 of the 4 triggers for actions identified in the action plan. The Department immediately enacted the actions prescribed in the plan, including closing 58 additional bat caves on MDC property to public access. In May, the Department received confirmation that 5 gray bats, never before documented to have WNS, collected outside a hibernaculum in south-central Missouri had *Geomyces destructans*. A visit to the hibernaculum did not reveal any dead bats to indicate mortality due to WNS. The Department is committing resources, including a recent grant from USFWS, to construct cave gates on top priority bat caves to provide further protection to help bats recover. In addition to the Department's action plan, the agency is working with the USFWS to lead a statewide committee

of federal and state agencies, NGOs, show cave owners, cavers, and private landowners to develop a statewide action plan to coordinate outreach, management, and research efforts.

Program Planning and Budgeting

In an effort to better position ourselves for future success in everything we do and hold ourselves accountable to the people of Missouri, we have initiated an effort to better define our programs across the agency and to align those programs within the budget. Currently, our budget is developed primarily along division boundaries rather than programmatically; therefore, it's difficult to assess allocation of resources among the various programs, especially those programs that are multi-disciplinary. Moreover, it's difficult to communicate about program accomplishments, internally and externally, or to roll-up information when that is widely dispersed throughout the agency. Once the initial step of identifying and defining programs is complete, we will implement a new budget framework for FY12 and begin the process of reviewing programs according to resources (time and money), desired future achievement, and future level of commitment.

Land Conservation and Stewardship Program

For many years, the Department has employed primarily a single strategy to protecting lands for conservation purposes—fee title acquisition. Today, however, more opportunities exist for partnerships and wider use of additional tools like easements, leases, and other incentive-based strategies. For the past several months, we've been exploring other options for planning and achieving the protection of lands with high conservation values. To this end, we're developing a new program that will fold together various types planning (e.g., Comprehensive Wildlife Strategies, Forest Priority Areas, and Priority Watersheds), better define all the tools in our land protection tools box, and seek more and broader partnerships using desired endpoints and stated conservation values.

The purpose of the Land Conservation and Stewardship Program shall be to protect and conserve important land and water resources critical to forest, fish and wildlife conservation, habitat restoration needs, and quality outdoor experiences. The goals of the program are: To protect Missouri's most significant land and water resources for appreciation and use by future generations, and provide the land base necessary for conservation of the state's forests, fish, and wildlife resources, and related outdoor recreation.

These goals will be achieved by employing a variety of strategies including fee title acquisition, leases, conservation easements, donations, voluntary and incentive-based protection/conservation, and partnerships with individuals, foundations, government, not-for-profit organizations, and local communities.

Website Redesign

Our MDC website contains huge amounts of useful information, but it is hard to keep information current, accurate and easy to find. The goal of the website redesign effort is to improve communication to our customers by making items easier to find and ensuring timely and relevant information is readily available. The website redesign effort makes it possible for trained division-level staff to create, publish and update their division's web content. The redesign project includes building a new content management system, training division staff and supporting the transfer of their existing content to the new website. The redesigned website will use our existing website addresses. (missouriconservation.org and mdc.mo.gov). MDC staff will have the opportunity to use and become familiar with the new website in a test environment before it is made available to the public. The new website will be made available to the public on July 1, 2010.

QuickDraw Waterfowl Reservation System

The Department will pilot a new system this fall to allocate hunting opportunities at three of its intensively managed wetland areas.

Numerous studies have shown one of the most limiting factors to outdoor recreation participation are the lack of time. In response to these studies, and with the hope of attracting additional, one-time hunters, the MDC will utilize an internet-based application system to allocate approximately 80% of the hunting spots prior to the actual day of the hunt. (i.e., hunters will know they are hunting before they leave their home). Hoping to reduce the number of hunters turned away on any given day and hoping to attract new participants the MDC will conduct a computer drawing two times per week and notify successful hunters via text message or by e-mail. The pilot areas will still allocate the remaining spots along with "no-show" spots through the traditional early morning drawing.

Hunters will apply on-line for a specific day and a specific area. If unsuccessful, hunters will have the option to hunt other areas or take a chance at one of the unallocated spots for the "poor-line". The electronic drawings will be held on Mondays for the upcoming Friday-Monday hunts and draw on Thursdays for the upcoming Tuesday – Thursday hunts.

ePermits

The online permits project known as ePermits was approved in 2009 by the Commission as part of the Vacancy Management Plan; ePermits expands our customer service by enabling customers to purchase permits on the web, on their mobile devices or at a local vendor. This initiative implements a new strategy for MDC permits and provides a cost effective manner to transition MDC from a POS based system to an online permit system that is available to MDC customers and vendors. It provides our customers the ability to buy permits online and print them out for immediate use. The agency anticipates significant savings as a result of this change. Customers will be able to purchase permits on the web, on their mobile devices, or at a local vendor.

New Kids Magazine - Xplor

A multi-media “nature-tainment” mash-up called Xplor is the Missouri Department of Conservation’s latest tool for reconnecting children with nature. The magazine is designed to address child advocates’ concern over children’s growing alienation from nature. Author Richard Louv described the phenomenon as “nature deficit disorder” in *Last Child in the Woods*. The 2005 book distilled much of what was known about the phenomenon’s negative effects on children and society. It also spawned a national movement to connect kids to the outdoors, something the Conservation Department has been working at since the 1930s.

Recognizing that young people today get information in dramatically different ways than previous generations, the Conservation Department is devising a challenging, exciting tool that combines the visual, tactile appeal of a full-color magazine with the audio and video capabilities of the Internet.

Youthful readers will be able to read about how nature artists and photographers capture their stunning images, and then go to Xplor online for video lessons on drawing, painting and photography from the master artists and photographers. Likewise, they will get to spend time with people with wild jobs and share other Missouri kids’ real-life adventures illustrated in graphic-novel style.

Other regular Xplor print features include a “YUCK!” department about things slimy, gooey, stinky and just plain gross, plus audio and video clips that bring magazine articles to life. The magazine will cover the full range of outdoor nature-related activities, from hunting and fishing to birdwatching and hands-on conservation. The inaugural issue of Xplor appeared in February 2010, and subscriptions are at 50,000 so far.

Discover Nature Schools

Discover Nature Schools is a new flagship conservation education program designed to help students get outside to experience hands-on learning in nature close to home. The program includes student and teacher guides designed to meet state education standards, as well as grants for field trips, instructional materials and outdoor classrooms.

Units have been developed for middle schools (Conserving Missouri’s Aquatic Resources) and for 4th-5th grade students (Nature Unleashed). Department Conservation Education Consultants (18 of them statewide) provide workshops to teachers on how to use this curriculum in outdoor learning.

An ecology unit for high school, Nature Unbound, will be piloted in the Fall 2010. It can be used in biology as well as agriculture education classes. Staff is developing units for kindergarten to 2nd grade and for pre-school. In the meantime, we’re rolling our previously stand-alone outdoor classroom grants and field trip grants into the Discover Nature Schools program, so the funds will be put to most effective use.