



# Missouri Wilderness Coalition

Wilderness Conference Summary

September 25, 2008

## 2008 State-Wide Missouri Wilderness Conference Summary

**Wilderness Summit in Salem.** Our recent Missouri wilderness conference in Salem was a success! We had about 35 supporters gather to discuss our campaign for designating seven exceptional areas, already either Forest Service or National Park Service owned, as federal Wilderness. From all across the state we came together (from Kansas City, Warrensburg, Springfield, the Ozarks, Jefferson City, Cape Girardeau, and St. Louis) to renew our commitment for having wilderness legislation introduced by the Missouri delegation and designated by Congress.



**What we learned.** Our conference opener was from Dave Murphy, Executive Director of the Conservation Federation of Missouri. Dave delivered a personal message on behalf of wilderness, enriched with a quote from one of his favorite authors Sigurd Olsen. John Karel reviewed our state's history with the issue, including designation of the eight wilderness areas we now have. John reached back to the days of Aldo Leopold and Leonard Hall bringing us all up to the 1985 Forest Plan where the seven areas we are now working to preserve were classified as "sensitive areas" and then managed that way for more than 20 years.

Scott Merritt then presented the Missouri Wilderness Coalition proposal. Highlighted with color slides, maps, and descriptive background for each area, we all came away understanding the importance of our work ahead. Greg Iffrig reviewed the uniquely American wilderness experience and the fact that for Missouri, wilderness stands as the only public control areas, our hedge against tinkering; it may be the most important reason we must save them. Greg reminded us that the Forest Service has now threatened several areas, with the Acting Supervisor speaking out publicly against wilderness. Carrie Yonley then recounted her personal and family connection with the 2300-acre Smith Creek proposed wilderness area in the Mark Twain's Cedar Creek District of north-central Missouri. From her home she can look out every day on this modest-sized, but rich and wild landscape; Carrie's is one more example of the landowner's local connection to wilderness.

**The Group's Contribution.** For the afternoon we began our discussion with Rindy O'Brien, Missouri native, with years of Washington DC 'hill' experience. Rindy's dedication to this issue and her love for Missouri is well known to wilderness advocates in this state and elsewhere; she generously shared her knowledge. For many of us the highlight was her well-told story from another state's campaign, where the compelling moment came when a white horse appeared, literally, to turn the tide at one state's Congressional hearing. Rindy's upbeat approach and keen insight encouraged us all and set the stage.

As the day moved along everyone remained engaged, even into the middle of the afternoon, as we began a thoughtful discussion of our campaign goals and the steps we need to take if we are to succeed.

## Follow-Up

The most important result of this meeting was a renewed and reinvigorated commitment from everyone to work together to complete the wilderness agenda for Missouri. We know what that will take and we have begun the work. Our first major goal is to have legislation introduced by April 23, Earth Day of 2009. This will take a lot of work but we feel ready for that now.

**Buttons are coming!** After some immediate follow-up discussion we have agreed on our short and simple message:

**MoWILD.org**

Joe Krutsch has taken on the task of having our new campaign buttons prepared. Once they are ready we will then distribute them through our growing network. Thanks, Joe!

**Our Elevator Message.** While we have done a pretty good job of preparing detailed, accurate information about our areas and our proposal, we need to boil that information down to an essential "elevator message", for those situations where we have only limited windows of access to potential supporters and decision makers.

For the "short ride": Missouri conservationists propose that seven areas, totaling less than 50,000 acres of federal public land in Missouri become part of the National Wilderness Preservation System.

For the Longer Elevator Ride, When You Have Just A Little More Time. The following talking points are offered:

1. Changes in Forest Service management threaten seven areas totaling just under 50,000 acres of Missouri wilderness, all of which are already publicly owned.
2. These areas have been successfully managed as wilderness for more than 25 years.
3. Congress must pass wilderness legislation to protect these nationally recognized wilderness areas that provide important bird habitats, clean streams, and healthy forests.
4. These areas will bring economic and tourism benefits, and would cost no jobs.
5. Wilderness allows hunting, fishing, horseback riding and other non-motorized recreation opportunities for all.



**Other Useful Information On Hand or In Prep.** Don't forget we also have more copies of the tabloid if you need them. And remember the website, yes, [mowild.org](http://mowild.org), for pictures and to print the fuller report we prepared for our Missouri delegation - that's all available from the website. You'll always find the most up-to-date list of endorsing organizations. Scott will also be happy to provide copies of his PowerPoint program via CD if you wish. Just let him know.

Scott is also working with several computer-savvy folks to be able to provide a Missouri Wilderness internet discussion space and calendar. There was quite a bit of interest in this so we are working hard to get this put together. You will be notified by e-mail when it is up and running.

David Lobbig has already gotten the commitment of a studio to prepare a full color video about our Missouri wilderness campaign. It promises to be high quality, colorful, and useful for all of us. It will be yet another way to catch attention and spread our message to an ever broader audience. Thanks David!

Finally, one of the most important messages we came away with from our gathering was that wilderness success in Missouri can only come as a bipartisan effort. That has always been true, and it is true today. Wilderness is not only for some of us, it is truly for all of us. All Missourians benefit from wilderness, and almost all Missourians will support it if we can convey our story with truth, knowledge, and compassion.

That is our charge, and we believe that working together we can accomplish this mission.

Let's begin!

John Karel            Greg Iffrig            Scott Merritt

## **Missouri Wilderness Coalition**

P.O. Box 377  
Boss, MO 65440  
(573) 626-1021 or (314) 602-6639  
[scottm@mowild.org](mailto:scottm@mowild.org)  
[www.mowild.org](http://www.mowild.org)