



MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION

Headquarters

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SARA PARKER PAULEY, Director

April 17, 2023

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 2023 annual meeting of the Conservation Federation of Missouri (CFM), have been considered by staff. In response, we submit the following comments:

RESOLUTION #2023-1: Rescind Certain Regulations Governing the Hunting and Trapping of Furbearers. CFM urges the Conservation Commission of Missouri to immediately rescind the 2022 regulation changes establishing and extending the harvest of furbearer species.

RESPONSE: The Commission recently made changes to the furbearer regulations to provide additional opportunities to hunt and trap certain furbearer species based on the requests from a diverse group of Missouri stakeholders. It was determined that racoon, opossum, skunk, and coyote have all experienced long-term population increases and could biologically sustain additional harvest opportunities. There has been a perceived notion these regulations were established specifically for predator control in response to declining ground nesting bird populations, however the Department has maintained the position that creating and maintaining quality habitat via active management is critical to the restoration of ground nesting bird populations. These new furbearer regulations provide additional, sustainable harvest opportunities and provide individuals additional opportunity to manage furbearers on their own lands. The Department will evaluate the use of these new hunting/trapping opportunities through our biennial small game survey and will continue to monitor furbearer populations. As with other regulations, the Department will continue to monitor the available data and public input to inform any regulatory recommendations related to management of the furbearer resources.

RESOLUTION #2023-2: Conservation Federation of Missouri's Position on CO2 Emissions. CFM urges the Missouri General Assembly, the Missouri Department of Conservation, and the Missouri Department of Natural Resources to support the limitation of the anthropogenic emissions and the resulting global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius to protect Missouri's citizens, wildlife, and natural resources from catastrophic climate change.

RESPONSE: The Department appreciates CFM's concern for the international issue of climate change and supports the reasonable limitation of anthropogenic emissions to protect Missouri's citizens, wildlife, and natural resources.

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RESOLUTION #2023-4: Encourage Ozark Chinquapin Restoration. CFM urges the Missouri Department of Conservation to support the further development of blight-resistant Ozark Chinquapin planting stock and work with the Ozark Chinquapin Foundation to establish test plantings on their lands where appropriate.

RESPONSE: The Department appreciates CFM's recognition of and support for the restoration of Ozark Chinquapin which is listed as a Species of Conservation Concern (SOCC). The Department also sees the value in conserving this unique tree. To that end, our Science Branch has partnered with the University of Missouri to support Dr. Ronald Revrod's efforts to conserve the genetics of the Ozark Chinquapin for many years. Dr. Revrod works with leaders in other states to include other species/subspecies of Chinquapins. Eventually his work will result in an understanding of the reasonable conservation units of Chinquapins and identify possible markers for blight resistance which would enable forward progress with recovering the species.

The Department has also worked with the Ozark Chinquapin Foundation (OCF) on the restoration of this SOCC. The OCF began collecting seeds from all the living trees they could find in the Missouri and Arkansas Ozarks. Those seeds were planted together in locations that are a mix of public and private lands (including Indian Trail Conservation Area in the early 2000s). The OCF intentionally let the trees crossbreed in hopes of developing blight resistant offspring that would survive. We have not planted additional trees since those original plantings almost 20 years ago. Recent efforts to enter into a cooperative agreement with the OCF have stalled as we have struggled with who owns the trees that have been planted and issues associated with an organization using state-owned land to develop a product which will ultimately be offered as a for-sale/commercial product. We also are cautious about planting "improved" trees on state-owned land and the consequence this 'improved' tree could have on the surrounding natural community.

We believe the Ozark Chinquapin is an important tree and would like all parties interested in this tree to work together. To achieve this goal, approximately five years ago through our cooperative agreement with the University of Missouri to support work on this SOCC, we directed the University to explore a partnership with the OCF. Sadly, the OCF took exception to the University's work and threatened legal action against the University. OCF is certain the work Dr. Revrod is doing is proof of a stolen genetic analysis related to the OCF's patents and that the University is trying to infringe on their patents. The Department has continued to focus funding and support on the University of Missouri's efforts as we believe those efforts to be scientifically defensible. We provide the University \$33,000 annually to explore the genetics of the Ozark Chinquapin looking for a blight resistant subspecies. Dr. Revrod continues to work with others in adjacent states to include other species/subspecies of Chinquapins in the work.

RESOLUTION #2023-5: Adoption of the Community Health Index and Implementation of Corrective Action Plans for Remnant Prairie Management Entities. CFM calls for Department and other state, federal and NGO entities that manage remnant prairie to utilize the natural community health index (CHI) methodology to monitor the ecological health of prairies they manage and take corrective stewardship actions when CHI scores are low or declining.

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RESPONSE: The Department has been working internally and with a variety of partners, including the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), Missouri Western State University (MWSU), University of Missouri-Columbia (MU), and the Missouri Prairie Foundation (MPF) on the development of CHIs to assess and monitor ecological health of prairie, savanna, glade, and woodland natural communities. This work began in 2016. Baseline CHI data were gathered for priority Department glade sites in 2016-2018 via a cooperative agreement with MWSU. Baseline CHI data were gathered for priority Department remnant prairies in 2018-2020 via a cooperative agreement with MPF.

Currently the Department's natural history biologist in the Kansas City region and the natural history biologist's assistant are re-sampling some of the prior sampled Department prairie CHI units. There has also been a cooperative effort between the Department, MU, and the USFS to utilize CHI to evaluate the effectiveness of restoration efforts in the Pineknott Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Project (CFLRP) site of the Mark Twain National Forest. The Department will continue to work internally and with partners on the development and deployment of CHIs. The Department will also ensure that its cadre of natural history biologists incorporate CHI monitoring into their annual work plans and establish an adaptive management feedback loop between CHI reporting and prairie management planning.

RESOLUTION #2023-7: Awareness for the Missouri Outdoor Recreational Access Program (MRAP). CFM urges the Department to promote and expand MRAP through increasing public awareness and media visibility among landowners and land users, and by making informational materials available to supporting conservation organizations, such as the CFM through its members and affiliates, to expand hunting, fishing, nature viewing, and other outdoor recreation opportunities in Missouri; and CFM urges the Department to work with partner organizations, including University of Missouri Extension, and the NRCS, to increase awareness of MRAP among landowners and land users.

RESPONSE: The Department appreciates CFM's support of MRAP and the encouragement to further expand the footprint of the program on the landscape. MRAP not only provides additional outdoor recreation opportunities to hunters, anglers, and nature viewers, but it also maintains and increases thousands of acres of wildlife habitat on private land. The Department is taking actions to increase public awareness of the program for both recreation users and potential MRAP landowners. In an effort to increase awareness of the program among landowners, the Department recently mailed over 5,300 promotional postcards to landowners who have land enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) in Missouri. Additional promotional postcards were also made available for Department staff and partners across the state to mail to local cooperators that may be interested in enrolling lands into the program. The Department is in the process of requesting approval from USDA to place MRAP informational fliers at each USDA Service Center. In efforts to increase awareness among recreational users, the Department has collaborated with Quail Forever to launch two separate MRAP Youth Challenges on Facebook and other social media platforms. Additionally, in the coming months, the Department plans to post MRAP property highlights and success stories on our social media pages.

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Current MRAP enrollment is approximately 15,317 acres, with a goal of doubling the enrolled acres by September 2024. The program does continue to receive applications from landowners, however; increasing the rate of applications is needed. The Department looks forward to working with CFM through its members and affiliates as suggested to further promote and grow the program.

RESOLUTION #2023-8: Oppose the Proposed Nexgen Silica Sand Mine in Ste. Genevieve County. CFM opposes the construction and operation of a silica sand mine and processing facility in Ste. Genevieve County, Missouri, as proposed by Nexgen Silica, LLC, and requests the Missouri Department of Conservation oppose the construction of the mine.

RESPONSE: The Department has received CFM's request and defers to the Department of Natural Resources as the agency responsible for the air pollution, land reclamation, and water pollution permitting processes.

RESOLUTION #2023-10: Support for Creation of a Missouri Small Game Hunting Challenge. CFM encourages the Missouri Department of Conservation to develop and initiate a Small Game Hunting Challenge as a means to recruit, retain, and reactivate small game hunters throughout the state.

RESPONSE: The Department appreciates CFM's interest in small game hunting and R3 efforts. The Department recognizes the importance of hunting, as well as introducing new audiences to new places. Staff are committed to the recruitment, retention, and reactivation of hunters and anglers and are continuously looking for ways to ensure the heritage of one of Missouri's greatest pastimes is continued.

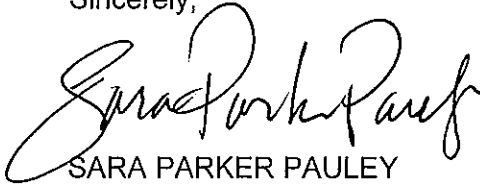
At a time when Missouri is losing an average of 5,000 resident permit holders per year, newly-created R3 endeavors must provide programming and initiatives that will drastically change the trajectory of declining participation. While the idea of a small game slam might sound intriguing to a select group of individuals, results from other states have shown no known increase in participation or retention as a result of these types of initiatives. With limited resources, the Department must focus new R3 efforts on programs that demonstrate the ability to provide a significant boost to hunter and angler recruitment, retention, and reactivation. Beginning next fiscal year, the Department intends to initiate program inventory and evaluation for all R3 programs throughout the agency to determine their efficacy as it relates to hunter and angler recruitment, retention, and reactivation.

The Department recently completed a "journey mapping" of the types of new hunters and anglers in Missouri. Based on survey and focus group data, Missouri's new hunters and anglers typically identified with one of three categories: Recreationists, Family Firsts, or Self-Sufficients. As is implied in each of the terms, those who identify as "Recreationists" hunt and fish for the recreation of it; "Family Firsts" hunt and fish as a way to spend time with family; and "Self-Sufficients" hunt and fish as a way to acquire a source of protein. None of the "personas" that were developed from this study indicate Missouri's new hunters and anglers participate in hunting and fishing to win awards. The Department is also hesitant to promote hunting in a way that could be perceived as an activity merely for sport or trophy, particularly since our recent

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journey mapping project shows hunting for awards is not a significant driver. This is reinforced by a 2019 study conducted by Southwick and Associates. According to this study, 84% of Americans supported hunting if it was done for the meat, whereas only 29% supported hunting if it was done for a trophy/competition. The Department appreciates CFM's interest in R3 efforts related to small game hunting and look forward to working with CFM to ensure all Missourians enjoy the outdoors in many different ways.

Sincerely,



SARA PARKER PAULEY
DIRECTOR

c: Conservation Commission
Deputy Director Jennifer Battson Warren
Deputy Director Aaron Jeffries
Deputy Director Jason Summers
Commission Secretary