

### **Protecting Missouri's Outdoor Heritage**

Looking at the leaves falling from the trees and feeling the cool, crisp air reminds us that we are in one of the most beautiful times of the year. For many people autumn is a good time to get away from the normal demands of life and take to the fields and forests for hunting season. This Saturday marks what is perhaps the busiest day of the year for sportsmen as Missouri opens its annual firearms deer season.

Outdoor sporting activities such as hunting and fishing are time-honored Missouri traditions. To the pioneers and settlers of this area these activities were much more than recreation, they were a way of life and survival might well depend on how successful a person was at living off the land.

Today's world is far removed from the days when people hunted and fished from necessity. Instead, a different kind of problem now confronts our State. Factors such as the migration of people from rural areas to more urban locations have raised concerns that our outdoor sporting traditions might not always be preserved.

Currently Missouri's outdoor tradition remains quite healthy. For example, during the 2003 November firearms deer season, over 400,000 Missouri hunters took to the woods and set a record harvest. These hunters provide an important service to this state. The number of deaths attributable to collisions with deer is on the increase. Also, the health and well-being of our deer population depends on an annual thinning of the herd.

Although tens of thousands of Missourians hunt, far less than a majority of Missourians actively hunt. Add to that the grumblings of a vocal minority who believe that activities like hunting and fishing should be outlawed and you find some cause for concern.

Last year I cosponsored legislation in the senate that would have protected this right in the Missouri Constitution. This resolution stated in part, "The opportunity to harvest wild fish and wild game animals is a heritage that shall forever be preserved to the individual citizens of the state." While this resolution did not pass, I intend to again propose to the legislature that this issue be brought before the voters of Missouri and added to our state constitution.

Our outdoor traditions of hunting and fishing are very important. I hope you'll join me in this effort to make sure they are protected for future Missourians.

If you have comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by e-mail at [matt\\_bartle@senate.state.mo.us](mailto:matt_bartle@senate.state.mo.us) or by phone at (888) 711-9278.