



# **Southeast Missouri Conservation Center in Cape Girardeau**

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## **Bringing Southeast Missouri's Natural History to Life**

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When the Southeast Missouri Conservation nature center opened its doors this past May, Southeast Missouri entered a new era of nature appreciation. The Conservation Campus is one of five nature centers around the state operated by the Missouri Department of Conservation. Missouri forests, rivers, lakes and fields are home to valuable plants, animals and natural resources. The habitants and their habitats deserve protection, and thanks to the efforts of Missouri's Department of Conservation, safeguarding the natural and wildlife resources is possible.

The department further extends its reach by educating the public about resource management and ensuring that citizens can connect to the wildlife through fishing, hunting and exploring. The Conservation Campus located in Cape Girardeau focuses on the southeast region's unique natural and cultural history. Southeast Missouri is located at a crossroads where forests, rivers, plains and the Ozarks come together, resulting in the most biologically diverse region in the state.

An extraordinary amount of detail went into planning the campus to raise awareness for wildlife, and geographical and natural resources. Every exhibit, every concept, every feature of the campus was planned with the interests of the people of southeast Missouri in mind. The process took more than eight years from start to finish, and the result is a one-of-a-kind educational experience for adults and children who want to learn about wildlife in a hands-on environment. The \$4.7-million campus features a 20,000 sq. ft. building with a 160-seat auditorium, three classrooms, an exhibit gallery, freshwater aquariums and a scientific research center. On display in the exhibit gallery are interactive exhibits and information stations that teach visitors a variety of lessons, from how to call animals, to what a fur trapper's cabin looks like. There's a beaver lodge that kids as well as adults can crawl through, and Native American artifacts and primitive tools that were used to harvest plants and animals centuries ago are displayed.

Outside of the nature center are two miles of nature trails that follow the White Oak Trace. The trail features native grass plantings, wildflowers, sinkholes, deep ravines, and impressive stands of oak and poplar trees. Visitors can explore life-like habitats found in the forests, marshes, swamps and rivers of Southeast Missouri.

There are several programs, films, workshops and special events offered at the nature center, with the overall theme being connecting to wildlife through the protection and management of Missouri's fish, forests, and wildlife resources. One of the programs beginning next month at the Conservation Campus is a Hunter Education Course. The Conservation Campus is great place for school groups to take a field trip. There are numerous programs that are age specific: preschool, kindergarten through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, 3<sup>rd</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> grade, and 6<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. These programs are conducted by experienced naturalist staff and last up to two hours depending on group size. One can call to organize a group visit and request a leader guide to help plan the visit.

To find out more about the programs available and other activities call 573-290-5218. The nature center is just east of I-55 (Exit 99) and Kingshighway (State Highway 61). It is open 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday, and noon to 5 p.m. on Sunday. Admission is free.

## **Contact Me**

As always, I appreciate hearing your comments, opinions and concerns. Please feel free to contact me in Jefferson City at (573) 751-2459. You may write to me at Jason Crowell; Missouri Senate; State Capitol; Jefferson City, MO 65101, or email me at: [jcrowell@senate.mo.gov](mailto:jcrowell@senate.mo.gov) or visit me on the web at <http://www.jasoncrowell.com>.

Thank you for your time.

*Senator Jason Crowell represents the people of Bollinger, Cape Girardeau, Madison, Mississippi, Perry and Scott counties in the Missouri Senate.*