



## MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

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# Senator Stouffer on Conservation Sales Tax

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The Senate Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, Parks and Natural Resources has been hearing testimony on Senate Joint Resolution 3 for the past two weeks. SJR 3 allows for the citizens of Missouri to vote on the Department of Conservation sales tax every ten years.

This sales tax, which is one-eighth of one percent, began in 1977. With the sales tax, the department does not receive any appropriated money from the general revenue budget. As a courtesy each year the department testifies about what it has been doing with its money in the House and Senate.

Missouri's Department of Conservation works hard. Our department is ranked second in the nation. The department has helped develop a \$3-billion forest industry, an abundance of wildlife, a \$2-billion hunting-, fishing- and wildlife-watching industry, and approximately 90,000 jobs across Missouri. The department has also designed many educational programs to teach children and adults how to enjoy and respect the magnificent scenery and resources of Missouri.

Although the department has made many achievements for which it should be recognized, there are still many issues for which the department should be held accountable. For instance, the deer population is growing rapidly and becoming an increasing threat to our crops and the safety of motorists. Also, the department has made investments that have weighed heavily on our state budget. The department purchased two acres of land in Cedar County costing \$70,560. In addition, the state auditor reported several items that are considered excess spending including: \$900,000 that went toward catering and food-service providers from 1999 to 2002; \$1,100 in late credit card charges in 1999 and 2000; expensive conferences, such as an 8-day St.

Louis conference totaling \$30,000 for some employees; and 1,300 on-road vehicles with no cost reports or usage logs for the vehicles plus the department owned three planes and one helicopter in 1999.

Unfortunately, this is the only department in the state that does not have a system of checks and balances. They can spend their money and regulate what they want without one person making them accountable for the spending of our tax dollars.

In the unlikely event the conservation tax is not approved by voters, this will not end the department because federal regulation ensures hunting and fishing license fees will not be used for any purposes other than funding state fish and wildlife agency. Also, the intention is not to end the tax, but to make the department accountable for the money they receive from the people.

If you have questions or comments about this issue or any other issues please contact my office toll free at 866-768-3987 or by email at [bstouffer@senate.mo.gov](mailto:bstouffer@senate.mo.gov).

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