



MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION

Headquarters

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SARA PARKER PAULEY, Director

April 21, 2021

Mr. Tyler Schwartze, Executive Director
Conservation Federation of Missouri
728 W. Main Street
Jefferson City, MO 65101

Dear Mr. Schwartze:

The resolutions that pertain to the Missouri Department of Conservation (Department), adopted at the 2021 annual meeting of the Conservation Federation of Missouri (CFM), have been considered by staff. In response, we submit the following comments:

RESOLUTION #2021-1: Not Allow Airguns During Archery Season.

CFM strongly urges the Department to resist all efforts to consider air guns to be archery equipment, and not make them legal during Missouri's archery seasons.

RESPONSE: During Missouri's archery deer and turkey season, allowed methods include longbows, compound bows, recurve bows, crossbows, and atlatls. Within the *Wildlife Code of Missouri*, a bow is defined as a device drawn and held by hand and not fastened to a stock nor to any other mechanism that maintains the device in a drawn position. This definition includes longbows, recurve bows, and compound bows. A crossbow, by definition in the *Wildlife Code of Missouri*, is a device for discharging quarrels or bolts, formed of a bow set crosswise on a stock, usually drawn by means of a mechanism and discharged by release of a trigger. Because the hunting method commonly referred to as an air bow does not meet the definition of either a bow or crossbow within the *Wildlife Code of Missouri*, it is not permitted to be used during the archery deer and turkey season and the Department of Conservation is not considering its inclusion as a legal method during the archery deer and turkey season at this time.

RESOLUTION #2021-2: Support for Science-Based Management of Black Bears. CFM strongly supports the Missouri Department of Conservation's science-based management of black bears, including carefully regulated hunting to maintain a healthy bear population at levels that are biologically sustainable, and urges the Missouri Department of Conservation to continue educating the public about hunting as part of black bear management.

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RESPONSE: The Department appreciates the CFM's interest in Missouri's black bear population and the Department's black bear management program. We appreciate the support for science-based management of Missouri's black bear population. As your resolution mentions, the black bear population is growing and expanding in range, and as a result the Department will offer a very limited, and highly regulated, black bear hunting season to provide opportunity for Missourians to participate in the sustainable harvest of this valuable natural resource. For the first season, harvest and permit quotas were established that will allow for sufficient hunter opportunity, while maintaining black bear population growth. Harvest and permit quotas will be evaluated annually to ensure harvest is sustainable. Additionally, bear-hunter education classes will be developed to educate interested individuals on black bears, black bear hunting, and regulations associated with the bear hunting season.

The Department appreciates this input, and as the 2020-2030 Black Bear Management Plan underscores, we will continue to use science-based methods to inform black bear management decisions into the future.

RESOLUTION #2021-3: Amphibian Chytrid Awareness. CFM encourages the Missouri Department of Conservation and Missouri Department of Natural Resources to inform Missourians about the threat of *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis* (BD) and how they can prevent the spread of BD, and to promote the practice of basic sanitation regimens between bodies of water.

RESPONSE: The amphibian chytrid fungus is a water-borne fungus that causes the disease chytridiomycosis by invading the skin layer in amphibians. The fungus has been known to cause amphibian population declines around the world, especially in Central America. Although the fungus was first described in 1998 and received worldwide attention in the early 2000s, it has been present in North America, including Missouri, since the 1960s. The fungus is known to be lethal for some species while other species can withstand infections. When the Department became aware of this emerging threat to amphibians in the early 2000s, the Department took considerable proactive actions by implementing surveillance for the fungus in the wild, implementing preventative measures to reduce spread, and increasing public awareness. Amphibian chytrid fungus is widespread on many species of amphibians within Missouri, but largescale population declines due to the fungus have not been observed during the past 20 years. Nevertheless, the threat of this fungus and many other pathogens (e.g. fungus, bacteria, virus) impacting Missouri amphibians, reptiles, and other wildlife continues to be a high priority for the Department. Efforts the Department has taken to address threats to wildlife posed by amphibian chytrid fungus include:

- Surveillance and monitoring of amphibian chytrid fungus on amphibians (central newts, hellbenders, and many cave species) most likely to be impacted, as well as amphibian die-off events.
- Completion of a brochure entitled "African Clawed Frog – Keep Them Out of Missouri Waters" was disseminated to science teachers across the state and provided free to the public at Department offices.
- Regulations were changed to eliminate the sale of frogs and salamander larvae as live bait to reduce the potential spread of diseases and pathogens.
- Implementation of cleaning and disinfecting protocols by individuals conducting research on amphibians and reptiles, as well as by Discover Nature School programs.
- Implementation of guidelines to eliminate or reduce the spread of zebra mussels that will aid in reducing spread of other pathogens.
- Training of Education staff within the Department and other agencies regarding amphibian diseases to facilitate outreach to Missouri citizens.
- The Department recently created a Disease Coordination Team that focuses on diseases and pathogens that are a risk to wildlife and recreational users.

When this emerging disease was described in Missouri, the Department took considerable proactive actions to increase awareness and reduce the spread of amphibian chytrid fungus. As further opportunities arise (e.g., *Conservationist* articles, media news releases, website information, school programs, etc.), the Department will continue to raise awareness of threats posed by amphibian chytrid fungus and other amphibian diseases including steps conservationists and the public can take to minimize impacts to wildlife.

RESOLUTION #2021-5: Support for the White Oak Initiative. CFM calls for the Missouri Department of Conservation, Missouri Forest Products Association, and MU Forestry Extension to take action promoting the White Oak Initiative's work and promote the active management of this iconic tree species for the use and enjoyment of generations to come.

RESPONSE: The Department has partnered with the White Oak Initiative (WOI) for the last three years. The State Forester serves on the Initiative's Steering Committee and has been active in assisting with the evaluation of applications for mini-grant funding. The Department financially supports the WOI through a matching grant in the amount of \$25,000 annually over a three-year period.

The Department received a \$10,000 mini-grant in February 2020 to develop outreach messaging and tools to reach Missouri landowners in a target geography. This project was a bit delayed due to COVID but is well underway. In addition, a *Nature Lab* feature

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on white oak and the challenges associated with its regeneration is planned for the April 2022 issue of the *Missouri Conservationist*.

The Department appreciates the comments regarding promoting active management of white oak for the use and enjoyment by all Missourians. The Department is committed to being good stewards of public resources including all forest systems and we are dedicated to sustainable forest management. The Department has lands certified in the Sustainable Forest Initiative and uses many tools to actively manage forests for White Oak and other species regeneration. Management practices implemented by The Department on public land follow current scientific and professional best practices to ensure adequate regeneration. We have partnered with the USDA Forest Service and University of Missouri to study and mitigate the effects of Rapid White Oak Mortality and Oak Decline, which are major factors in white oak's precipitous decline.

All landowners interested in care of their forest are encouraged to have a long-term management plan developed for their woods. When these plans are written by MDC staff, they emphasize managing for long term health and sustainability of the forest. As the WOI develops outreach tools and messaging for private landowners, those tools will be incorporated into forest management plans.

RESOLUTION #2021-8: Enable Missouri Citizens Receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP) to Apply for Reduced-Fee Fishing Permits. CFM encourages the Missouri Department of Conservation to implement a reduced-fee fishing permit program for SNAP participants and other low-income Missourians.

RESPONSE: The Department focuses on angler recruitment, retention, and reactivation, and has for some time. As referenced in CFM's 2021 Resolutions document, the *Fishing for the Future Plan* identifies the Department's current plan for the support of Missouri's water resources and the continuation of the state's rich fishing heritage.

According to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's "2011 National Survey of Fishing" report, Missouri is located in the region that has experienced the highest fishing participation rates in the nation, which among other variables, can be directly attributed to the cost of Missouri's permit required to participate. In 2020, Missouri's Annual Resident Fishing Permit fee of \$12.00 was ranked as the second lowest in cost when compared to its neighboring states, which have an average price of \$23.00. By keeping the cost of the Resident Fishing Permit low, the Department has ensured the price continues to not be a barrier to enjoy the fishing opportunities of the state.

State	Price
Tennessee	N/A
Nebraska	\$38.00
Kansas	\$27.50
Oklahoma	\$25.00
Kentucky	\$23.00
Iowa	\$22.00
Illinois	\$15.00
Missouri	\$12.00
Arkansas	\$10.50
Average Price	\$23.00

*Data was collected and provided by the Conservation Business Services Branch – Permit Services section and reflects the rate of the 2020 Resident Fishing Permit for the states listed.

The implementation of a reduced-cost permit for Missouri residents participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) would result in the need for additional full-time equivalents (FTEs), to successfully administer the program. Unlike reduce-cost permits for other qualifying candidates, such as 60% or greater disabled veterans where their eligibility does not change, SNAP eligibility is subject to change each year, requiring participants to submit an annual application and supporting documentation for review and approval by the Department.

In addition to low and competitively priced permits, the Department also offers the following programs which aid in limiting any additional barriers that might prevent citizens from being able to enjoy all the benefits fishing has to offer:

- The Rod and Reel Loaner Program lets Missourians check out free fishing poles and tackle boxes. Offered at more than 140 locations throughout Missouri, the loaner program makes fishing equipment available to everyone. Locations can be found at <https://huntfish.mdc.mo.gov/fishing/get-started-fishing/rod-and-reel-loaner-locations>.
- Free fishing weekend, as well as trout parks which offer special kids free fishing and veteran free fishing days each year.
- The Community Assistance Program, where the Department partners with communities throughout the state to provide over 200 additional public fishing areas.
- The Winter Trout Program, which stocks local ponds and lakes in parts of the state where trout are not normally found. This provides a 'close to home' trout fishing opportunity without the expense of traveling to parts of the state where trout are normally found.

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The Department continually seeks to recruit new anglers and engage diverse audiences and appreciates CFM's work to identify new and innovative outreach efforts.

RESOLUTION #2021-10: Require Non-Toxic Shot for Small Game on All Missouri Department of Conservation Areas. CFM recommends that the Missouri Department of Conservation expand the requirement for the use of non-toxic shot to all small-game species when hunting with shotshells on all property it owns or manages.

RESPONSE: The Department recognizes spent lead from shotshells as a potential toxin to wildlife in the environment. As a result, there are currently thirty-seven conservation areas owned or managed by the Department where use or possession of lead shot is prohibited for hunting. Additionally, within the past four years, twenty Department owned or managed areas with high dove hunting pressure also require non-toxic shot. Through hunter education courses, hunting clinics, and managed hunt orientations, the Department provides educational materials regarding the effective use of non-toxic shot and encourages participants to consider using and/or switching to non-toxic shot for hunting all species on public and private lands. The Department will continue to monitor hunting pressure on Department owned and managed lands and consider recommendations for adding additional areas that require non-toxic shot for all small game hunting.

RESOLUTION #2021-11: Conservation Federation of Missouri (CFM) support of Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) intensively managed wetland areas and a Missouri Wetland and Waterfowl Symposium. CFM urges the Missouri Department of Conservation to maintain adequate staffing and resourcing of intensively managed wetland areas necessary to achieve desired management objectives; to maintain the investment in managed wetlands in Missouri and related management infrastructure and strategies that ensure the integration of diverse wildlife benefits and a broad range of public benefits thus perpetuating the model of waterfowl and wetlands conservation that has been a hallmark of Missouri conservation for more than 70 years; and to partner with CFM's Wetland and Waterfowl Resource Advisory Committee to develop a joint proposal for review by leadership of the two entities to carry out a Missouri Wetland and Waterfowl Symposium to be held during a future date but no later than 2022.

RESPONSE: The Department recognizes wetlands are the most productive natural community in our state. Wetlands provide essential ecological services such as flood storage, water quality improvement, nutrient and sediment filtering, ground-water recharge, and essential habitat for a broad suite of taxa year-round, including stop-over

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sites for hundreds of migratory bird species during spring and fall migration. Wetlands also provide a broad range of societal benefits. Of the top 10 eBird birdwatching hotspots in Missouri with the most species recorded, nine are managed wetland areas, averaging 260 species on record; five of those top 10 are intensively managed Department wetlands.

The Department, through the Golden Anniversary Wetland Initiative over the past two decades, acknowledges the importance of the fifteen intensively managed wetlands and that restoration and management activities rely on substantial partnership support and dollars. The Department realizes these 15 intensively managed wetlands need knowledgeable staff and dollars to maintain and will continue with our current budget processes of looking at the Department's entire portfolio of infrastructure needs when requesting annual spending authority for wetland associated work.

In addition to the Department holding annual Wetland Reviews and other training opportunities for staff and partners, the Department supports partnering with CFM's Wetland and Waterfowl Resource Advisory Committee to develop a joint proposal for review by the leadership of both entities to carry out a Missouri Wetland and Waterfowl Symposium at a future date.

Sincerely,



SARA PARKER PAULEY
DIRECTOR

c: Conservation Commission
Deputy Director Hubbard
Deputy Director Battson Warren
Deputy Director Jeffries
Commission Secretary