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MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION

*Headquarters*

240 West Truman Boulevard, P.O. Box 180, Jefferson City, Missouri 65103-0180  
Telephone: 573/751-4113 • Missouri Relay Center: 1-800-735-2966 (TDD)

JOHN D. HUSKINS, Director

July 5, 2006

Mr. Dave Murphy, Executive Director  
Conservation Federation of Missouri  
729 W. Main Street  
Jefferson City, MO 65101

Dear Dave:

The resolutions that pertain to this Department—adopted at the 2006 annual meeting of the Conservation Federation of Missouri (CFM)—have been reviewed by staff. In response, we submit the following comments:

**RESOLUTION NO. 2 – MDC AD HOC TEAM**

CFM endorses the implementation of the *Weighted Random Selection Option* in implementation of a preference point system for MDC managed hunts.

**RESPONSE:** The Department of Conservation appreciates the follow-up input of the Conservation Federation of Missouri in response to the **Report of the Ad Hoc Team Reviewing Hunt Selection Procedures**. The Ad Hoc Team's effort was an undertaking of the Department's Regulations Committee in response to a 2005 resolution by the Federation. Subsequent to the 2006 resolution on this topic by the Federation, the Regulations Committee tasked an implementation team to identify a pathway leading to implementation of the weighted random selection process for certain managed deer hunts. A report was provided to the Regulations Committee and Conservation Commission for consideration, and will serve as a basis for further action.

**RESOLUTION NO. 8 – STUDENT CONSERVATION ORGANIZATION**

CFM recommends that the Department of Conservation collaborate with the Missouri Cooperative Extension Service, federal, state and non-government organizations to sponsor two conservation pilot programs, in both urban and rural areas, to education high school students in conserving the state's natural resources through hands-on activities.

**RESPONSE:** The Missouri Department of Conservation supports the concept of pilot student conservation activities/organizations for high school students (in rural and urban areas). Missouri Cooperative Extension has expressed an interest in working to begin these two pilot efforts, with one possible method being development of Junior Master Naturalist chapters to fulfill that concept. We do not support that particular approach at this time. The Missouri Master Naturalist program was begun by MDC in cooperation with Extension and we are finding it challenging to meet the staffing needs to grow that adult program, so expansion into reaching a younger audience is not feasible yet. MDC will continue to explore and evaluate potential options to increase educational efforts of high school students.

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Since the overall resolution began with noting a lack of conservation education in high school, it's important to mention that MDC is working to develop conservation education instructional units for Missouri high schools in 2008. We will also provide grant funding to support outdoor learning as part of those units. Eventually this will be part of our larger Learning Outdoors school program for grades K-12—an effort to provide hands-on conservation education in an effective and focused way to Missouri students throughout their school years.

**RESOLUTION NO. 11 – PRIVATELY OWNED FOREST LAND MANAGEMENT**

CFM encourages increased funding for forest management through USDA Forest Land Enhancement Program, Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program, Environmental Quality Incentive Program, MDC cost-share program and other applicable alternatives.

**RESPONSE:** Increased cost share funding for private forest land management activities is a priority for MDC. Efforts are underway on several fronts to make this a reality. We will be working with USDA NRCS state leadership in the near future to heighten awareness of forest management and explore the possibility of dedicating some EQIP or other program funds to forestry practices. The National Association of State Foresters, the USDA Forest Service, and the Society of American Foresters are all actively engaged in shaping the 2007 Farm Bill to ensure the presence of forestry programs in the Farm Bill.

More immediately, the amount of cost share money allocated to states from the U.S. Forest Service through the Forest Land Enhancement Program (FLEP) is objectively determined based on a formula which takes into account several state factors including: the amount of private forest land, the number of private forest landowners, the number of acres of private forest land physically capable of supporting commercial forestry activities, risk of forest insect and disease infestation, and miles of streams whose impairment can be remedied through forestry activities (temperature, sediment, and nutrients). In order for a state to receive more FLEP money, the overall program funding from Congress must be increased.

Monies from MDC's internal cost share program are available to fund forest management activities and are used on a routine basis. This fund has remained stable in the face of recent budget pressures, and will likely continue to do so. However, the chances of large increases in this program are slim due to competition with the myriad other programs funded in the Department's budget.

Forestry Division will work diligently to maintain current cost share levels with traditional partners and explore new opportunities with non-traditional partners.

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**RESOLUTION NO. 12 – BLACK BEARS OF MISSOURI**

CFM requests the Department of Conservation conduct a large-scale assessment and study of the black bear in Missouri, to include a scientific population estimate, identification of major travel corridors, reproductive evaluations, habitat and resource selections, den locations, behavior and dispersal and distribution patterns.

**RESPONSE:** The Missouri Department of Conservation has long held an interest in better defining the conservation status of the black bear in Missouri. We have done some basic research work, and have documented that Missouri has a small but slowly growing black bear population in the state. About a decade ago, we surveyed the state to determine the status and distribution of black bears and black bear habitat, and found that we had somewhere in the neighborhood of 150 to 300 black bears, generally in the southern third of the state. That number may be approaching 400 or more today. We conducted a very thorough and intensive bait-station survey, covering over 60 different transects in the best bear habitat (approximately 4,000 bait-stations) to determine the distribution of bears in the state. A portion of these routes has been surveyed annually since then, with a very low visitation rate (about 1%), suggesting a very low density of bears. A total of 548 black bear sighting reports were recorded in 56 counties during this project, and in 29 counties, bears were only reported in one or two years, suggesting transient animals. We developed a bear habitat model, and estimate that Missouri has approximately 3 million acres of bear habitat, scattered in three blocks, and they are not contiguous with the best bear habitat in Arkansas. The final research report is available upon request. We maintain close contact with bear biologists in Arkansas and Oklahoma, and share data and information that help us to manage our small population. Today we have an active nuisance bear management program, with emphasis on prevention of bear problems, and use of deterrents rather than a capture/removal program. We are interested in a continuing program of black bear research, and look forward to forming funding partnerships with other interested conservation groups.

**RESOLUTION NO. 14 – ATLATL HUNTING**

CFM urges the Department of Conservation to consider legalizing the atlatl and dart for hunting small game and to undertake a study to determine the feasibility of harvesting big game.

**RESPONSE:** The Department of Conservation is currently studying the use of the atlatl for taking wildlife. Should the atlatl be approved by the Conservation Commission as a method for taking wildlife, the likely effective date would be March, 2007.

**RESOLUTION NO. 15 – TRAPPING FEES**

CFM requests the Department of Conservation suspend the requirements of individuals 65 years of age and older to purchase a trapping license.

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**RESPONSE:** The Missouri Department of Conservation has required trappers to purchase a trapping license annually to help maintain contact with trappers in the state since the early 1950s. Currently, about 4,500 trappers purchase this permit and a substantial portion are already over 65 years of age (the average age of Missouri trappers is now near 50 years of age). The trapping permit fee is relatively inexpensive (\$10), and provides for an economical way for the Department to identify the participants in this activity, and to survey them periodically about their efforts and opinions. Trapping provides many benefits to the Department and to the public, and some licensing requirement is an essential part of our management program, and provides some amount of accountability to the public. In our efforts to continue to support and define the benefits of trapping in the eyes of the public, our communication messages often refer to the licensing requirements as well as other aspects of law enforcement. We think it is essential that we continue to require all trappers (other than those exempt) to have a license.

**RESOLUTION NO. 18 – PRAIRIE CHICKENS/PRAIRIE**

CFM supports the efforts of the Missouri Department of Conservation and the Grassland Coalition to protect and restore prairie chickens, grassland wildlife and Missouri's prairie heritage.

**RESPONSE:** The Missouri Department of Conservation renewed its emphasis on Greater Prairie-Chicken recovery during 2005 by updating land management, monitoring and landowner outreach strategies to address the continued decline of this state endangered species. Partner and peer review of those recommendations helped produce a comprehensive action plan for the first five years of a long-term recovery effort. Financial investments beginning in 2006 will support additive management of public and private lands in select landscapes, fund monitoring and habitat use studies and enable initial translocations. The Department will continue to work with Missouri Grasslands Coalition partners through the auspices of Missouri's Comprehensive Wildlife Strategy to engage new partners and secure additional resources to support recovery efforts over the long term. These investments of financial resources, staff time and agency attention will pay dividends to a wide array of grassland plant and animal species representative of Missouri's prairie heritage.

**RESOLUTION NO. 19 – ALTERNATE HUNTER EDUCATION METHODS**

CFM encourages the Department of Conservation to explore the possibility of alternative Hunter Education delivery methods which will complement the excellent program currently in place, while maintaining the present level of educational reliability.

**RESPONSE:** The Missouri Department of Conservation concurs with this resolution and is in the process of exploring alternative delivery methods for mandatory Hunter Education. We plan to move from planning to implementation in the upcoming year as we pilot alternative methods to complement the excellent program currently in place to maintain hunter safety.

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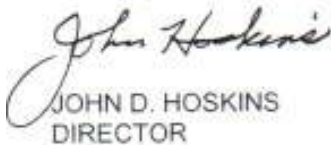
**RESOLUTION NO. 20 – NATIONAL HERITAGE STATUS FOR THE  
CONFLUENCE AREA**

CFM expresses its support for National Heritage Designation for the confluence area, provided it is not in conflict with the Departments of Conservation and Natural Resources goals and objectives.

**RESPONSE:** The Department of Conservation recognizes the unique importance of the Missouri and Mississippi River confluence area to fish and wildlife resources plus outdoor recreation and open space. The Mississippi and Missouri Rivers are the greatest rivers in North America and their confluence immediately north of St. Louis is an outstanding natural heritage. The Columbia Bottom Conservation Area and the Edward "Ted" and Pat Jones Confluence Point State Park serve as anchors for the confluence area. A number of organizations and agencies are working on open space conservation, habitat restoration, and a linked system of multi-use trails, recreation facilities, and historic and heritage sites from these two large public ownerships to the Gateway Arch and south to the Meramec River. National heritage status for the confluence area, if authorized would assist local residents and conservation partners in preserving the natural values of the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers and their floodplains.

As you know, the Conservation Commission endorsed these Department responses at its June 23, 2006 meeting. Again, we appreciate the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,



JOHN D. HOSKINS  
DIRECTOR

c: Conservation Commissioners  
Assistant Director Brown  
Assistant Director Smith  
Assistant Director Ziehmer  
Commission Secretary