

Missouri Park & Recreation Association 2026 Legislative Platform

THIS IS MPRA . . .

Founded in 1959, the Missouri Park and Recreation Association serves as the voice for parks and recreation issues in Missouri at the local, state, and national levels. This nonprofit association's members work to provide opportunities and enhance the quality of life for all Missouri citizens. MPRA members are dedicated to promoting public awareness of the contribution of parks, recreation, and open spaces that encourage healthy, balanced individuals and communities.

The association works to educate for the growth and improve the quality and accessibility of urban, suburban, and rural parks, open spaces and recreational lands, facilities, and programs. It promotes research and dissemination of best practices in parks, conservation, health and wellness, recreation, and leisure issues. MPRA strives to maintain high standards of professional ethics and practices while promoting continuing education opportunities for its membership. The association encourages the support of college and university curricula to enhance research and ensure a stream of qualified and skilled future professionals.

MPRA cooperates with public, private, and volunteer agencies to ensure the provision of quality park, recreation, and conservation programs. MPRA is governed by a board of directors elected by its general membership. It maintains an office with full-time staff in Jefferson City. MPRA is an affiliate member of the National Recreation and Park Association.

MPRA Legislative Issues – State

Building Healthy Individuals and Communities:

Obesity -Throughout Missouri, there is an epidemic of obesity and associated health issues in both children and adults. A physically active lifestyle and access to nutritious food are critical to disease prevention and good health. **Public parks and recreation facilities offer low-cost opportunities for citizens of every age, ability, and income level to increase their level of physical activity, improve nutrition, and better connect with the natural environment, thereby preventing chronic and costly health problems.** MPRA supports the adoption of statute revisions that would allow local parks and recreation departments to increase recreational opportunities for its citizens, regardless of income level.

Smoking - For years, MPRA has endorsed initiatives to create smoke-free environments for all citizens. **We support the general efforts to increase the tobacco tax, currently the lowest in the nation, which would encourage smoking cessation.** Additionally, we support the use of the increased tax revenue to be used for programs that promote healthy and active lifestyles.

Alcohol and Drug Abuse - Alcohol and drug use is widespread and ranks as one of the nation's most serious health problems. The problem should be addressed at the individual, community, state, and national levels. **MPRA supports legislation similar to the Anti-Drug Act of 1988, promoting community services and partnerships designed to target alcohol and drug abuse prevention through education, training, and recreation projects.** New legislation should promote collaborations among alcohol and drug abuse prevention, treatment and rehabilitation, juvenile justice, education, housing, employment, social welfare, parks and recreation, and physical and mental health programs. MPRA stands ready to cooperate fully to assist our communities to promote a drug-free society. MPRA encourages legislative measures to eliminate the term "recreation" from any association with drugs or alcohol. An example would be replacing "Recreational Marijuana" with "Non-Medicinal Marijuana."

Funding - The state should lead in developing policies, practices, and funding infrastructure to promote physical activity and healthy lifestyles that best utilize existing parks and recreation facilities. We recommend support for making parks and recreation agencies eligible for all state-funded programs targeting youth and adults for healthy physical activities, life skills development, environmental education, and crime prevention/intervention.

Trails: Access to safe, well-maintained community connections is a priority for Missouri's citizens. State, local, and federal lands feature thousands of miles of multi-use trails. In 2013-14, Missouri was named the "Best Trails State" by American Trails, reflecting the efforts put into developing major trail systems, including Katy Trail State Park. Such systems, including the Rock Island corridors, contribute significantly to local economies, support conservation, promote alternative transportation, and connect communities to nature and each other. **MPRA supports initiatives that enable local and state agencies to develop and promote trail connections and accessibility across Missouri.**

Tax Initiatives: Missouri's municipalities and counties rely on sales taxes, property taxes, special use taxes, and internet use taxes for general fund and park fund operations and capital improvements. **MPRA recommends that any changes to the Missouri Tax Code take into account how cities and counties parks are funded and the benefits they provide to all citizens.** MPRA urges the Missouri General Assembly to respect the voice of local voters by requiring that sales taxes collected from online sales be apportioned exactly the same as sales taxes collected locally within Missouri.

Funding Initiatives: **MPRA supports increased funding for Missouri State Parks and trails, specifically the Rock Island corridor, which provides state-wide connections through numerous cities and counties, along with a comprehensive bonding package for higher education institutions.** Parks and trails provide an enriched quality of life for all Missourians, regardless of geography or socioeconomic status. Modernized, state-of-the-art facilities prepare Missouri students for real-world experiences and allow for a seamless transition into the workplace. Support for such initiatives will enhance the lives of all Missouri citizens. MPRA encourages elected officials to consider the differences between capital expenditures and maintenance when considering bonding decisions. MPRA does not support the use of the state-authorized parks and stormwater sales tax to be used for construction,

renovation, or maintenance of professional sports stadiums.

Environmental Stewardship: The State of Missouri should help support and implement practices statewide that protect and enhance human life, preserve the environment, and conserve valuable natural resources. These initiatives are integral to sustaining and improving the quality of life for all citizens in the future. The state should include parks and recreation agencies in strategies, initiatives, and projects that protect our natural resources and create recreational amenities through the use of "green solutions" such as stream buffers, stream restoration/protection efforts, native plantings, bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, stormwater control projects, bio-retention facilities, energy efficiency measures, recycling programs, air and water pollution reduction, alternative energies, and other measures that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve environmental quality.

Municipal, county, and state parks and recreation departments help promote a commitment to clean air and water, the wise use of natural resources, and the stewardship of public and private lands. We encourage financial support for local government "green" initiatives. MPRA supports funding for the Department of Natural Resources Division of State Parks and the Department of Conservation.

MPRA encourages positive action on environmental issues. We oppose any changes to the makeup of the Conservation Commission or to the process by which the Commission is appointed. We oppose any attempts to infringe on the constitutional mandate under which the Commission carries out its mission. MPRA supports the value of traditional rural recreation opportunities to Missourians. We recommend action that reminds all Missourians of the need for continued dedication to improving open space, expanding recreation opportunities, and responsibly using all our natural resources. MPRA recognizes, supports, and defends the public ownership of lands used for public recreation. Any disposal of such lands for use(s) other than public recreation should be cautiously considered and approved by a public vote.

Americans with Disabilities Act: MPRA believes accessibility is the cornerstone of our society and culture. Including all people in the fabric of society strengthens the community and its individual members. The value of leisure experiences in enhancing the quality of life for all people cannot be overstated. Shared leisure experiences empower future generations to build a better place to live and thrive.

MPRA supports programmatic access, as defined in the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and, more recently, the 2010 updates specific to parks and recreation, to all parks, historic sites, and recreation areas throughout federal, state, county, and local parks.

Support for Higher Education: MPRA believes that effective long-term stewardship of Missouri's leisure-oriented resources, facilities, and programs depends on the quality of present and future parks, recreation, and tourism professionals. MPRA stresses the need to provide strong nationally accredited parks, recreation, sport, and tourism program curricula at the state's higher education institutions, creating a strong workforce and important internship opportunities in Missouri. In doing so, there is an acknowledgment of the critical role that superior parks and recreation opportunities play in the state's long-term economic health and well-being.

MPRA urges the state of Missouri, the General Assembly, and the coordinating Board of Higher Education to maintain and support national accreditation of outstanding parks, recreation, sport, and tourism educational programs within the state. Special care should be given to provide nationally accredited curricula that afford financial accessibility to the many students throughout the state.

Parks as Safe Havens: Missouri citizens have long regarded their public parks as "safe havens." Public parks and recreation agencies have always endeavored to remove any condition in their parks that might pose a threat or danger to their parks' patrons and providers, including sexual predators, drugs, bullying or other harassment, and illegal weapons. MPRA continues to vigorously support legislation that grants political subdivisions in Missouri the authority to ban or remove any condition or activity in their public parks that poses a potential danger to park user groups, park and recreation employees, contractors, volunteers, and individuals. MPRA encourages the authorization of local, county, and state recreation agencies to operate Park Ranger divisions to maintain order and enforce codes within their jurisdictions.

Funding for Missouri Department of Tourism: Communities across Missouri benefit from visitors who not only learn about all there is to offer in the state but also contribute significantly to the local economies. Robust marketing of tourism opportunities is critical to attracting visitors to every part of Missouri, and the Department of Tourism should remain the primary source of those efforts. MPRA supports full funding to the Missouri Department of Tourism each year, as presented by department leadership.

Regulation of Local Parks and Recreation Agencies: Functions and responsibilities of local park and recreation are currently defined and governed by State statutes, city and county home rule charters, local ordinances, resolutions and contracts, and voter approved bond issue and sales tax covenants. Missouri communities are diverse, from urban to rural and everything in between, and require tailored approaches for effective and efficient governance. The tremendous variety of activities, facilities, and populations makes the task of statewide regulations on unique local issues unnecessarily expensive and burdensome for local officials seeking local control.

Workforce Development: Parks and Recreation agencies throughout the state hire thousands of employees on a part-time/seasonal basis, many under the age of 20 who have little to no work experience or skills. Workforce development is critical for state growth, and parks and recreation agencies are poised to aid with this effort. Parks and recreation agents are key contributors to workforce development, from lifesaving skills like CPR, First Aid, AED, lifeguarding, etc. which expose the next generation to careers like health/emergency services, teaching/child care, coaching and officiating, forestry, trades, maintenance, etc. The basic work skills parks and recreation employees gain include organization, customer service, cash handling, conflict resolution, prioritization, communication, teamwork, etc., and the list goes on and on. MPRA supports funding initiatives and legislation that encourage economic growth through workplace development programs.