



Senator
Bill Stouffer

DISTRICT 21

Senator Bill Stouffer – Cultivating Rural Missouri.

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The Stouffer Report: Democracy Wins Again After the People Speak Out

With a new year comes some good news. And it is something a lot of folks have been hoping would happen for the good of rural Missouri. I also believe the result comes directly from you.

Several months ago, the conservation commission — which governs the [Missouri Department of Conservation](#) — proposed two revenue-increasing ideas. One would raise hunting and fishing fees for residents from \$1 to \$3. The other plan would require a landowner to have at least 80 acres of ground instead of 5 to qualify for no-cost turkey and deer permits. Both would change longtime rules. Both have been rejected. Also turned away was a proposed “forever” permit for seniors. Now, folks over 65 can keep fishing and hunting small game for free.

Commissioners say their original intent was to make the rules easier to understand and to raise fees a little. The proposal was drawn up and then introduced in September, when the economy was doing better. By the time they opened public comment in November, things had changed. Thousands of folks weighed in to speak their minds. At the end, the conservation commission said the will of the people won out. Combine this with the economy, and there was no way they could allow these changes to be made. Members said over 17,000 people commented on the proposed changes during a 30-day comment period.

This is a key part to the story. For the most part, public comment periods go largely unnoticed. From my years on the Senate Transportation Committee, I have seen large-scale plans forge ahead because nobody stepped forward and said “wait a minute.” But this was not the case this time.

I want to applaud this commission for making the right decision. So often we hear about government agencies ignoring public opinion and only looking at the money. Commissioners could have easily said the need to raise fees outweighed the public outcry. Instead, they did the right thing.

I also want to point out these concepts have not been thrown out. The conservation commission said they will not implement the higher permit fees or other changes this year, as they had originally intended. But they have the option of coming back later this year and opening the plans for public comment once again, if they determine the need still exists. There is always the chance folks will be more understanding once the economy has improved. As long as commissioners remember to listen to what the people say, I believe they will make the right decisions.

I also pray you continue to speak out and let your elected officials know what you think. With your help, there is no end to the great things we can accomplish in Missouri.

Senator Stouffer serves the counties of Carroll, Chariton, Cooper, Howard, Lafayette, Macon, Ray, Saline, and a part of Clay.

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

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