



THE STOUFFER REPORT

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For the Week of:
July 17, 2006

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Missouri's Parks and Soils Tax

Although August primaries do not usually attract a lot of voters to the polls, this year's ballot contains an extremely important measure to continue funding for Missouri's farmers and state parks.

On very rare occasions do Republicans and Democrats, as well as the Missouri Farm Bureau and environmentalist groups, agree on an issue. In fact, most of us in Rural Missouri are hesitant to support taxes of any kind. However, the Missouri parks and soils tax continues to see support throughout the state.

The one-tenth percent parks and soils tax will again be up for voter approval on the Aug. 8 ballot. This source of funding creates valuable returns through Missouri's tourism and agriculture industries, and I encourage all eligible voters to visit the polls and fully consider Amendment 1.

The parks and soils tax was first placed on the ballot in 1984 as a result of a grass-roots initiative. It has since been renewed in 1988 and 1996, both times by a two-to-one margin. The tax now generates \$82 million each year, which is divided equally between soil conservation and state parks.

The \$41 million in annual soil-conservation revenue has meant a lot to Missouri farmers struggling against soil erosion. In 1982, Missouri was losing an average of 10.9 tons of soil per acre. Soils tax revenue has helped cut that number by more than half, to 5.3 tons per acre in 2002. Continued funding for this important conservation effort is vital to Missouri's agricultural industry.

Meanwhile, sales-tax funding for state parks and historic sites has resulted in drastic improvements in Missouri tourism. Missouri parks suffered from a lack of maintenance and general upkeep in the 1970s and 1980s, and now Missouri parks are considered among the best in the nation.

The \$41 million that goes to Missouri parks from the sales tax makes up some 75 percent of their operating and capital-improvement budgets. Further, that \$41 million generates \$538 million each year in economic benefits for Missouri through the purchase of gasoline, hunting and fishing permits, and other tourism-related expenditures.

The parks and soils tax is one of the rare instances of a tax acting as an investment in our state. Its returns are extremely valuable for Missouri's economy, and anyone who has visited one of our beautiful state parks will recognize that the revenue is being put to good use. I encourage all Missouri voters to come out to the voting booth and consider this important issue.

If you have questions or comments about this or any other issue, please call toll free (866) 768-3987 or by email at bstouffer@senate.mo.gov.

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