

## MISSOURI "DESIGN FOR CONSERVATION"

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I appreciate the opportunity to talk to you about wildlife and forest conservation in Missouri because it is a popular subject in our state. Last November, a majority of the voters approved a one-eighth of 1 percent sales tax, with the money *constitutionally* dedicated to wildlife and forest conservation . . . and we're excited about the future, to say the least.

The tax is expected to bring in about 22 million dollars this year. Last year's conservation budget was nearly 18 million dollars so Missourians have pledged a great deal of money to conservation, some 40 million dollars for fiscal 1977-78. That kind of faith carries real meaning. It is easy to be in favor of popular causes, but far less common to back up that support with hard cash.

The story of Design for Conservation really began in 1936, with the passage of a constitutional amendment creating the Missouri Department of Conservation. Prior to that time Missouri had a highly political, non-professional fish and game department. This constitutional amendment took the old fish and game department out of politics by creating a non-partisan 4 man commission, on a bi-partisan basis, appointed by the Governor for 6 yr staggered terms. The constitution vested the control, management, restoration, conservation and regulation of all bird, fish, game, wildlife and forest resources in the Missouri Conservation Commission, and earmarked hunting and fishing license funds, and other monies generated for conservation. It made possible a continuing, professionally based program of conservation, that brought wildlife back from dismal lows in the 1930s to relative abundance today. But what about the future? This concern, on the part of the professional staff, was brought to the attention of the Commission, which approved a study of present programs and future needs.

In 1969 the Missouri Department of Conservation was evaluated by 3 nationally known conservationists. The team consisted of A. S. Leopold of the University of California at Berkeley, I. K. Fox then of the University of Wisconsin and C. H. Callison, then executive vice president of the National Audubon Society.

The team's findings were published in June 1970 as the *Missouri Conservation Program Report*. The study team said that organization and programs were excellent, and were a good base to future actions. However, the committee felt we should broaden our programs to include conservation of all wildlife, including non-game species, and to provide for outdoor recreation outside the traditional realm of hunting and fishing.

To accomplish this would require a source of funds far beyond hunting and fishing license fees. With the belief that somewhere the funding was available, the Department developed a proposal to provide a more thorough and effective conservation program. The proposal was called "Design for Conservation" and it appeared as a special edition of the *Missouri Conservationist* magazine in September 1971. An up-dated version appeared in the August 1975 *Conservationist*.

"Design" is a basic program for Missouri's outdoor future—a plan to mitigate the adverse impacts of modern development. It is a long-range plan to expand Missouri's wildlife conservation program, and provide more outdoor recreational opportunities. It proposes acquisition of high-quality uplands, wetlands, prairies, forests and natural areas. It calls for construction of community lakes, development of interpretive centers, acquisition of stream access sites and additional hatcheries and trout management areas. All of the public services of the Conservation Department are to be expanded. They include providing advice, service and materials for private wildlife, pond and forest management, and increased law enforcement, educational services and research. Those are all programs we were already engaged in, but the emphasis was expanded from harvest to wider uses and enjoyment of the outdoors—to the so-called "non-consumptive" activities.

To study ways to fund this program, the Department employed a private consultant, and later the University of Missouri. Their studies, titled *Revenue Sources: Present and Potential and Analysis: Two Potential Revenue Sources*, suggested a number of sources of funds, from various taxes to bond issues.

At a public meeting called by the Department to make public the study committee's report and the Department's proposals, a citizen group was formed—"the Citizen's Com-

mittee for Conservation." Working closely with the Conservation Federation of Missouri, the group launched an initiative petition drive in 1971. The petition called for an amendment to the state constitution providing that carbonated soft drinks would be taxed at the rate of one-cent per 16 ounces, with the money earmarked for use by the Department of Conservation. Enough Missourians signed the petitions to put the issue on the ballot in 1971, but the effort failed because of a legal technicality. The proposed constitutional amendment which appeared on the petitions lacked an "enacting clause," and the state Supreme Court ruled the issue could not go on the ballot.

The effort languished until the Citizens Committee came back in 1975 with a new initiative petition. Based on a more recent study of the taxes most acceptable to Missourians, it called for a constitutional amendment with an addition to the state sales tax of one-eighth of 1 percent, with the money to be earmarked for use by the Department of Conservation. The state sales tax currently was 3 percent. Signatures collected on this petition drive had to be those of registered voters due to a new state law. The group collected nearly 200,000 signatures and the issue was certified to appear on the 1976 general election ballot.

The CCC, working entirely with donations, informed Missourians and urged them to vote "yes" on Amendment No. 1, the conservation amendment. The Department informed people about the conservation program—The "Design for Conservation" which could be funded if the new money became available.

On 2 November 1976 (General Election Day) the measure passed by about 30,000 votes. The tax, that went into effect on 1 July 1977, is expected to yield some 26 million dollars per year, after this year, for the wildlife and forestry conservation projects outlined in the "Design for Conservation."

The total effort to pass this amendment spanned several years and involved the efforts of thousands of people. The backbone of the drive was a well-established state Conservation Federation.

The executive director of that organization devoted himself full time to the project for the final 2 years. He had full backing to do so from his board of directors. He had his own office—a full-time assistant during the entire effort, an additional assistant the final 6 mo, and 2 full-time office workers plus one volunteer who worked 5 days a week without pay. The office staff was supplemented by other volunteers, some who worked almost every day in the last year.

In Missouri a minimum of about 100,000 signatures is required on petitions to place a constitutional issue before the voters. Signatures had to be collected in at least 7 of Missouri's 10 congressional districts. A total of 8 percent of the number that voted for governor, in two-thirds of the state's ten districts, are required.

Petition signers had to be registered voters. The CCC wanted at least 150,000 signatures as insurance, because some of the signatures inevitably would be disallowed when the petitions were checked by the Secretary of State. Many people think they are registered, but are not; or they move and the county clerk no longer carries their name on his rolls. The drive ultimately netted almost 200,000 signatures.

Collecting 200,000 signatures was a tremendous amount of work for the citizens group. The CCC had a statewide organization with a coordinator in each Missouri county. The coordinator was responsible for a minimum number of signatures, and he got them by rounding up volunteers and driving them to shopping centers, fairs, college campuses and other spots where people gather. Hunting and fishing clubs did well getting signatures, but the best petition carriers were often college students, bird watchers and backpackers.

The CCC required money throughout the campaign, from the petition drive to actual campaigning and advertising. Money was needed for travel expenses, printing, mailing, some salaries and, most importantly, pre-election advertising. The group hoped to have about \$300,000 for an ad campaign, but ended up committing about \$65,000. In addition, another \$45,000 was used for expenses.

The Citizens Committee initially hired a campaign organization to raise funds and conduct a media campaign. The private firm had difficulties raising money, however, and their contract was terminated. The citizens group proceeded on their own to raise money and produce their own advertising. An advertising agency was hired by the group to reserve air time. The group produced radio and television spots, plus camera-ready ads for use in newspapers. A number of celebrities donated their services to the ad campaign, including Marlin Perkins of "Wild Kingdom" fame, plus assorted football, baseball and golf celebrities, and regional radio and television personalities.

Most of the group's donations came from sustaining members of the Conservation Federation, and mailings to about 250,000 people. Most mail donations were small, but they added up. Some money came from corporations that either liked the idea, or were in the business of selling outdoor-related equipment. Mailings to individuals were repeated, sometimes resulting in a second donation. The statewide money raising effort included the sale of wildlife art prints. We found that the use of limited edition prints by artist Charles Schwartz was an important stimulus in producing funds. Over \$90,000 was attributed to his donated artwork in the two fund-raising efforts. Money was also raised locally (by such schemes as auctions and barbecues) and used to pay for local advertising. Direct contributions came from clubs—Audubon groups, trappers associations, trout fishing clubs, etc. The CCC hoped for large donations from corporations, but these never materialized.

Many volunteers were needed throughout the effort and one vital source of volunteers for the Citizens Committee was the Department of Conservation. Department people were interested and gave many of their off-hours to the effort. Much of the group's volunteer office help consisted of wives of Department employees.

The Citizens Committee sought—and got—endorsements from all state and national conservation groups, from the National Wildlife Federation and AAUW to National Audubon, the Secretary of the Interior and the National Rifle Association. Individual endorsements came from people like Marlin Perkins, H. Nat Reed and a number of other celebrities. The Citizens Committee also worked for editorial endorsement from the news media. All endorsements were important, and many resulted in free publicity.

The CCC had a state chairman and steering committee which made decisions and backed up the full-time staff. They spent many hours in meetings, deciding when and how things should be done. It took a committed group like this to keep the effort moving, and keep up the morale of volunteers over the state. A newsletter went to volunteers periodically to inform them of the progress of the campaign.

Opposition to the proposal came from several areas, and the same type of opposition could probably surface in other states. A business-financed lobby, the Missouri Public Expenditure Survey, said it opposed the amendment because earmarked funds would not allow legislative control, and the amount of revenue produced would grow beyond what was needed. Those few newspapers which opposed the amendment did so largely on the basis of a news release from the Public Expenditure Survey. Some farm and landowner groups opposed the amendment because of their fears it would mean a landgrab (eminent domain), even though the Department of Conservation had pledged not to use eminent domain in acquiring new public lands. Opponents said the purchase of additional public lands would hurt county property tax receipts.

A small Ozark landowners association, formed years ago to oppose scenic rivers legislation, placed ads against the proposal in newspapers and even distributed flyers in opposition at grocery check-out counters. Some political figures opposed the amendment on the grounds they disliked earmarked taxes. Overall, opposition was generally low-key, and where it occurred, the CCC countered it well.

The petition drive itself was an important way to inform, on a personal basis, 200,000 potential voters, about the need to provide funding for an expanded conservation program. The hundreds of thousands of readers of the Department's *Conservationist* magazine were well informed on the proposal. The CCC also reached about 100,000 people with letters written by volunteers and mailed just prior to the balloting. Good media relations helped carry the vote in several counties.

The Department of Conservation used every means available to inform Missourians about the conservation program that would become possible with additional funding. Methods included:

- A feature-length film titled "Design for Conservation."
- A slide show.
- Special editions of our magazine, the *Conservationist*, plus many articles.
- News Releases.
- Radio and television programs.
- Exhibits.
- Speeches distributed to all Department personnel.
- Special publications.

There were a number of things at work in the project—the Conservation Federation of Missouri, a thousand volunteers, donations from many people, and helpers with expertise in many different areas. Most important, of course, were the 900,000 Missourians who voted “yes” to increase funding for wildlife and forestry conservation in their state. You might be interested to know that the proposal carried strongest in metropolitan areas, and areas where there were colleges. It fared poorest in rural areas . . . but it carried.

Our most recent activity on Design has been to publish monthly a progress report in the *Conservationist*. Although we have not as yet received any money from the tax, we have been active. Free fishing has been granted to people 65 and over, as promised. We have already begun expanding non-consumptive programs and personnel. We had pledged payment in lieu of taxes to counties where land acquisition might result in significant burdens and had legislation to permit us to do so introduced in the legislature.

In March we conducted a series of Town Hall meetings throughout the state to find out if we were on the right track. We held 13 meetings and they were attended by 1,400 people. The reaction of the people attending was generally very positive. They seemed to appreciate an opportunity to present their ideas and many took advantage of the opportunity to comment on present programs. A minority expressed opposition to various aspects of Design but most of the 482 who made statements offered advice and encouragement on the implementation of “Design for Conservation”.

Various aspects of land acquisition drew the most comment. Some simply said it should be top priority. Others wanted to see specific types and habitat acquired. This first year we are budgeting 80 percent of the new funds to land acquisition and other capital expenditures.

In summarizing the meetings, one thing they proved was that we were on the right track with Design, with minor program adjustment and slight acquisition modification.

We’ve taken the basic first step. We have the resources to do a top notch job. Now we must perform—and we are confident we will.