



Farm Service Agency

May 26, 2015

Missouri State Office

Brandon Butler

601 Bus. Loop 70 W
Suite 225

Executive Director

Columbia, MO 65203

728 West Main Street

Jefferson City, MO 65101-1559

Phone 573-876-0925

Fax 855-830-0681

Dear Mr. Butler:

Thank you for your correspondence of April 30, 2015 concerning the resolutions adopted by the Conservation Federation of Missouri. In regard to these resolutions, I would offer the following information and comments concerning the programs and efforts of the Farm Service Agency that address some of these Resolutions. The Farm Service Agency continually strives to address conservation issues and provide assistance in those areas deemed relevant and of high importance to conservation organizations, like yours, and landowners in the state of Missouri.

RESOLUTION #1

The Farm Service Agency provides Missouri landowners, who agree to establish practices aimed at restoring wetlands and conducive to waterfowl, the opportunity to enroll land into the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) that promote these objectives. These practices are:

- CP-9 (Shallow Water Areas For Wildlife)
- CP-23 (Wetland Restoration)
- CP-23A (Wetland Restoration-Non Floodplain) and
- CP-31 (Bottomland Timber Establishment on Wetlands).

RESOLUTION #2

The Farm Service Agency, through the local FSA County Committees, recently reviewed CRP rental rates for all counties in Missouri. Recommended rates to be used for 2015 were submitted to the National Office for review and concurrence. These updated rates are expected to become effective June 1, 2015.

RESOLUTION #3

The Farm Service Agency offers Missouri landowners, interested in grass strips to be used in conjunction with row crops, 2 CRP practices which may meet their needs. These practices are:

- CP-15A Permanent Vegetative Cover (Contour Grass Strips)
- CP-15B Permanent Vegetative Cover (Contour Grass Strips) on Terraces.

Hopefully the above information provides some insight to what the Farm Service Agency has to offer in support of the Resolutions adopted by the Conservation Federation. If additional information needed or if I can provide further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact this office. We would be happy to meet with and discuss our conservation programs with your organization at any time.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark A. Cadle". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'M' and 'C'.

Mark A. Cadle
State Executive Director



DEPARTMENT of AGRICULTURE
STATE OF MISSOURI
JEFFERSON CITY

JEREMIAH W. (JAY) NIXON
GOVERNOR

RICHARD FORDYCE
DIRECTOR

*Serving, promoting and protecting the agricultural producers, processors
and consumers of Missouri's food, fuel and fiber products.*

May 28, 2015

Brandon Butler
Missouri Conservation Federation
728 West Main
Jefferson City, MO 65101

Dear Brandon,

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the resolutions developed during your annual meeting. The efforts of the Conservation Federation are important to all Missourians. The resolutions submitted for response include grazing native grass, converting cool-season pastures to warm-season grass, incentives for renewing CRP contracts, promoting milkweed habitat for monarchs, and promoting the use of prairie strips.

The Department of Agriculture has a long history of working with organizations like yours to make Missouri a better state for everyone. We also routinely work with government agencies, universities and many others to ensure that good conservation practices and modern agriculture can coexist in a mutually beneficial environment.

Fortunately, Missouri farmers and ranchers have understood the value of stewardship and conservation for many generations. Since our constituents, like yours, recognize the importance of our natural resources, the Department of Agriculture will work within our means and abilities to support the Conservation Federation resolutions.

Sincerely,

Richard Fordyce
Director



GREAT LAKES/ATLANTIC REGION

c/o U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
101 Park DeVillie Drive, Suite B
Columbia, MO 65203
(573) 234-2132 ext. 178
mflaspholer@ducks.org

June 16, 2015

Brandon Butler
Executive Director
Conservation Federation of Missouri
728 West Main Street
Jefferson City, MO 65101

Dear Mr. Butler,

Missouri Ducks Unlimited (MO DU) supports your 2015 Resolution targeting an **Incentive Program for Private Wetland Owners**. During spring, waterfowl need high-quality wetland habitat to fuel their journey to the breeding grounds. At some point in the spring migration, ducks shift from eating mainly seeds and waste grain to eating bugs (aquatic invertebrates) that provide the protein and minerals needed for egg production. Properly managed spring wetlands located in mid-latitude states such as Missouri provide these invertebrates, and are critical in our ability to return waterfowl to their breeding grounds in good breeding condition.

In Missouri 93% of the original wetland habitat base has been lost and an estimated 87% of that wetland loss occurred during the 1950's thru the 1970's. In many locations across the state, modern engineering has tamed the once-existing swamps and marshes and converted the rich alluvial floodplains of the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers into highly productive farmland.

Today agriculture plays a vital role in sustaining Missouri's social and economic well-being. If Missouri is to be successful in restoring wetland functions and values to our great floodplains we will need to do so in partnership with Missouri Agriculture.

DU and conservation partners continue working with willing landowners on a voluntary basis with incentives to provide these critical wetland acres. For example, the Missouri Agriculture Wetland Initiative (MAWI) is a cooperative partnership among DU, State, and Federal Agencies aimed at combining wetland restoration and enhancement programs to provide additional incentives for landowners interested in wetland restoration. Participants are required by program policy to restore specific wetland habitats and provide those habitats through the fall and spring migrations. Additionally, the program continues to be a good marketing, outreach and education effort directed at bringing awareness to the important role wetlands play in regards to overall soil, water quality and wildlife conservation.

DU will continue to look for opportunities to create or expand existing programs and to partner with willing landowners and agencies such as the MDC and NRCS to improve wetland habitat conditions in Missouri. Your interest in waterfowl and wetlands is appreciated.

Sincerely,

Mark Flaspohler
Manager of Conservation Programs
Ducks Unlimited

LEADER IN WETLANDS CONSERVATION



MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION

Headquarters

2901 West Truman Boulevard, P.O. Box 180, Jefferson City, Missouri 65102-0180
Telephone: 573-751-4115 ▲ www.MissouriConservation.org

ROBERT L. ZIEHMER, Director

July 10, 2015

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

Dear Mr. Butler:

The resolutions that pertain to the Missouri Department of Conservation (Department), adopted at the 2015 annual meeting of the Conservation Federation of Missouri (CFM), have been considered by staff. In response, we submit the following comments:

RESOLUTION NO. 1 – INCENTIVE PROGRAM FOR PRIVATE WETLAND OWNERS

CFM encourages the Missouri Department of Conservation, Ducks Unlimited, Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Farm Service Agency to support an incentive program for Missouri, such as the Missouri Agricultural Wetlands Initiative Program (MAWI III), to encourage private duck clubs and wetland owners to manage their wetlands for spring migration habitat, specifically to retain water coverage throughout the spring migration period.

RESPONSE: The Department has partnered with Ducks Unlimited (DU) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in the rehabilitation and reinstatement of the Missouri Agricultural Wetland Initiative, resulting in the Phase III program (MAWI III). MAWI III partners with State and Federal agencies to combine wetland restoration and enhancement programs to provide additional incentives for landowners interested in wetland restoration. Participants are required by program policy to restore specific wetland habitats and provide those habitats through the fall and spring migrations. Currently, the MAWI III program is supported through funds provided by the Department, DU, and USFWS with \$296,563 currently available for landowner wetland projects.

RESOLUTION NO. 2 – MDC RESEARCH OF RAPID WHITE OAK MORTALITY (RWOM)

CFM encourages the Department of Conservation to dedicate additional funding and research to the understanding of RWOM.

RESPONSE: The Department shares CFM's concern that more research is needed to understand RWOM. As of summer 2014, RWOM had been reported in forty-three counties and more than 2.6 million board feet of affected timber had been salvaged from lands managed by the Department and the privately held Pioneer Forest. Unlike other common and well-studied patterns of oak decline and mortality in Missouri, this mortality disproportionately affects white oak and is greatest on higher quality sites for tree growth.

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Sikeston

JAMES T. BLAIR, IV
St. Louis

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Jefferson City

DAVID W. MURPHY
Columbia

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The Department matched grant funds from USDA Forest Service Evaluation Monitoring program for University of Missouri researchers to study the phenomenon in 2014 and Department staff provided assistance with the research efforts. Preliminary results suggest accumulated tree stress from extreme weather events in recent years may play a role in the mortality. Insects and diseases were identified; however, more research is necessary to improve our understanding of their contribution to mortality.

The Department will provide up to three years of additional funding and other assistance for research through a partnership with the USDA Forest Service Northern Research Station, Pioneer Forest, University of Missouri, and forestry staff in other states with similar patterns of declining tree health (Indiana, Iowa, Ohio, and West Virginia). The additional research will improve our understanding of the factors involved, help predict when and where stands may be susceptible, and improve our ability to manage affected areas.

RESOLUTION NO. 3 – ASIAN CARP EDUCATION

CFM recommends the Missouri Department of Conservation increase its efforts to educate Missourians through publication of a brochure detailing adverse impacts of Asian carp and its preparation for consumption and that the Missouri Department of Economic Development be encouraged to explore options for market development of Asian carp in Missouri.

RESPONSE: The Department recognizes the value of educating Missouri citizens on important resource issues such as invasive species. We also see value in assisting citizens in the utilization of an aquatic nuisance species which, when processed, can be a tasty food fish. Department staff are using various public forums to share resource concerns related to this invasive species, demonstrate the preparation of Asian carp, and provide an opportunity to taste them. While we do not have a print version of a brochure detailing the adverse effects of Asian carp, information is available on our public website (see: <http://mdc.mo.gov/your-property/problem-plants-and-animals/invasive-animals/asian-carp-control>). Information on preparing Asian carp, including videos, can be found on the same webpage under external links. Downloadable brochures, though not produced by us, are also available on the Internet.

The Department recognizes the important role private industry can play in Asian carp eradication. When contacted about possible funding for potential Asian carp projects, staff work with the interested party and the Missouri Department of Economic Development to identify options for financial assistance.

RESOLUTION NO. 5 – CFM SUPPORT FOR USE OF A FALL ARREST SYSTEM IN THE MISSOURI HUNTERS EDUCATION COURSE

CFM encourages the Missouri Department of Conservation to increase the hunter education certification requirements on tree stand safety.

RESPONSE: The Department recognizes the importance of safety while hunting from an elevated platform or tree stand. Although not required to report these types of incidents, the Department knows that tree stand falls historically are the cause of the majority of hunting incidents. The Department coordinates and manages the Hunter and Bowhunter Education programs, and tree stand safety information is integrated into these programs. Integrated tree stand safety sections address awareness and education and inform hunters about the importance of wearing a fall arrest system while hunting from an elevated platform or tree stand. Tree stand safety information is included in the hunter education and bowhunter education student manuals, the online course, and the required videos. A question about

the fall arrest system is included in the hunter education exam that must be taken and passed in order to become certified. The Department currently satisfies the request as outlined in this resolution to include the use of a fall arrest system, test students on the fall arrest system, and provide information on different models and how to use them. The Department will continue educating hunters about the importance of using a fall arrest system while hunting from an elevated platform or tree stand.

RESOLUTION NO. 6 – CFM URGES MDC TO RECONSIDER RECOMMENDATIONS TO REDUCE THE LEGAL LIMIT OF THE NUMBER OF BUCKS FROM TWO TO ONE DURING ARCHERY SEASON

CFM urges the Missouri Department of Conservation to continue current archery legal limits of two bucks per archery season.

RESPONSE: The Department's deer management efforts are focused on using science-based wildlife management principles to maintain biologically and socially balanced deer populations throughout the state that provide recreational opportunities and minimize human-deer conflicts and the potential for negative impacts on ecosystem health. An increasing number of hunters have expressed their desire to see more bucks in older age-classes. To meet this objective, we must consider restrictions on buck harvest as a tool to manage age structure of the buck segment of the deer population. For example, the antler-point restriction was implemented to shift harvest pressure from bucks to does and improve age structure of the buck segment of the population. The point restriction has reduced the harvest of 1½ year old bucks, but has not greatly reduced total buck harvest. Therefore, one option to consider is reducing the total number of bucks an individual could harvest to reduce pressure on the buck segment of the population. The allowance of two bucks during the archery season was established at a time when deer populations were rapidly expanding, there were few archers, and archery harvest made up a relatively small proportion of the total harvest. Each year, archery harvest makes up a larger proportion of the total antlered buck and overall deer harvest. For example, the archery deer harvest in 2000 made up 10% of the total deer harvest and 11% of the antlered buck harvest; by 2013, those numbers had increased to 20% and 19%, respectively.

The Department recognizes that relatively few archers take two antlered deer during the hunting season. However, the ability to take two antlered deer makes hunters less selective. Therefore, it is expected that reducing the number of antlered deer a hunter may take will make them more selective and reduce buck harvest beyond the simple number of hunters who currently take more than one antlered deer. Preliminary results from the 2014 archery deer season hunter survey indicated that 59% of respondents agree, 29% disagree, and 11% neither agree nor disagree with limiting hunters to one buck during the archery season. Public input indicated that many of the archery hunters who voiced opposition to the reduction in the number of antlered bucks taken place great value in the opportunity to take a second antlered deer during the archery season. We recognize that some hunters strongly desire the opportunity to take multiple bucks. The Department's challenge is to balance the desires of an increasing number of hunters to see bucks in older age-classes and desire of hunters to keep the option to kill three bucks during the fall deer season.

RESOLUTION NO. 7 – MDC TO DESIGNATE SET FIELDS FOR YOUTH HUNTING DURING DOVE SEASON

CFM encourages the Missouri Department of Conservation to study designating one field on large conservation areas for youth only, as defined by MDC youth hunting regulations, during the entire dove season.

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RESPONSE: Repeated dove hunting surveys conducted by the Department indicate that the overwhelming majority of dove hunting activity takes place during the first week of the season. Because hunter densities can be high on popular dove hunting areas, many conservation areas already have fields designated as youth-only. This designation is done to reduce hunting pressure, create a less intimidating experience for young hunters, and avoid pushing doves off public hunting areas. In addition, over the past two years, the Department has partnered with the National Wild Turkey Federation and Quail Forever to develop youth and first-time hunter fields on private lands throughout Missouri. Landowners participating in this program agree to open their properties to those youth and first-time hunters who have been selected through the program and undergone safety training.

The Department recognizes that recruitment and retention of young hunters plays a vital role in the future of hunting, and is a strong supporter of programs to involve youth in outdoor activities, including hunting. Nevertheless, we believe that designating fields as youth-only for the entire season unnecessarily restricts opportunity for those hunters who do pursue doves throughout the entire season. Because dove hunting pressure is so low after the first week of the season, we believe that youth and adult hunters alike will find places to hunt that receive little or no pressure. The Department will continue to provide youth-only dove fields early in the season, but at this time does not plan to extend the youth-only designation to the entire season.

RESOLUTION NO. 8 – CFM SUPPORT FOR AND PARTICIPATION IN A PROPOSED BLACK BEAR AND BOBCAT STUDY

CFM encourages the Missouri Department of Conservation to establish a camera-based black bear and bobcat population study with the participation of CFM members.

RESPONSE: From 2010 to 2012, the Department conducted research to estimate the state's bear population and is now collecting information about black bear survival and reproductive rates. Bobcats and other furbearers are currently monitored using observations recorded by bowhunters and through an annual track survey conducted by Department staff.

This fall, the Department will consider a study that uses trail cameras monitored by Missouri citizens to measure presence and abundance of black bears, bobcats, feral hogs, and other species. Reporting would be web-based. CFM members are encouraged to participate in this project (if funded) as our goal will be to have 1,000 contributors during the first year.

The proposed project would provide meaningful information about the presence and abundance of bears, bobcats, feral hogs, and a variety of other species. Citizen-monitored trail cameras would enable the Department to track the expansion of bears into those portions of Missouri that have good bear habitat, but do not have a reproducing population at this time. Bear and bobcat abundance estimates generated from this project would be included as part of a larger effort to use statistical population reconstruction to follow expansion of these species.

RESOLUTION NO. 9 – MDC IMPLEMENTS FACILITATING OFF SITE OPTION FOR MISSOURI DISCOVER NATURE SCHOOLS PROGRAM

CFM requests that the Missouri Department of Conservation in partnership with Missouri Department of Natural Resources make available a Discover Nature Schools "Field Day" in which a facilitator with equipment commutes to a school or local Missouri State Park to

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implement the Discover Nature Schools activities through which they can facilitate guided discovery and experiential learning.

RESPONSE: The Department recognizes the importance of students learning about the forests, fish, and wildlife of the state, making connections to nature, and valuing Missouri's native plants, animals, and habitats. Since 2006, the Department has used the Discover Nature Schools (DNS) conservation education program to accomplish these objectives, reaching over 300,000 students with cross-disciplinary, hands-on, outdoor-based activities.

One goal of the DNS program is to achieve adoption of DNS in 100% of Missouri school districts by July 1, 2015. As of June 8, 2015, DNS has been adopted by 505 districts from a total of 520, resulting in outreach success of 98%.

Department Education Consultants (ECs) employ a variety of strategies to recruit and retain schools in the DNS program. ECs train teachers and offer assistance with facilitation and equipment at DNS field experiences in which DNS activities are conducted outdoors and often off site. DNS field experiences allow students to synthesize DNS concepts in a more holistic and culminating way than may be possible in their schoolyards, and are a powerful component of the DNS program.

A partnership currently exists between the Department and the Missouri Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in regard to conservation and natural resource education. For example, ECs conduct DNS teacher training workshops and help facilitate DNS field experiences at several Missouri state parks, including Cuivre River, Van Meter, and Rock Bridge, often recruiting DNR park interpretive staff to assist. Also, three staff members from DNR are on the Department's committee to revise the DNS middle school unit, *Conserving Missouri's Aquatic Ecosystems*.

A map has been produced which depicts the final fifteen districts yet to adopt DNS. This district map may be cross-checked with a map of state parks and, in cooperation with DNR staff, DNS field days may be scheduled at state parks and offered to schools yet to adopt DNS. Where possible, DNR grants may be used to reimburse schools for costs of transporting students to state parks. When visiting a state park is not feasible, ECs may offer to facilitate DNS activities at other off-site locations or at non-participating schools.

Strengthening the Department's partnership with DNR and adding DNS field days for non-participating schools are two additional strategies which will help the Department meet its goals of 100% district adoption of DNS and reaching as many Missouri students as possible with learning outdoors experiences, guided discovery, and experiential learning about Missouri forest, fish, and wildlife resources.

RESOLUTION NO. 10 – DEVELOP AN INCENTIVE PROGRAM FOR CONVERTING COOL-SEASON GRASS PASTURES TO NATIVE WARM-SEASON GRASS

CFM encourages the Missouri Department of Conservation, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Missouri Cattleman's Association, the Missouri Department of Agriculture, the Missouri Soil and Water Conservation Program, and the University of Missouri Extension to work in partnership to develop a comprehensive program complete with promotion, education and incentives for landowners to convert their cool-season grass pastures to native warm-season grass pastures.

RESPONSE: The Department recognizes the importance of cooperatively working with livestock producers to develop conservation practices that provide multiple-use benefits for livestock production, water quality, soil quality, and wildlife habitat. In 2014, the Department successfully applied for a Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP) project administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The Missouri Department of Agriculture, Missouri Department of Natural Resources, Harrison County Cattleman's Association, as well as several other organizations and agencies provided support for the project. The RCP project, called the Regional Grassland Bird and Grazing Land Enhancement Initiative, focuses on providing financial assistance to Missouri livestock producers to assist in enhancing existing pastures in a manner that provides benefit to production as well as wildlife habitat. The project is anticipated to provide approximately \$400,000 per year for five years directly to producers for the enhancement of grazing lands. Financial assistance is provided to assist producers with costs associated with converting portions of existing pasture from cool-season introduced grass to native warm-season grasses (NWSG). The program allows willing landowners to convert up to one-third of their grazing lands to native grasses. Included in the RCP project, is the objective to develop education curriculum focused on grazing and incorporating warm-season grasses into livestock operations. Discussions on creating or updating grazing schools have been initiated between the Department, NRCS, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, MU Extension, and the Missouri Department of Natural Resources. The new or updated curriculum will be offered to private landowners.

RESOLUTION NO. 12 – REQUEST THE MDC PROVIDE ADDITIONAL INCENTIVE MONEY FOR RENEWING CRP CONTRACTS WITH NATIVE WARM-SEASON GRASS
CFM asks the Missouri Department of Conservation and United States Department of Agriculture to provide an additional incentive to landowners to renew their expiring wildlife friendly CRP contracts.

RESPONSE: The Department initiated a Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Incentive in December 2012. The Incentive provides \$100 to \$150 per acre to private landowners to enroll new acres or re-enroll expiring CRP acres into the CP33 – Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds, CP38 – SAFE, CP42 – Pollinator Habitat, or CP23 – Wetland Restoration CRP practices. All of the listed CRP practices require native warm-season grass (NWSG) plantings. The incentive also provides financial assistance to enhance management of existing NWSG CRP land. As of June 2015, approximately \$1.2 million dollars have been dedicated towards the Department's CRP Incentive. Approximately 7,946 acres of CP33, CP38, CP42, and CP23 were enrolled or re-enrolled with the assistance of the Incentive. The Incentive will continue to be available to landowners in FY16 with an additional \$500,000 dedicated to the program to extend expiring CP33 buffer contracts.

On May 29, 2015, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced an additional 800,000 acres will be available for a general CRP sign-up starting December 1, 2015. In addition, USDA announced existing program participants with CRP contracts expiring September 30, 2015, will be granted an option for one-year extensions. The Department will assist in the promotion of both the general CRP sign-up and contract extension opportunities.

RESOLUTION NO. 13 – NEST PREDATOR STUDY
CFM requests that the Missouri Department of Conservation perform a study to determine the effects of nest predation on quail populations and the effects of a predator control program on nesting success.

RESPONSE: The Department recognizes that bobwhite quail have high annual mortality (80%) due to multiple factors. Predation is the main source of mortality for bobwhites during all life stages. Predators of bobwhite nests include everything from mammals to birds to snakes. All of these nest predators are generalists, and none target bobwhite nests specifically. Only mammalian species may be legally controlled by removal through hunting or trapping, and it is nearly impossible to remove all mammalian predators in an area. Furthermore, predator management has the best potential to impact nesting birds during the summer months, which is outside of the current legal trapping and hunting seasons. The Department is conducting a multi-year study to assess which habitat management techniques produce the most bobwhites. Staff are looking at nest success as one of the measures of effectiveness of various management techniques and are in the planning stages of incorporating a mesopredator component into the current quail study to determine if habitat composition and shape affects abundance, movements, and likelihood of encountering bobwhite nests. Information from these studies will help conservation area managers improve habitat management strategies for bobwhite quail.

RESOLUTION NO. 14 – NON-TOXIC SHOT ON DOVE MANAGEMENT FIELDS

CFM recommends that the Missouri Department of Conservation prohibits all lead shot on Missouri Department of Conservation dove management fields.

RESPONSE: The Department recognizes lead as a potential toxin to wildlife; as a result, fifteen conservation areas have been designated for non-toxic shot use only. In addition, the Department's Outreach and Education Division has developed a workshop devoted to teaching hunters about the effective use and applications of steel shot as an alternative to lead. This workshop, *Effective Wingshooting for the Hunter*, is presented at least annually in each of the Department's eight administrative regions. The Department believes that an increase in non-toxic shotshell alternatives in the marketplace, coupled with an outreach campaign that informs hunters about the benefits of non-toxic shotshells will result in hunters adopting lead-free ammunition for dove hunting. Recent research has demonstrated comparable lethality between steel and lead shotshells and increases in lead prices have resulted in the more comparable prices for lead and steel game loads which may result in more hunters choosing lead-free shotshells.

RESOLUTION NO. 15 – GRAZING NATIVE GRASS TO IMPROVE ECOSYSTEM FUNCTION

CFM recommends that land management agencies and NGO's in Missouri that manage native grasslands continue and expand prescribed grazing, where feasible and appropriate, and in conjunction with other management tools, to improve the diversity and wildlife value of those grasslands. A monitoring program should also be implemented to document the effects that grazing has on these native grasslands.

RESPONSE: The Department manages native prairie and other grasslands to benefit characteristic plants and animals, and to serve the interests of a wide variety of public users. Patch-burn grazing (PBG) can approximate some of the historic processes that helped shape the tallgrass prairie ecosystem and holds the potential to be a useful additional management tool.

PBG will be implemented on 4,625 acres in 2015, including a total of 2,973 acres of native prairie and 1,652 acres of native warm-season grass plantings. Of the native prairie, 284 acres are designated as natural areas and account for 6.5% of the total acreage of prairie natural areas the Department manages.

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Grassland management practices implemented by the Department continue to be rooted in science and research. All high quality prairie remnants managed with PBG are being monitored with the Community Healthy Index and any significant declines in health will stimulate discussions regarding continued use of grazing with managers and Wildlife Division leadership.

A long-term study led by the Resource Science Division's Grassland Field Station is investigating the effects of grazing management on prairie ecology. The results of this study will continue to expand our knowledge of grazing management and inform future decisions and approaches. This project, *The long-term impact of patch-burn grazing on prairie plant species, diversity, and structure in Missouri*, will help us understand how different prairie plants respond to PBG, and how this management changes the structure, height, and density of plants on prairies. This project is scheduled to run from 2015 to 2031, which is approximately three full grazing rotation cycles.

The Department will incorporate information gained from these studies into future native prairie and other grassland management practices. In addition, the Department will host field days and other outreach opportunities to engage the public in learning about prairie ecology and management. The Department remains committed to the conservation of a variety of native prairie and grassland habitats, communities, and species.

RESOLUTION NO. 18 – EXTEND MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AREA'S TRAIL ACCESS FOR GENERAL PUBLIC USE

CFM requests the Missouri Conservation Department and Conservation Commission to conduct further user surveys or studies of conservation areas, and if needed, to consider amending regulations governing these areas to permit more access by the general public during more of the fall, winter and spring periods.

RESPONSE: The Department recognizes the importance of continuing to deliver on the promises of the Design for Conservation, including a network of readily-accessible public lands for enjoyment of Missouri's forest, fish, and wildlife resources. Hunting, fishing, trapping, bird watching, hiking, nature study, and other traditional activities are important uses of conservation areas. Managing for multiple public uses is a primary objective when making area planning and management decisions, and those decisions are based upon our best understanding of public need and use patterns.

The Department is committed to understanding and serving the needs of constituents and will continue to use various methods to determine how to maximize opportunity for all area users. Staff regularly conduct area user and public opinion surveys, including a recent unstaffed range survey and a proposed elk tour loop survey, and actively seek public input on area plans as they are developed, all with the goal of gaining a more complete understanding of how the public wants to use their conservation areas.

The *Wildlife Code* is an ever-evolving document which is responsive to public engagement. Area managers review regulations governing the conservation areas they manage annually. Public input gathered through visitor use surveys, comments received on area plans, and requests submitted to the Department's Regulations Committee all receive consideration during this annual review of the *Wildlife Code*. The Department's mission is to "protect and manage the forest, fish, and wildlife resources of the state; to facilitate and provide opportunity for all citizens to use, enjoy, and learn about these resources", and that includes all appropriate uses of conservation areas, from hiking, horseback riding, and bicycling,

to bird watching and nature study, to hunting and fishing and more. Finding an appropriate balance among all area users can be a challenge, but the Department is dedicated to delivering on that mission.

RESOLUTION NO. 19 – PROMOTING MILKWEED AND MONARCH POPULATIONS IN MISSOURI

CFM encourages the Department of Natural Resources, the Missouri Department of Agriculture, Missouri Department of Transportation, the Missouri Department of Conservation and other appropriate agencies in the planting of various native species of milkweed, as well as other native Missouri species that support monarch butterfly populations and pollinators on public and private land in Missouri. In addition, we ask cities with ordinances in place restricting the planting of native milkweed species to remove these restrictions.

RESPONSE: Many ongoing efforts of the Department benefit monarch butterflies. This includes the active management of approximately 28,000 acres of grassland and 21,000 acres of glade, savanna, and woodland natural communities to support a rich diversity of native plants, including milkweeds and nectar plants important to monarchs. Aggressive efforts to convert crop fields and fescue pasture to diverse prairie reconstructions are occurring, with a single project affecting more than 2,100 acres over the next four years in six locations, all providing benefits to monarchs. Milkweed seed is often included in native seed mixes used on Department-managed lands and, to further support milkweed establishment, we are cultivating milkweed in our Forest Nursery this year to provide seedling plants for public lands.

The Department's Landowner Assistance Program (LAP) provides cost-share incentives to plant approximately 900 acres of diverse, wildlife-friendly grassland habitat annually. Seed mixes are created to meet the needs of target species and landowner objectives, but nearly all seed mixes include at least three pounds of native forbs per acre. Specific pollinator mix recommendations include at least nine flowering species, three each for spring, summer, and fall. While milkweeds are essential for monarch caterpillars, many flowering species support adult monarchs. Department biologists follow Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) conservation practice standards for wildlife habitat restorations. Six species of milkweed are included on the NRCS list of approved native forbs for natural community restorations. In response to the decline in monarch butterfly populations, the Department is evaluating the development of LAP practices that prioritize the inclusion of milkweed species in habitat plantings.

The monarch butterfly presents a unique opportunity to engage the public in the conservation of an iconic species. In 2014, the Department partnered with the Missouri Prairie Foundation (MPF) to distribute more than 4,000 milkweed plants and other nectar species free-of-charge to citizens, along with care instructions and information cards on monarch butterflies. Response to this opportunity was overwhelming; MPF received nearly three times the number of requests as could be filled. Therefore, we plan to expand this project in 2015 in continued partnership with MPF.

The Department's Discover Nature Schools (DNS) program includes a series of five instructional units designed to teach conservation education to students from preschool through high school. Monarchs and milkweed plants are mentioned specifically in several DNS units, and monarchs may be used as examples in numerous DNS recurring topics such as insects, life cycles, metamorphosis, wildlife food requirements, food chains, predator/prey, and animal defenses.

DNS also provides opportunities for students to participate in monarch habitat improvement projects in their schoolyards and communities.

In summary, the Department is actively promoting milkweed and monarch populations in Missouri along with other native plant species utilized by monarchs and other native insect species.

RESOLUTION NO. 20 – PROMOTING THE USE OF PRAIRIE STRIPS IN ROW CROPS

CFM encourages the Missouri Department of Conservation to use all available means to promote and encourage the use of prairie strips in row crops as an agricultural best management practice.

RESPONSE: Minimizing soil and nutrient loss from agricultural fields is essential to ensure protection of Missouri's water resources. Currently, there are several Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) practices with objectives to enhance water quality, reduce soil erosion, and improve wildlife habitat. For example, CRP practices CP15A and B – Establishment of Permanent Vegetative Cover (Contour Grass Strips) for implementation off or on terraces respectively, CP21 – Filter Strip, CP22- Riparian Buffer, and CP33 – Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds are available in Missouri on a continuous basis.

Implementation of prairie strips in row crops is most likely to be completed via enrollment into the CP15 practices. Currently, there are only 880 acres of CP15 buffers enrolled in Missouri. Although the program will provide compensation to private landowners for removing acres from agriculture production, compensation is not provided to landowners to plant the CP15 contour buffer strips to prairie vegetation. The Farm Services Administration's (FSA) CRP handbook specifically states CP15 practices are not intended to develop or establish wildlife habitat. Additionally, the CP15 buffers are only required to be a minimum of fifteen feet wide. Research indicates habitat less than thirty feet wide can function as habitat sinks for nesting grassland birds.

The CRP handbook policies are developed by FSA national leadership and Missouri is not able to modify those policies without approval by FSA national leadership. The Department will contact the state FSA to determine if using prairie vegetation such as native warm-season grasses and forbs as well as requiring wider contour buffer strips under the CP15 practices are possibilities.

The Department will continue to provide additional financial incentives at an anticipated rate of \$100 per acre to private landowners who enroll in the CP33 – Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds through the Department's CRP Incentive program. The CP33 practice requires native warm-season grasses and forbs and provides quality habitat for grassland birds and pollinators. In addition to providing quality wildlife habitat, the CP33 practice helps to enhance water and soil quality by reducing soil and nutrient runoff from crop fields.

RESOLUTION NO. 21 – CFM SUPPORT OF RESEARCH FOR CONTROL OF ZEBRA MUSSELS, BOTH CHEMICAL AND BIOLOGICAL

CFM encourages the Missouri Department of Conservation to focus research on chemical and biological methods for zebra mussel control.

RESPONSE: The Department recognizes the importance of controlling zebra mussels, an aquatic nuisance species. Zebra mussels have become established throughout the Midwest and other states and are a national problem. As a result, considerable effort at the federal level has occurred in order to

Mr. Brandon Butler
July 10, 2015
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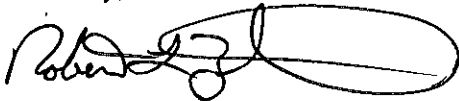
evaluate potential chemical and biological controls for zebra mussels in both closed and open systems. The Department supports these efforts through our membership in various entities such as the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and benefits from the efforts of studies conducted by the U.S. Geological Survey. This allows us to focus on educational efforts to minimize the risk of zebra mussel movement to additional water ways. It also allows those better positioned to address concerns such as impacts of control measures on desired native species and meeting the labeling requirements for promising pesticides.

**RESOLUTION NO. 22 –SUPPORT OF THE 2016 DEER SEASON REGULATIONS
RECOMMENDATIONS**

CFM encourages the Missouri Department of Conservation to implement a mandatory bow hunter safety course with an emphasis on crossbows be taken by hunters born after January 1, 2001, who desire to use a crossbow during the prescribed seasons in the case that the Missouri Department of Conservation enacts the aforementioned regulation change.

RESPONSE: The Department recognizes that safety is an important consideration for many hunters. Safety is often raised as a concern associated with the legalization of crossbows during the archery deer season. Data from Ohio, which first legalized crossbows in 1976, indicates that from 1976 through 2004, there were only nineteen incidents involving crossbows. Fifteen of those incidents were self-inflicted. There were also twelve longbow incidents during the same period, seven of which were self-inflicted. When combined with the estimated number of hunting trips in Ohio, the rate of incidents is well below one incident per one million trips for each type of bow. Missouri's current hunter education course does cover some safety issues associated with crossbows and the bow hunter education course has extensive coverage of crossbows. Because training is currently available to those hunters who wish to learn more about how to safely operate a crossbow, and incident rates appear to be infrequent, the Department does not feel it is necessary at this time to require all hunters take a bow hunter safety course.

Sincerely,



ROBERT L. ZIEHMER
DIRECTOR

c: Conservation Commission
Deputy Director Draper
Deputy Director Ripperger
Commission Secretary

Missouri Department of Transportation
Roberta Broeker, Interim Director

1.888.ASK MODOT (275.6636)

July 7, 2015

Conservation Federation of Missouri
Brandon Butler, Executive Director
728 West Main St.
Jefferson City, MO 65101-1559

Dear Mr. Butler:

Please be advised that Dave Nichols has retired, and I am serving as the Interim Director.

Thank you for the resolution provided with your April 30, 2015 letter. The resolution encourages promoting milkweed and other native Missouri species to support monarch butterfly populations and pollinators.

MoDOT is currently dealing with the issue of insufficient transportation revenues and is dramatically reducing expenditures on the majority of our road and bridge system. This reduction in operations may mean some roadside areas are left nearly untouched. We are considering cost effective ways to support existing and new populations of milkweed and other beneficial plants where appropriate. For example, MoDOT wetland biologists are exploring methods to collect and redistribute seed of various milkweed species within our existing wetland mitigation sites. We are also considering ways to enhance seed mixes for future mitigation sites with species that benefit pollinators.

MoDOT is participating in the *Collaborative Strategy to Benefit Monarchs and Pollinators in Missouri* meeting that your organization is sponsoring on July 13 and 14. We look forward to helping develop a strategy in this conservation effort.

Sincerely,



Roberta Broeker, CPA
Interim Director



Our mission is to provide a world-class transportation experience that delights our customers and promotes a prosperous Missouri.

www.modot.org



June 16, 2015

Brandon Butler
Executive Director
Conservation Federation of Missouri
728 West Main Street
Jefferson City, Missouri 65101-1559

Dear Mr. Butler,

In response to your letter dated April 30, 2015, I have reviewed the Federation's resolutions Numbers 1, 10, and 20. I appreciate your suggestions to provide more opportunities for landowners in Missouri to improve wildlife habitat and to better utilize native grasses. Below, I have provided responses to your resolutions.

Resolution Number 1 – Incentive Program for Private Wetland Owners

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has been a leader, both in Missouri and nationally, in wetland restoration with the Wetland Reserve Program, and now with the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program. NRCS has also been a partner in the Missouri Agricultural Wetlands Initiative Program by providing technical input into the program and technical assistance to implement the program. We will continue to work with our partners to implement the program and to explore additional opportunities to restore and maintain wetland habitat for the spring migration.

Resolution Number 10 – Develop an Incentive Program for Converting Cool-Season Grass Pastures to Native Warm-Season Grass.

NRCS will continue to work closely with our partners to develop conservation practices, specifications, and program opportunities for landowners to better utilize native grasses. NRCS has prioritized the use of native vegetation, as it provides benefits such as ecosystem sustainability, drought tolerance, improved soil health, and enhanced wildlife habitat. NRCS provides financial assistance through its farm bill programs to promote the conversion to, and use of, warm-season grasses for livestock forage. The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), provides opportunities for organizations to partner with Department of Agriculture to improve water quality, combat drought, enhance soil health, support wildlife habitat, and protect the sustainability of agricultural lands. The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) was successful in securing approximately \$400,000 per year for 5 years for the Regional Grassland Bird and Grazing Land Enhancement Initiative. NRCS is working together with MDC to implement this initiative which provides financial assistance to Missouri livestock producers to enhance existing pastures in a manner that benefits livestock production as well as enhancing wildlife habitat. Also included in the RCPP project, is an effort to develop education curriculum focused on prescribed grazing and incorporating warm-season

Brandon Butler

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grasses into livestock operations. The NRCS State Wildlife Biologist and State Grassland Conservationist are engaged in this effort with MDC, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, University of Missouri Extension, and the Missouri Department of Natural Resources to explore options to either update the current grazing school format or develop a separate grazing school that emphasizes the use of native grasses.

Missouri NRCS will continue to support efforts, and provide financial assistance, for conversion to native grasses. We will also explore options to enhance opportunities and funding for the use of native grasses.

Resolution Number 20 – Promoting the Use of Prairie Strips in Row Crops

The use of native grasses can be very beneficial in enhancing multiple resources, such as wildlife habitat, water quality, and soil health, on agricultural landscapes. NRCS provides technical and financial assistance for restoration of native prairies and for establishment of native warm-season grasses. Establishing prairie strips in row crops has been implemented in Iowa through the STRIPs (Science-based Trials of Rowcrops Integrated with Prairies) project. I will instruct my staff to explore additional opportunities within our programs and with partners to offer native grass plantings for this purpose.

I would also encourage you to attend the NRCS State Technical Committee meeting from 8:30am-12:00pm, Tuesday, June 30, at the University of Missouri Bradford Research and Extension Center. Registration will begin at 7:45am. This is another venue and opportunity to provide input about the delivery of NRCS programs within the state.

I appreciate your efforts to explore opportunities to protect and enhance the natural resources in Missouri. I look forward to working with you and other partners to enhance our efforts in doing so. If you have any questions, you may contact Dwaine Gelnar, State Resource Conservationist, or Chris Hamilton, State Wildlife Biologist, at 573-876-0908.

Sincerely,



J.R. Flores
State Conservationist

cc:

Dwaine Gelnar, State Resource Conservationist, NRCS, Columbia, MO
Chris Hamilton, State Wildlife Biologist, NRCS, Columbia, MO