

An aerial photograph of a forest with a winding stream. The stream flows from the top left towards the bottom right, curving through the trees. The trees are mostly bare, suggesting a winter or late autumn setting. The water in the stream is a light brownish color, possibly due to sediment or fallen leaves.

MISSOURI CONSERVATIONIST

VOLUME 87, ISSUE 1, JANUARY 2026
SERVING NATURE & YOU

Xplor

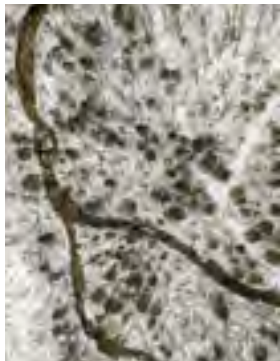


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ON THE COVER

Drury-Mincy Conservation Area – see more in this issue's *Places To Go*.

DAVID STONNER

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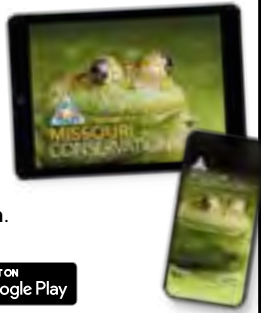
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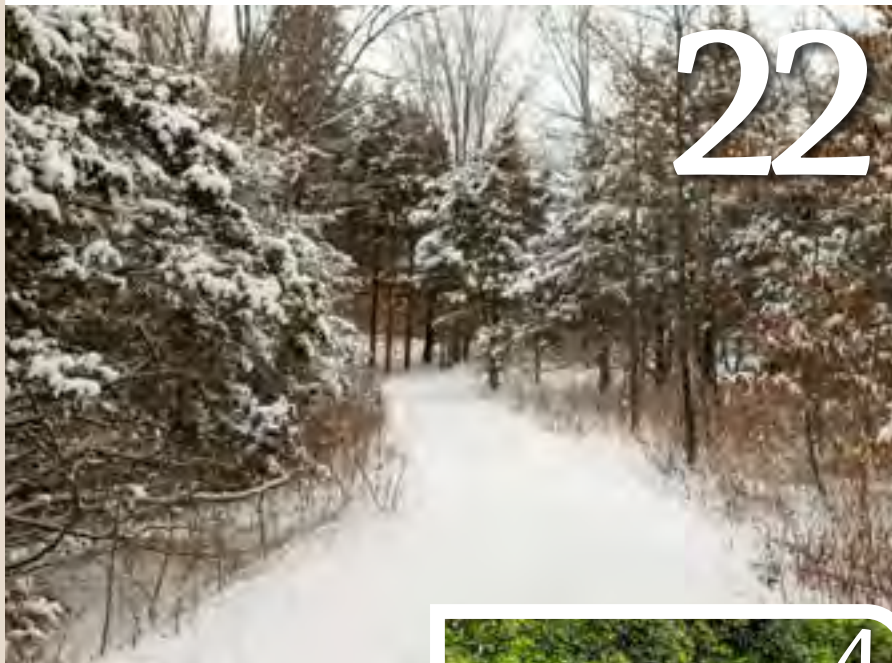
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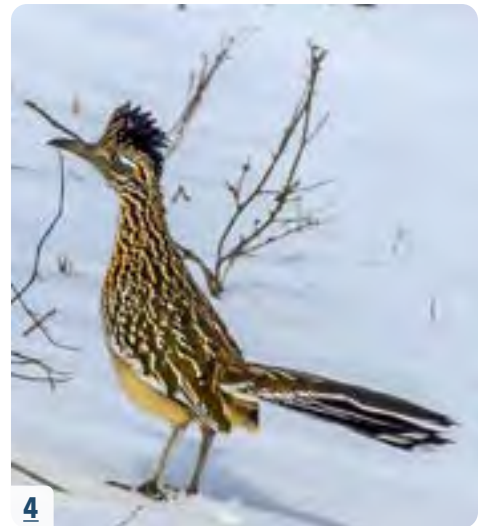
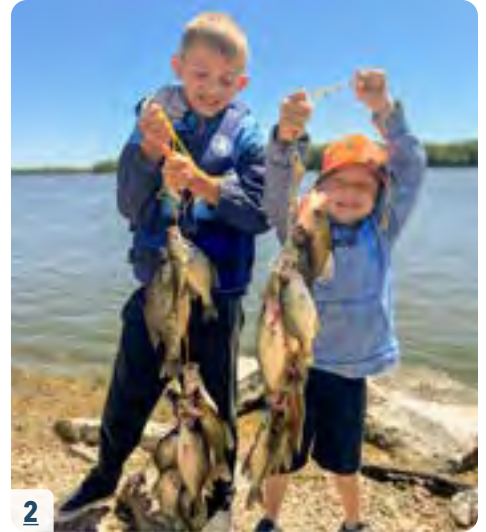
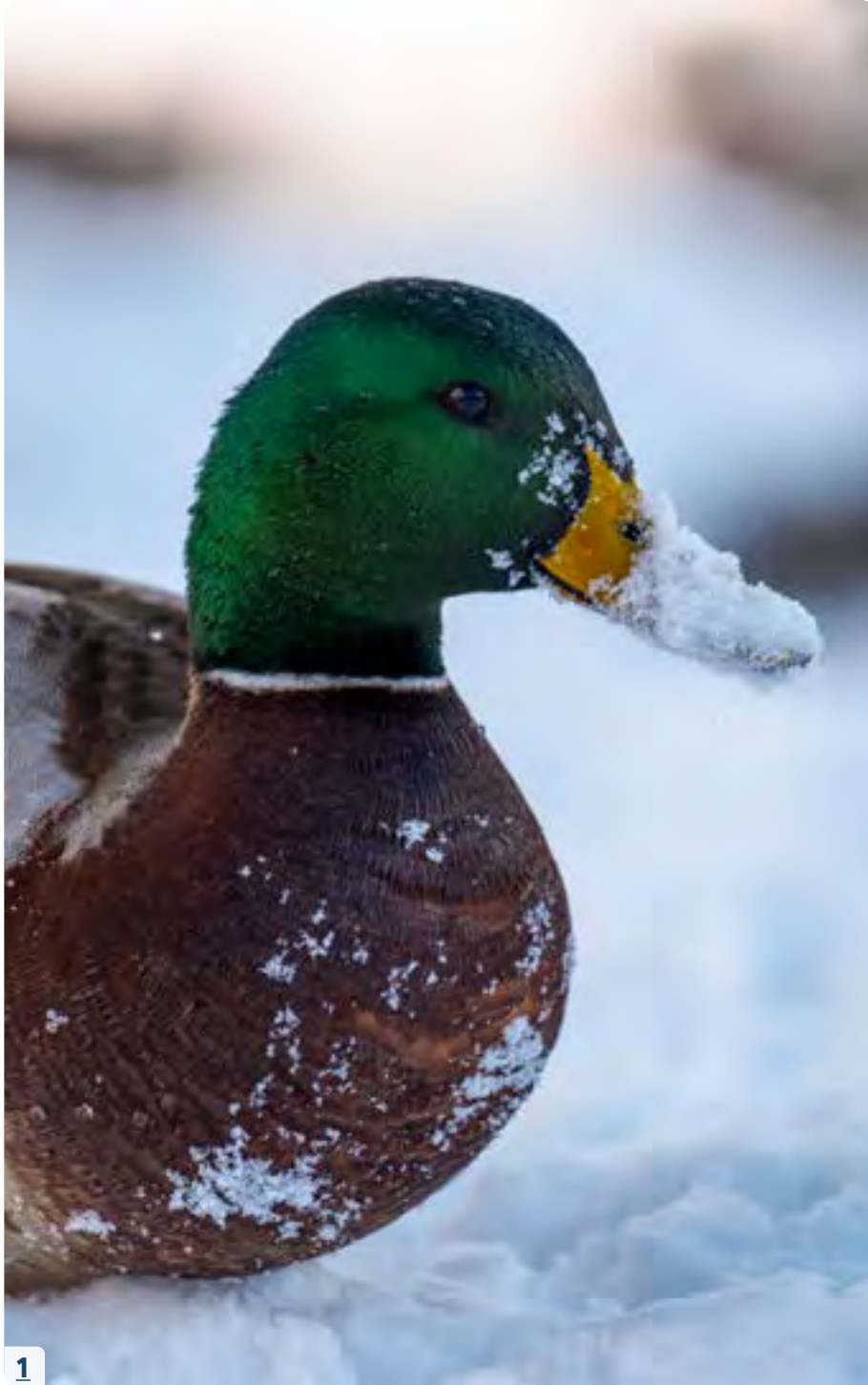
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Inbox



Want to see your photos in the *Missouri Conservationist*?

Submit your photos online via [flickr.com/groups/mdcreaderphotos-2026](https://www.flickr.com/groups/mdcreaderphotos-2026/), [mdc.mo.gov/magazine-reader-photos](https://www.mdc.mo.gov/magazine-reader-photos) or by emailing readerphoto@mdc.mo.gov

1 | Mallard with a snowy beak by **Garret Deeter**, via Flickr

2 | Fishing at Smithville Lake by **Wesson Gregory**, via web

3 | River otter by **Jerry Keeney**, via Flickr

4 | Greater roadrunner by **Cindy Todd**, via Flickr

➔ In the December issue we plan to feature even more great reader photos. Send in your best year-round pictures of native Missouri wildlife, flora, natural scenery, and friends and family engaged in outdoor activities. Please include where the photo was taken and what it depicts.



Letters to the Editor

Submissions reflect readers' opinions and may be edited for length and clarity. Email Magazine@mdc.mo.gov or write to: MISSOURI CONSERVATIONIST PO BOX 180 JEFFERSON CITY, MO 65102

READING ON THE ROAD

My husband took our grandson, Calvin, to Blind Pony Conservation Area to go fishing one afternoon after school. He was so excited to receive an Official Citation from Conservation Agent Trent Oberg that day.



He loves looking at all the pictures in the *Missouri Conservationist* and *Xplor* magazines when they arrive in the mail — especially if there are fish in the magazine. He also loves going to all the fish displays at the Conservation booth at the Missouri State Fair.

I know Agent Oberg sure made Calvin's day.

Betty Faris Concordia

MDC's conservation agents hand out Official Citations for Being Responsible Outdoor Enthusiasts to children enjoying nature. In partnership with Sonic restaurants, the citation makes the recipient eligible for one free ice cream cone. —The Editors

CARDINAL VS. BLUEBIRD

I am thankful for our beautiful state's official magazine. The photography is wonderful, and the articles educational and entertaining. The northern cardinal

[November, cover photo] is my official state bird, no offense to the eastern bluebird.

Darin Winters
Raymore



Up Front



✳ **The turning of the calendar offers an opportunity to look ahead with optimism at the year to come. It also offers an opportunity to reflect on the work of last year. The *Annual Review*, which is a staple of the January issue, highlights the work made possible by your support. Whether you hunt, fish, manage land, or spend time enjoying nature's beauty on an Ozark trail or through a set of binoculars, your engagement keeps conservation moving forward.**

This report highlights the extensive partnership with communities, landowners, and other conservation-minded organizations across the state. These include the more than half a million students reached through education programs, 17,000 landowner visits, habitat management on tens of thousands of acres of public lands, and major renovation work at the intensively managed wetlands and cold and warm water hatcheries.

It also highlights some of the many challenges facing conservation, such as continued efforts to eliminate feral hogs, managing invasive plants in woodlands and grasslands across the state, restoring habitats that are necessary for success of many wildlife populations, and enhancing the public's connection to nature.

As we enter 2026, thank you for the continued commitment to the conservation of Missouri's fish, forest, and wildlife resources. Together we can keep the long legacy of conservation in Missouri strong.

JASON SUMNERS, DIRECTOR
JASON.SUMNERS@MDC.MO.GOV

Our Mission

The Missouri Department of Conservation protects and manages the fish, forest, and wildlife of the state. We facilitate and provide opportunity for all citizens to use, enjoy, and learn about these resources.



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Send a note using our online contact form at mdc.mo.gov/commissioners.

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HABITAT MANAGEMENT

Beaver Dam Analogs

Biologists test a new method for restoring prairie streams

by Dianne Van Dien

✳ When it comes to restoring landscapes, we can learn much from the American beaver, whose dams have a hefty effect on stream function, water quality, the aquatic community, and surrounding vegetation.

So, when MDC Stream Program Specialist Ange Corson stumbled upon an article about fake beaver dams being used to improve stream habitat in western states, she took notice.

“We’re very concerned about our streams,” Corson said. “Many of them have been channelized, and now they’re highly incised [eroded] and no longer attached to their floodplains.”

Fake beaver dams, known as beaver dam analogs (BDAs), offer a low-cost way to slow the flow of water in streams to help restore them to a more ecologically friendly form.

Corson’s inquiry led to a joint project between MDC, The Nature Conservancy, U.S. Geological Survey, and the University of Missouri to test BDAs on streams at Dunn and Pawnee prairies in northwest Missouri.

Historically, prairie streams in Missouri were shallow and interconnected. Today, partly due to the removal of beavers as pests, many streams have lost the structure keeping them healthy and are now single channels that are deeply eroded (incised), lowering the water table and altering the ecosystem.

In the fall of 2024, the team built 24 BDAs (six each on four streams), while also leaving sections of those streams untouched to serve as a control for comparison.

To measure the success of the BDAs, several components are now being evaluated, explained Jacob Westhoff, assistant leader of the U.S. Geological Survey Missouri Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit at the University of Missouri. These include the fish community, fish movement, water quality, water temperature, groundwater levels, stream morphology, and vegetation.

“For some things we expect to see changes rather rapidly,” Westhoff said. “The accumulation of sediment behind the structures, you can expect to see rather quickly if they’re doing the job as we anticipated ... [while other things might have] a more delayed response.”

In time, said MDC Floodplain Ecologist Grant Sprague, “We’re expecting to see a shift in the plant community to more wetland-associated species.”

Although the timeframe allotted for this project focuses on the short-term changes, some monitoring will continue afterward. If the BDAs are successful, they may be installed on conservation areas in the future to help restore streams in those locations.

At a Glance

Beaver Dam Analogs (BDAs)

BDAs mimic beaver dams as a low-cost, low-tech method to restore stream health and function. They are built by pounding wooden posts into a streambed and weaving vegetation — often saplings and tree branches — through the posts, then adding mud and gravel.

What BDAs do:

- Slow water flow
- Reduce erosion
- Create pools
- Build up sediments

Potential BDA outcomes:

- Water table rises to natural level
- Stream reconnects to floodplain
- Native vegetation returns
- Habitat improves for native fishes and other aquatic life



MDC and partners are testing the effectiveness of BDAs on four prairie streams in northwest Missouri.

In Brief

News and updates from MDC



GIVE A GIFT TO NATURE

YOUR CHRISTMAS TREE CAN BE THE LAST GIFT YOU GIVE THIS HOLIDAY SEASON — NO WRAPPING REQUIRED

➔ MDC forestry staff remind you — don't throw that cut Christmas tree into the trash after the holidays. Recycle it! Many communities have a Christmas tree-recycling program. If not, there are several creative ways to make further use of your tree.

Place the tree in the backyard to offer cover for wildlife or under bird feeders to provide nesting locations in the branches. Add some post-holiday treats as ornaments by coating pinecones with peanut butter and adding bird seed.

Have your tree shredded or chipped for mulch, or place cut branches over dormant plants to provide a bit of insulation during the winter and to add organic matter as the needles fall.

You can also sink the tree in a pond to enhance fish habitat by giving them a place to rest, nest, and escape predators. Multiple live trees make the best cover, so work with friends, family, and neighbors to combine efforts. Anchor the trees with concrete blocks and sink them at a depth of about 8 feet with the trees placed in a row.

If you used a balled live evergreen and your ground is still soft enough to dig, add it to your home landscape for years of enjoyment and wildlife cover.

BUY YOUR 2026 HUNTING AND FISHING PERMITS

MDC reminds Missouri hunters and anglers that most annual permits expire at the end of February, including 2025 permits for small game, fishing, trout fishing, and combination hunting and fishing.

Buy Missouri hunting and fishing permits from one of many vendors around the state or online at **mdc.mo.gov/buypermits**.

Once purchased, permits may be carried electronically through MDC's free mobile apps, MO Hunting and MO Fishing, available for download through Google Play for Android devices or the App Store for Apple devices.

Save time by buying hunting and fishing permits for multiple people in a single transaction. Select the *Additional Customer* option during the permit purchase.

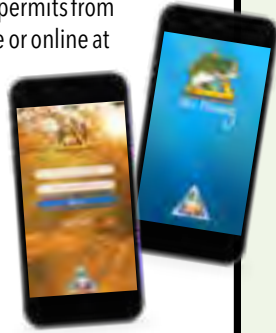
Commercial and lifetime permits can be purchased only through the MDC Permit Services Unit by calling 573-522-0107 for an application.

APPLY FOR SPRING MANAGED TURKEY HUNTS

Missouri youth, archery, and firearms turkey hunters can apply online for 2026 spring turkey managed hunts starting Feb. 1 at **mdc.mo.gov/springturkeyhunts**. Managed hunt details and application procedures are outlined on the webpage. Drawing results will be posted starting March 15.

Spring turkey hunting youth weekend will be April 11-12 with the regular spring season running April 20 through May 10.

Detailed information on spring turkey hunting will be available in MDC's *2026 Spring Turkey Hunting Regulations and Information* booklet, available where permits are sold beginning in March. Learn more about turkey hunting in Missouri at **short.mdc.mo.gov/Ztu**.



Ask MDC

Got a Question for Ask MDC?

Send it to AskMDC@mdc.mo.gov or call 573-522-4115, ext. 3848.

Q: Should I continue feeding wild birds when avian influenza is in the area?

➔ Although avian influenza has been detected broadly in waterfowl and raptors, transmission to songbirds and other typical feeder visitors remains low. As a result, there is currently no recommendation to remove feeders, unless you also keep domestic poultry on the property. To date, avian influenza has not been detected in Missouri songbirds, and these species are not considered a significant risk for spreading the virus.

Avian influenza spreads through contact with infected feces, saliva, or nasal discharge. Migratory waterfowl can carry the virus along North American flyways, and it can move among wild birds and domestic poultry. Symptoms of illness to watch for in wild birds include tremors, head tilting, lethargy, poor coordination, difficulty flying or walking, and trouble standing upright.

It's also important to know that bird feeders can contribute to the spread of other common songbird diseases such as salmonellosis, trichomoniasis, or conjunctivitis if they are not routinely cleaned and maintained. Crowding at feeders increases the chance of



Northern cardinal

disease transmission, making proper hygiene essential.

To keep feeders safe, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology recommends disassembling and washing them in a dishwasher on a hot setting. You can also handwash using soap and boiling water or a diluted bleach solution (no more than one part bleach to nine parts water). Scrub away debris and old seed, soak feeders in the bleach solution for 10 minutes, then rinse thoroughly and allow to dry completely before refilling.

Q: Is this an albino turkey?

➔ Some observers call turkeys like this smoke-phase turkeys or smoke morphs. With this genetic mutation, a bird's feathers commonly lack both brown pigment and blue, purple, and green iridescence. The overall coloration can vary.



Wild turkeys

The dominant color is usually white, with darker contrasting colors marking the bird's back, wing, and tail feathers. Smoke-phase turkeys also typically have less blue and pink coloration on the neck and head, compared with a standard wild turkey.

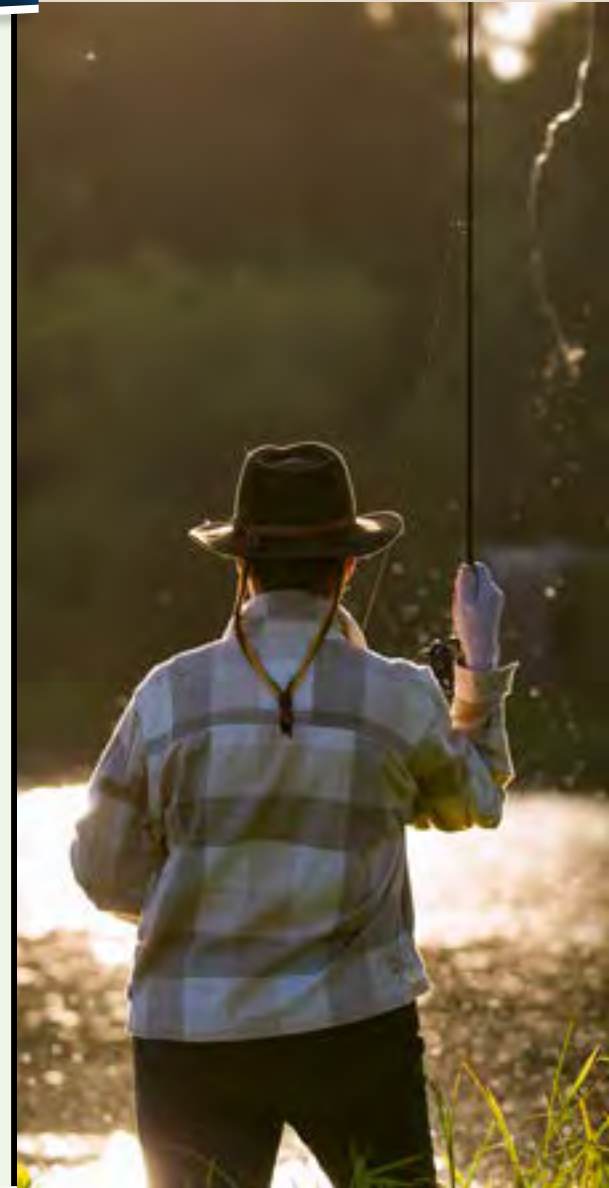
The smoke-phase phenomenon is considered one of about four hereditary conditions that a turkey might exhibit. The others are:

- Erythristic — a reddish or rust-colored appearance
- Melanistic — nearly all black

- Leucistic — whitish or piebald
- Albino — all white with pinkish eyes

Smoke is the most common wild turkey morph. Biologists estimate one in every 100 wild turkeys have this muted coloration, though most are not as striking as the bird pictured here.

The bird in this photo appears to be a hen. Most smoke-phase turkeys are female, although scientific observers do not understand why this is — yet.



WINTER TROUT HARVEST BEGINS FEB. 1

MDC stocked more than 70,000 rainbow trout in urban area lakes around the state for winter trout fishing beginning last November. Many of these areas allow anglers to harvest trout as soon as they are stocked, while other areas are catch-and-release until Feb. 1.

Beginning Feb. 1, all urban area lakes allow the harvest of trout. The daily limit at these locations is four trout with no length limit. All Missouri residents older than 15 and younger than 65 must have a fishing permit. All nonresidents over age 15 must have a fishing permit. To keep trout, all anglers regardless of age must have a Missouri trout permit. Find locations of winter trout fishing areas at short.mdc.mo.gov/oof.

What IS it?

Can you guess this month's natural wonder?

The answer is on Page 9.



SPECIES OF CONSERVATION CONCERN



Sandhill Crane

by Kristen Heath-Acre

Sandhill cranes (*Antigone canadensis*) are tall, elegant birds found in open prairies, harvested fields, and shallow freshwater marshes across North America. Adults stand over 3 feet tall and have gray or rust-colored plumage with a bright red crown. Across the Great Plains, flocks numbering in the tens of thousands create spectacular sights each spring, fall, and winter as they soar overhead or gather at staging and wintering areas to rest and feed.

WHY IT'S IMPERILED

Until the late 1800s, sandhill cranes were very common in Missouri. Due to overhunting and the degradation and loss of breeding and migratory habitat, sandhill cranes have suffered steep declines. Sandhill cranes can live to be 35 years old in the wild, but they have slow reproductive rates, making them susceptible to population decline. Most populations across North America are either stable or slowly increasing, which includes the growing number of cranes seen in Missouri.

MDC RESTORATION EFFORTS

Wetlands are vital habitats for many migrating and breeding Missouri bird species, including sandhill cranes. An estimated 87 percent of Missouri's historic wetlands have been lost, but

MDC and other conservation partners have made substantial headway in restoring and improving wetlands across the state. These efforts, in combination with hunting regulations, ensure that more migrating and breeding sandhill cranes will be seen in Missouri as time goes on.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Report any sandhill crane sightings in Missouri through eBird, a citizen science app, or contact your regional MDC natural history biologist to record the observation in the state's Natural Heritage Review Program. You can also help conserve Missouri's natural heritage by maintaining and restoring wetlands on your land. Federal and state cost-share programs can support these efforts. Contact your local MDC private land biologist to learn more.

Interested in exploring the outdoors, but unsure where to start? It's as easy as stepping out your door! Join host Jill Pritchard from the Missouri Department of Conservation as she explores everything nature has to offer — from health benefits and wildlife viewing, to outdoor recreation and unbelievable conservation stories. Subscribe and get your own *Nature Boost!* Download the podcast at mdc.mo.gov/natureboost.



WELCOME NEW CONSERVATION AGENTS

MDC congratulates its new conservation agents who graduated from the 2025 Conservation Agent Training Academy.

The 20 new agents join more than 170 existing MDC agents in protecting Missouri's fish, forest, and wildlife. The graduates include Sarah Abbott, Dominick Montileone III, Tyler Besaw, Trent Oberg, Dalton DeHart, Joshua Paskiewicz, Lorena Farrell, Erik Lahm, Jacie Hopfinger, Jacob Iman, Cade Petree, Nathan Jobe, Tyler Polley, Bradley Laux, Hunter Rid-enour, Bryce Menhennet, Justin Shearman, Joshua Slocum, Andrea Michelson, and Korben Tucker.

WHAT IS IT? EASTERN SCREECH-OWL

The eastern screech-owl is the only small, yellow-eyed owl with prominent ear tufts in Missouri. The tufts may be lowered and concealed from view. This owl is gray, brown, or red, but red is the least common in Missouri. Despite its name, the call is rarely described as a screech. Instead, the whistled call is more like a descending coo.



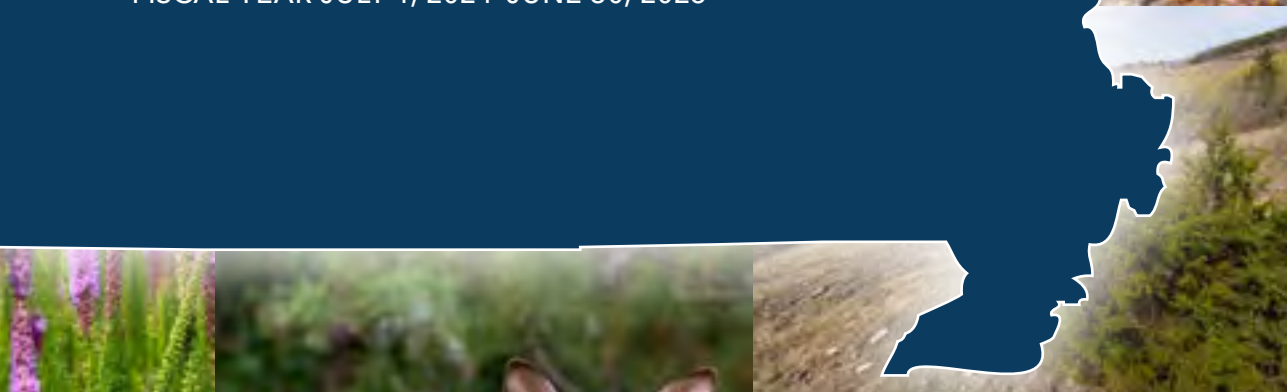


Annual Review

Fiscal Year 2025

SERVING NATURE AND YOU

FISCAL YEAR JULY 1, 2024-JUNE 30, 2025





GOAL 1:

MDC TAKES CARE OF NATURE

Protecting Our Shared Resources: Wildlife and Well-Being

Conservation agents are ready to answer the call when emergencies happen in Missouri's wild places. Agents patrol rural and remote locations and often respond to flooding and other weather-related emergencies, lost or missing outdoor recreationists, and provide emergency medical assistance. They are trained first responders and receive basic water rescue training. Additionally, 69 conservation agents throughout the state are trained in swift water rescue, or advanced boat operations, and are issued specialized equipment to respond to these emergencies.



HENRY



STUTZMAN



BOYD

Conservation Agent Mark Henry responded to one such emergency last May in Douglas County. He launched his boat and assisted with the rescue of a woman clinging to a tree branch in rising turbulent flood waters. Another incident occurred in St. Charles County on a cold, rainy night in early spring when agents Taylor Stutzman and Christine Boyd responded to a call of a lost mushroom hunter. The individual had been reported missing on a 2,500-acre conservation area. At about 3 a.m., after four hours of searching, they found the mushroom hunter cold, wet, and dehydrated from exposure to the elements for over 15 hours.

Feral Hog Elimination

The Missouri Feral Hog Partnership, which includes MDC and over 15 federal and state agencies and agriculture and conservation non-governmental organizations, removed 5,105 hogs from the landscape in 2024. The partnership also assisted 609 landowners with feral hog problems and scouted nearly 4 million acres for signs of hogs. Since 2016, the partnership has eliminated feral hogs from 85 percent of the watersheds in the state.

In addition to on-the-ground operations, the partnership placed equipment at Soil and Water Conservation District offices for landowners to use in areas with high feral hog activity and conducted landowner and community outreach activities throughout the southern portion of the state.

In 2020, the partnership established a unified incident command system to manage feral hog elimination efforts, with the goal of ridding Missouri's public and private lands of feral hogs.

A social group of 10 hogs can destroy 10-20 acres overnight, including crops, causing financial burdens on Missouri's landowners and agriculture producers. They are also known to carry diseases that could be devastating to the agricultural industry. Feral hogs root and wallow, which contribute to soil erosion, a reduction in water quality, damaged crops and hay fields, and the destruction of sensitive natural areas, such as glades, fens, and springs. They also compete directly with native wildlife by eating acorns, a major fall food source for deer, turkey, and black bear.

A social group of 10 hogs can destroy 10-20 acres overnight, including crops, causing financial burdens on Missouri's landowners and agriculture producers.





MDC Works with Private Landowners

Missouri has a tremendous diversity of natural communities ranging from wetlands and prairies to glades and woodland habitats. Private landowners account for 93 percent of Missouri's land and 82 percent of Missouri's forest land, making them key in creating and maintaining good wildlife habitat.

Recognizing the importance of working with private landowners, MDC prioritizes private land technical assistance. In FY25, MDC private land staff provided 17,925 technical assistance contacts, made 7,098 site visits covering 226,440 acres, developed 2,780 plans covering 153,138 acres, and provided \$3.75 million in cost share to landowners to assist with implementing conservation practices on their properties.



17,925 technical assistance contacts

7,098 site visits covering **226,440** acres

Developed **2,780** plans covering **153,138** acres

Provided **\$3.75 million** in cost share to landowners to assist with implementing conservation practices on their properties

From Poult to Population: Habitat's Role in Turkey Growth

The Turkey Habitat Initiative began a little over two years ago, and as part of the initiative, MDC has developed a habitat appraisal guide to help landowners and land managers identify areas of need on the properties they manage and a habitat management guide that addresses specific issues. Combined, the two resources can help a land manager determine how to improve their property for the betterment of the turkey population. MDC also developed a four-part video series outlining the importance of habitat management and reiterating steps available to improve turkey populations. These resources are a good place to start for anyone who would like to have more turkeys on the landscape, and they can all be found at mdc.mo.gov/MOTurkeys.

George O. White State Forest Nursery: Where Forests Begin

The George O. White State Forest Nursery, which raises trees for forestry projects on public and private lands, has placed millions of trees on the state's landscape since it began in 1934. In the

beginning, the focus was forest restoration, but now Missouri's citizens have much broader needs. The nursery listens to their customers and tries to meet those needs.

MDC allocates approximately 2 million seedlings grown at the 100-acre nursery to public and private requests around Missouri and elsewhere. Many of these seedlings go to Missouri landowners who want to improve habitat on their land. The nursery also supports Missouri's Arbor Day by supplying fourth graders with trees to plant. Last year, over 75,000 seedlings were sent to participating schools.

MDC's annual tree seedling sales are open from Sept. 1–April 15, with a shipping and pickup season that runs from mid-February to mid-May. Last year, nursery office staff answered over 8,000 customer phone calls, including calls concerning information on trees, habitat work, and seedling availability. This popular program allows landowners to purchase bundles of seedling trees ranging from 10 to 100 plants, depending on the purpose of the planting. The nursery also collects and buys thousands of pounds of seed each year — much of which is purchased from the public.



Wild turkey poults





Staff of the 100-acre George O. White State Forest Nursery plant and maintain approximately 2 million seedlings.

Revitalizing Our Lakes: MDC's Habitat Restoration Program

MDC and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), working with private-sector volunteers, placed 93 cedar brush piles in Truman Lake in the spring of 2025 as the first phase of a project aimed at improving fish habitat.

The goal of the Harry S. Truman Lake Habitat Project is to enhance aquatic habitat throughout the lake by placing 450 fish habitat structures constructed of cedar trees on the lakebed. Cedar trees are sourced from public land surrounding the lake and anchored with concrete blocks to improve fish habitat quality, and subsequently, angler catch rates.

A \$75,000 grant from Bass Pro Shops Outdoor Fund, administered and passed through the Reservoir National Fish Habitat Partnership, formed the nucleus of the project. MDC also contributed, and the project officially began in January 2025.

Crews deployed the habitat using a barge equipped with a hydraulic lift. The first phase was completed in April 2025, and field operations resumed in the fall.

The locations of the new and existing structures can be found on the MDC website and through MDC's free MO Fishing app. Downloadable GPX files are also available on the MDC website for transfer into a GPS device.

In addition to MDC and USACE, Osage Bluff Marina contributed with staging, prepping, and loading cedar trees; the Finey Homeowners Association cut trees and provided the area around their boat ramp for staging; and students from the University of Central Missouri volunteered their time.

GOAL 2:

MDC CONNECTS PEOPLE WITH NATURE

Missouri's First-Ever Birding Challenge

Missouri launched its first-ever Missouri Birding Challenge last May with a mission of engaging new birders and getting people of all ages excited about birding in Missouri — even right in your own backyard. The virtual challenge, which was held May 1–15, gave birders a two-week timeframe to log birds through the citizen science app eBird and compete with other birders and birding teams. Teams that completed the challenge requirements were eligible for prize drawings while at the same time providing valuable citizen science data about birds across Missouri.

“We weren’t sure what to expect with it being our first year for the challenge, but we were hopeful people would get as excited about birds as we are,” said Missouri State Ornithologist Kristen Heath-Acre. “We were blown away. Not only were they up for the challenge, but they showed us how passionate Missourians are about wildlife watching, especially birds.”

More than 630 individuals and 441 teams participated in the virtual challenge, logging 160,600 birds of more than 300 bird species in 95 counties in Missouri during the two-week challenge. There were also five webinars leading up to the challenge with close to 500 attendees tuning in to learn more about the benefits of birds, eBird, birding habitat, migratory birds, and bird declines.

The challenge was a collaboration between MDC, Missouri Conservation Heritage Foundation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Missouri River Bird Observatory, Missouri Birding Society, and the Columbia Audubon Society. The birding challenge raised \$13,379, and the Missouri Conservation Heritage Foundation, with longtime partner SELVA, is using the proceeds to protect key migratory bird winter habitat in Costa Rica.

The Missouri Birding Challenge scheduled for May 2026 will include improvements from participant feedback.

Building Conservation Volunteers and Citizen Scientists

Volunteers at MDC’s nature centers, outdoor education centers, and staffed shooting ranges contributed more than 40,300 hours of service to conservation in the past year. These volunteers assisted with special events, school and public programs, visitor relations, animal care, and area maintenance. Volunteers work with department staff to make the visitors’ experience at these facilities educational, enjoyable, and memorable. Volunteer hunting and fishing education instructors contributed more than 4,600 hours to connect Missourians to the outdoor pursuits of hunting and fishing. In addition to teaching people new skills, these volunteers help instill a conservation ethic and an understanding of natural resource management in their students.

Participants who are part of MDC-affiliated volunteer programs with partner organizations have an opportunity to work on a variety of citizen science projects with communities around the state, including programs such as Missouri Stream Team, Missouri Master Naturalist, and the Missouri Forestkeepers Network.

Do you have a passion for the outdoors?

MDC would love your help! MDC offers flexible volunteer opportunities for Missourians who want to educate others about the state’s fish, forest, and wildlife resources.

Learn more at short.mdc.mo.gov/4tL.



Missouri Stream Team

This past year, Missouri Stream Team members dedicated over 95,000 service hours to a variety of activities, including 70 habitat improvement projects, the planting of 1,303 trees for water-quality improvement, 398 water-quality monitoring trips, and the removal of 504 tons of trash from watersheds.

The Missouri Stream Team program educates Missourians on the nature and quality of the state's streams and how to take care of them through outreach, stewardship, and advocacy. Stream Team volunteers serve as stewards for Missouri's 110,000 miles of flowing water. They do hands-on projects, such as litter pickups, water-quality monitoring, storm drain stenciling, and streamside tree planting. The program is a partnership between MDC, the Conservation Federation of Missouri, and the Missouri Department of Natural Resources.

Missouri Master Naturalist Program

This past year, 880 volunteers in 12 Missouri Master Naturalist chapters partnered with 135 local organizations and provided over 75,000 hours of volunteer community service aimed at enhancing fish, forest, and wildlife management on public and private lands. Chapters dedicated 33 percent of their time to natural resource stewardship projects, 27 percent to educating the public, 22 percent to supporting their chapters through continuing education and administrative service, and 18 percent to citizen science projects for MDC and non-profit partners.

The Master Naturalist program is committed to growing and sustaining local learning and working environments to engage Missourians in the stewardship of our state's natural resources through science-based education and volunteer community service. Popular service projects include activities such as guided nature hikes, native plant seed collection, maintaining native gardens for MDC and partners, and a variety of citizen science projects. The Missouri Master Naturalist program is sponsored and jointly administered by MDC and University of Missouri Extension.

Rebuilding Canopy and Capacity: MDC and Partners Lead Missouri's Urban Forestry Recovery

After natural disasters, communities across Missouri rely on an alliance of organizations committed to restoring tree canopy and environmental resilience. At the center of this effort is MDC, which offers critical support through technical expertise, cost-share funds, and access to native seedlings. In fact, MDC's commitment is evident in the more than \$1 million the agency spent on community forestry cost-share. MDC also maintains cooperative agreements with Forest ReLeaf of Missouri and Heartland Tree Alliance, two non-profits dedicated to community-based tree planting and urban forestry. These partnerships allow MDC to expand its reach and impact in both rural and metropolitan areas.

Forest ReLeaf of Missouri operates one of the state's largest community nurseries, distributing more than 10,000 free trees annually through programs like Project CommuniTree. Its Priority ReLeaf initiative targets areas affected by natural disasters or economic hardship, providing larger trees and hands-on planting support. In events such as the 2011 Joplin tornado, Forest ReLeaf played a key role in long-term recovery, mobilizing volunteers and dramatically increasing nursery production to meet local needs.

Meanwhile, Heartland Tree Alliance (HTA) focuses on urban tree restoration in the Kansas City area. The organization leads tree planting efforts in neighborhoods facing tree loss due to storms, invasive pests, or urban development, planting over 1,000 trees annually. HTA strengthens recovery by training local volunteers through workshops and pre-apprenticeship programs, creating a sustainable community tree care model. Its events foster civic pride and build resilience against future climate impacts, particularly in low-income communities.

Together, MDC, Forest ReLeaf, and Heartland Tree Alliance form a dynamic ecosystem of support, helping Missouri

communities recover both environmentally and emotionally. These coordinated efforts don't just replace trees — they restore shade, biodiversity, and a sense of place.

Engaging Student Learning: MDC's Conservation Education Reaches 43 Percent of Missouri's Schools

MDC continues to strengthen its partnership with public and private schools across the state, now reaching more than 2,700 classrooms in 1,377 schools — approximately 43 percent of all Missouri schools. Through this partnership, MDC provides nature-based curricula, teaching supplies, and transportation grants, empowering schools to connect students with nature while meeting academic standards.

The recently revised Discover Nature Schools (DNS) kindergarten, first grade, and second grade curriculum aligns with state and national standards in physical, earth and space, life, and engineering sciences, and integrates Missouri-specific conservation topics. More than 450 classrooms have already adopted the updated K-2 curriculum.

The Missouri National Archery in the Schools program (MoNASP) is active in approximately 600 schools. The 2025 state tournament drew nearly 5,000 student archers from over 200 schools. MoNASP not only teaches students the fundamentals of archery but also builds confidence and personal achievement. In the past year, 12 Missouri archers were awarded \$30,000 in scholarships through the Missouri Conservation Heritage Foundation and MoNASP. Several of these students advanced to national competitions, and multiple seniors are being recruited for collegiate archery programs that are either established or under development.

In the past year, more than 7,700 students earned hunter education certification through courses delivered in 264 schools. The curriculum emphasizes safe and responsible hunting practices and introduces students to the fundamentals of wildlife management.

DNS reaches more than **2,700** classrooms within **1,377** schools, which is approximately **43% of all** Missouri schools.

MoNASP is active in **600** Missouri schools, drawing **5,000** student archers to the state tournament in 2025. **12** Missouri archers were awarded **\$30,000** in scholarships.

7,700 students earned hunter education certification through Missouri schools.

200 Missouri schools use the Discover Nature Fishing curriculum.

The Discover Nature Fishing (DNF) program equips participating schools with curriculum, supplies, and transportation grants. Over 200 schools currently use the DNF curriculum. The program aims to foster lifelong outdoor engagement by teaching students the joy and skill of fishing.

Fin-Tastic Education: A Trout Hatchery Experience

December 2024 marked the grand opening of the newly renovated Shepherd of the Hills Conservation Education Center in Branson.

Since its doors first opened in 1980, the center has served as a cornerstone of conservation education in southwest Missouri. Located adjacent to the Shepherd of the Hills Hatchery along the banks of Lake Taneycomo, the center connects thousands of visitors each year to the natural wonders of the Ozarks.

What began as a modest visitor center has since grown into a vibrant space for learning and exploration. From hatchery tours and guided hikes to school field trips and special events, the center offers engaging hands-on programs for all ages.

On Dec. 19, 2024, MDC celebrated this exciting new chapter with an open house and ribbon cutting. MDC commissioners, staff, volunteers, partners, elected officials, and members of the public gathered for the grand opening of the newly renovated \$7 million facility. Now 2.5 times larger than the original, the expanded center features a 7,500-gallon indoor aquarium, a flexible multi-purpose room with classroom space, interactive exhibits on Missouri's natural resources, a larger lobby, improved restrooms, and added staff offices.

Designed to better serve the community and support growing demand, the renovation reflects MDC's strong commitment to conservation education and accessibility. The center welcomed more than 58,000 visitors in its first six months of reopening.

From Engineering Labs to Campfires: MDC Sparks Outdoor Passion in Young Adults

Becoming a young adult is a pivotal time of life, which is why MDC recently shifted some of its efforts to connect more fully with this age group. Although staff has done a lot of great work over the year, below are a few highlights from recent outreach initiatives aimed at engaging young adults between the ages of 18–34.

Floating Wetlands and Engineering Class Collaboration

MDC staff Frank Nelson and Kara Tvedt partnered with the City of Springfield Utilities and a senior mechanical engineering class to collaborate on improving the plastic-free design of floating treatment wetlands for placement on a local lake. As part of their class curriculum, the engineering students were tasked with improving the floating wetland design by evaluating its current model and working through possible improvement solutions until finally building out their idea at the end of the project.



Finalized improvements included an upgraded version of the plastic-free floating wetland model and an elevated prairie plant component in the center with the wetland plants spaced around the perimeter. Throughout the course of the semester, Nelson and Tvedt served as project advisors for the class and worked to engage the students in this project and conservation efforts more broadly. Floating wetlands provide many benefits to the natural community including improved water quality, weed control, increased aquatic habitat, and carbon sequestering.

Camp Hellbender: No Newts Allowed!

Everybody grows up eventually, but being an adult doesn't mean a person can't still be a kid, at least at heart. For three years running, MDC staff has invited

participants from across the St. Louis area to enjoy an adults-only summer day camp experience. This series of seven events occurs at different locations across the region and features an array of outdoors-themed activities tailored to each new session. Participants are encouraged to enjoy activities such as kayaking, archery, outdoor cooking, tree climbing, geocaching, and stream exploration. At the last session, participants gather around a campfire and enjoy s'mores to share their new camp memories and grow in their appreciation of the outdoors.



GOAL 3:

MDC MAINTAINS PUBLIC TRUST

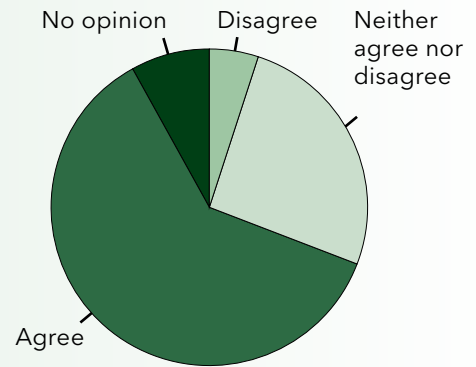
MDC contracted with DJ Case & Associates to implement quarterly Conservation Monitor Surveys to collect key opinions and attitudes regarding nature, conservation, and views on the department overall. According to the Conservation Monitor, over the past five years Missourians consistently rate MDC as a name they can trust.

Annually, MDC reviews and approves its Design for the Future Strategic Plan and has further defined strategic priorities and initiatives that align with the goals and outcomes.

MDC invests in its team and remains an employer of choice with an annual employee retention rate of better than 95 percent. This rate exceeded our direct competitors for talent by more than 15 percent. ▲

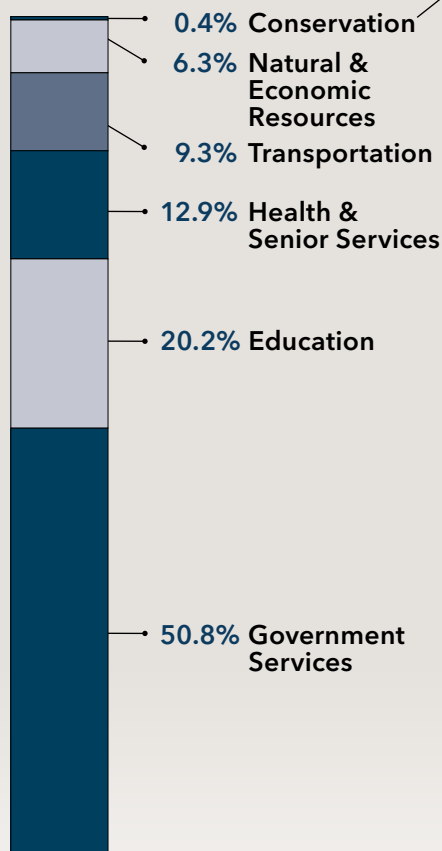
I am confident MDC uses funds wisely to benefit people and nature.

- 61% Agree
- 26% Neither agree nor disagree
- 5% Disagree
- 8% No opinion



State of Missouri Operating Budget

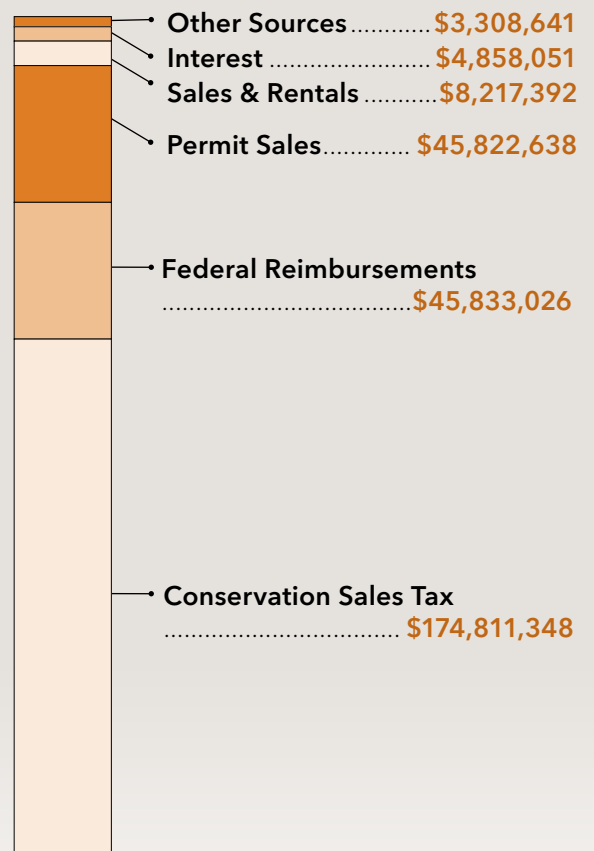
Total for fiscal year 2025:
\$50,467,678,830



MDC represents less than 1 percent of the total state budget and receives no state general revenue.

MDC FY25 Actual Receipts

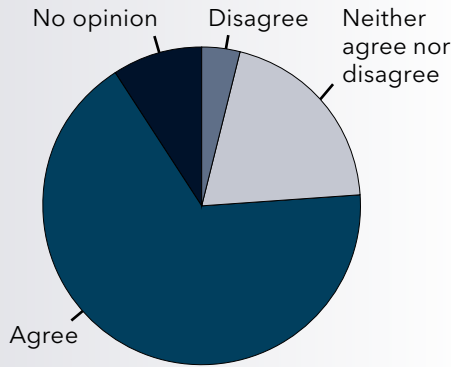
MDC gets the majority of its funding through the conservation sales tax. For every \$8 spent on taxable items, one penny goes to conservation.



OPERATING BUDGET SOURCE: Missouri Office of Administration

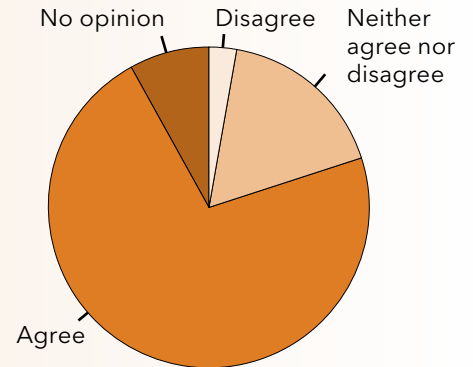
MDC consistently does a good job fulfilling its mission.

72% Agree
 17% Neither agree nor disagree
 3% Disagree
 8% No opinion



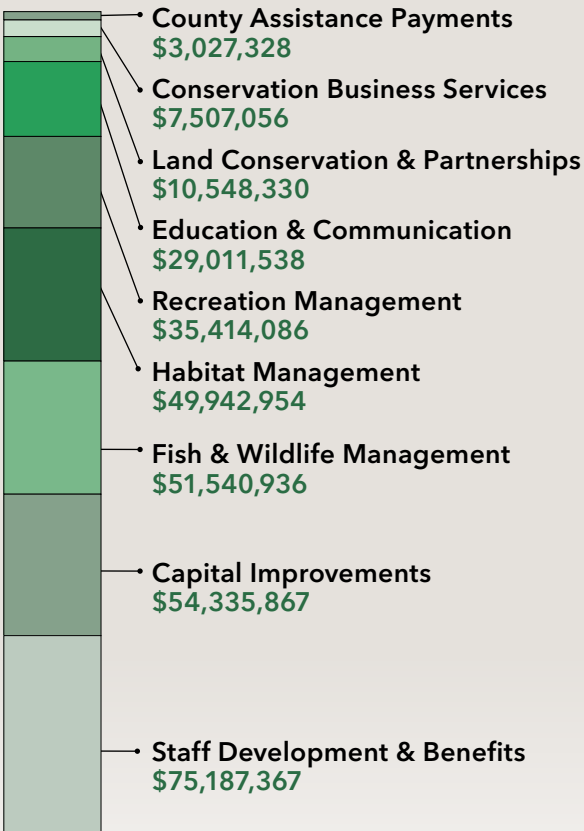
MDC is a name I can trust.

67% Agree
 20% Neither agree nor disagree
 4% Disagree
 9% No opinion



MDC FY25 Actual Disbursements

Funds are distributed throughout MDC to accomplish the state's top conservation priorities.



NOTE: Disbursements include all operating, other agency, and capital improvements from the Conservation Commission Fund. Other Agency disbursements are appropriated outside the Department of Conservation operating budget. Fuel, benefits, and other disbursements were allocated to the appropriate program.



A photograph of a winter landscape. The foreground is a field of dry, brown grasses partially covered in a light layer of snow. In the middle ground, there are several bare trees with dark trunks and branches, some with a few remaining brown leaves. The background shows a line of trees under a pale, overcast sky. The overall scene is quiet and serene.

A Winter Walk

COLD-WEATHER TREKS HAVE MUCH TO OFFER THE PREPARED HIKER

by **Angie Daly Morfeld**



Runge Conservation
Nature Center

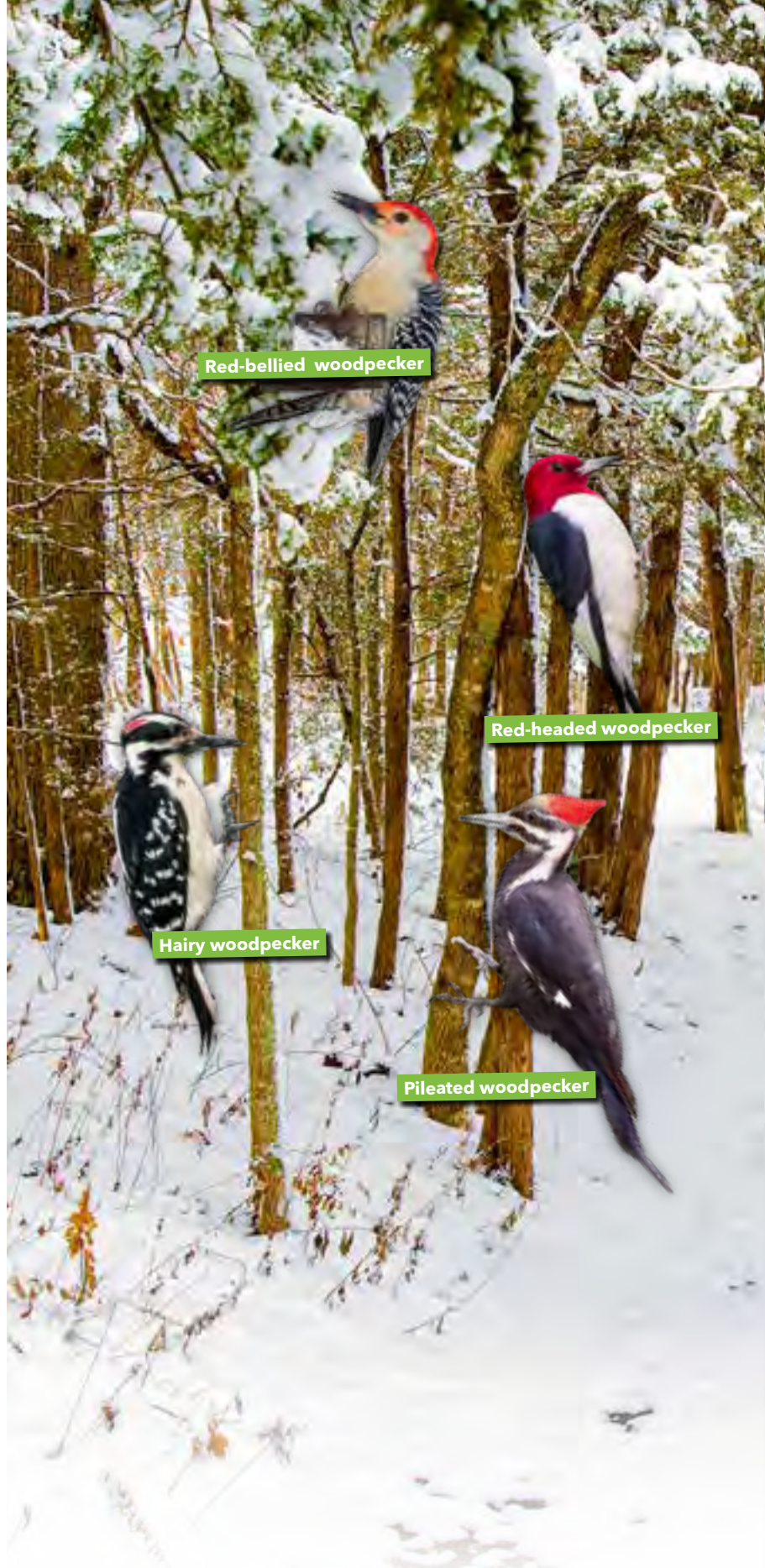
PHOTOGRAPH BY
DAVID STONNER

It's January. The hustle and bustle of the festive holiday season has come to a close and now you're left with just one chilly guest — old man winter. And he's not checking out for at least a couple months. Before you carve out a place on the couch, throw a blanket over your head, and await the spring thaw, MDC has a challenge for you. Get outside and rediscover the wonders of nature in winter.

Winter Weather Weary?

Just because the temperature dips below freezing doesn't mean you have to put your hiking shoes on ice. With a little forethought and planning, hiking can be a year-round activity. Here's some tips to set you on your way despite the chill:

- **Dress in layers.** You may feel chilled at first, but after 15 minutes of brisk movement, you may be surprised at how warm you feel. It's good to have options to regulate your body temperature. Three layers are generally recommended — a base layer, a mid-layer, and an outer layer.
- **Cotton isn't the fabric of your life.** Well, at least not for hiking in the winter. Cotton, once wet, will not keep you warm. Wool is a good alternative. It will wick away moisture, keeping you warm even when wet. Synthetic fabrics, like nylon, polyester, or a blend, will act in the same way and are especially good as a base layer.
- **Pack a bag.** Bring a pack with appropriate safety gear. It's always a good idea to have a trail map, first-aid kit, compass, multitool, hand-warming packets, and a headlamp. Remember, some areas don't have good cell service, so don't be reliant on Wi-Fi dependent navigation systems.
- **Be weather aware.** Pay attention to the weather and be prepared to turn back if conditions aren't favorable.
- **Hit the bottle.** Carry a water bottle and stay hydrated. Remember, even though it's cold, dehydration can still set in before you know it.



Henning Conservation Area

PHOTOGRAPH BY
DAVID STONNER



Eastern screech-owl

White-breasted nuthatch

Barred owl

Comma butterfly

Mourning cloak

Winter Really is for the Birds

Winter birds, like sparrows, finches, and chickadees, just to name a few, add pops of color and whirls of activity to an otherwise dreary winter landscape. You will often find large groups of these birds foraging for food, particularly at feeders. But just as often, you may hear the ruckus of activity as you walk through the woods or your neighborhood, yet you may not spot the foraging flock. If this happens while you're out walking, hiss through your teeth to make a loud *pish-pish-pish* sound. This noise mimics the alarm call of a wren, and curious birds will fly closer to investigate.

White-breasted nuthatches are also fun birds to watch in the winter. These little birds are often called upside-down birds because they climb head-first down the trunks of trees. This unusual, acrobatic behavior allows nuthatches to find food other insectivores leave behind.

Woodpeckers are usually easy to spot, even for novice birdwatchers. In fact, you may hear them before you see them! These head-banging birds create a drumbeat of sound as they tap trees, the sides of houses, or other wooden surfaces. Their hammering serves an important purpose, helping them find insects to eat, make nesting holes, and tap out messages to fellow woodpeckers.

Learn to listen to the sounds of your surroundings as you walk. When birds spot you, many will call out to warn others of danger. Some examples include black-capped chickadees (*chicka-dee-dee-dee*), northern cardinals (*chip, chip*), tufted titmice (*tsee-day-day-day*), and blue jays (*thief, thief, thief*).

If your hike takes you into the twilight hours, it's worth your time to listen for owls as they call one another. Owls have separate and distinct calls. For example, eastern screech-owls have a high-pitched, horselike whinny while great horned owls sound like *hoo, huh-HOO, hooo, hooo*. Barred owls let out a series of hoots that sound like, "Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you all?"

It's a Bird ... It's a Plane ... It's a Butterfly?

Birds aren't the only creatures taking flight during the winter. On warm winter days, you might just see something fluttering by that looks familiar, albeit a little out of place. It's a butterfly! Certain species, like eastern comma and mourning cloak butterflies, venture out on these temperate days. Enjoy them when you can. They deliver little signs of spring with each visit.

Making Tracks

Most mammals prowl around at night, searching for food and water. So, you're not likely to see a whole lot of animals in the winter during daytime walks, but what you will find is their tracks. A fun activity — especially if you have kids to entertain — is identifying animal tracks.

The best time to do this is right after a hard rain or snow. Tracks are easy to spot in the snow, but they're also easily seen in fresh mud. If you don't see tracks, look for other animal signs like scat or rub marks on trees. Explore the edges of ponds and streams where you might see tracks of muskrats, raccoons, or even otters.

Bring along an animal tracks guidebook or take a photo of the tracks you see. Make it a game and see who can find the most footprints. When you head back inside, use the photos to figure out what left the tracks.

Deer Antlers

White-tailed deer are a welcome sight on Missouri's landscape, enjoyed by hunters and wildlife watchers alike. Mature males, also known as bucks, form antlers each year that are shed by late January into March. Hunting for shed antlers is a fun wintertime activity that can be incorporated into your daily hike. This added adventure can increase the steps of your hike and heighten your observational skills.

The key is knowing where to look. If you see deer tracks, follow them. You never know what you might find on the path they are traveling. Deer often bed down during the cold winter months so look around matted-down patches of grass and cover. But you don't have to be in the woods to find antlers. You might find them anywhere you have seen deer, including backyards, roadsides, parks, and greenways.

Tree Treasures

As you are out walking, take a moment and look around trees. You may find a treasure trove that you've never noticed before.

With the tree branches bare, it is much easier to spot abandoned nests high in the treetop. But not just nests left behind by birds. Also look for empty bald-faced hornets' nests. These nests are large, gray,



Virginia opossum

Striped skunk



Eastern cottontail



White-tailed deer



Raccoon



Deer antlers



Owl pellet



Bald-faced hornets' nest



Oyster mushrooms



Turkey tail mushrooms



Artist conk

and have a papery appearance. In the 1940s, Ozark folklorist Vance Randolph wrote that nearly every old-time mountain cabin had an empty hornets' nest hung up in the loft for good luck. He further explained that people even tied them up in newly built homes that were not yet occupied.

Once your search of the treetop is over, look around the base of the tree. If you spot what appears to be a hairy, gray pellet, you may have discovered an owl's roosting spot. Owls feast on rodents, and the soft, meaty portions are quickly digested. The bones, fur, and teeth are harder to swallow, so they are regurgitated into these hairy pellets onto the forest floor. They are fun for kids to examine.

Mushrooms are another natural treasure that are found on and around trees. Oyster mushrooms and turkey tail mushrooms are two edible mushrooms that grow year-round. Most mushrooms you find this time of year will be dead, but they still serve an important purpose. They break down dead and decaying

materials and turn them into nutrients that other living things use to grow.

Ready to Walk in a Winter Wonderland

Bing Crosby was really on to something when he crooned about the joys of walking through a winter wonderland. Few things are more serene and peaceful than nature in the winter, yet there's so much activity to observe. And while we cannot guarantee sleigh bells ringing, birds singing love songs, or talking snowmen, we can guarantee a beautiful sight! ▲

Angie Daly Morfeld is the editor of the Missouri Conservationist. She much prefers hiking in the winter's cold versus the summer's heat. And her Labrador retriever, Dollie, loves finding deer antlers!

Parts of this story were taken from A Walk in the Winter Woods (January/February 2022 Xplor) and Missouri's Winter Wonderland (February 2016 Missouri Conservationist).

Get Outside

in JANUARY



Eastern gray squirrel

→ Ways to connect with nature

Missing Spring? Go to a Spring!

If you miss seeing lush greenery during the winter, visit one of Missouri's many beautiful springs. When spring water reaches the surface, it's well above freezing, about 55 degrees. Aquatic plants can stay green in these areas even in freezing, snowy weather. Watercress, for example, thrives in bushy green colonies around the crystal blue water of springs.



Blue spring

Catch a Winter Rainbow

Missouri's wild populations of **rainbow trout** spawn in Ozark streams from late December through the first week of February. Reproducing rainbow trout populations exist in at least 14 Ozark springs and streams. The rest of the state's trout population is maintained by captive rearing and continuous stocking. Only catch-and-release trout fishing is available through Feb. 9. For more information, check out *A Summary of Missouri's Fishing Regulations*.



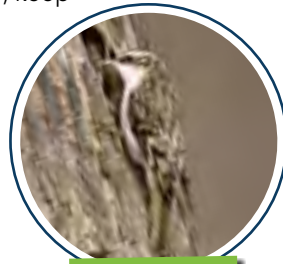
Rainbow trout

Wardrobe Change

Eastern gray squirrels take on a bit of a different look in winter. Their fur becomes longer and more silvery gray and their ears have a noticeable fringe of white fur.

Creeping for Food

If we have a cold snap, keep an eye out for **brown creepers**. These fascinating birds start at the base of a medium or large, rough-barked tree, then spiral upward around the trunk searching in the crannies of the bark for hidden insects. A creeper may explore some of the upper branches, especially in early-morning sunshine. Finished with one tree, it will flutter rapidly to the base of a nearby tree and repeat the process. Once you locate a brown creeper, you can watch it move from tree to tree.



Brown creeper

Natural Events to See This Month

Here's what's going on in the natural world.



Horned larks are one of our earliest nesting birds.



Female black bears give birth in winter dens.



Ohio horsemint's basal leaves remain green all winter.

Find more events in your area at mdc.mo.gov/events

VIRTUAL

Learn to Fish: A Year of Fishing

Friday • Jan. 9 • noon-1 p.m.

Online only

Registration required by Jan. 9. For more information, call 888-283-0364 or visit short.mdc.mo.gov/oJx.

All ages

Let MDC help make 2026 your best year of fishing. Join us for this virtual program covering the annual changes in Missouri's angling world, such as seasonal regulations, a species to target each month, and even when trout parks open or close. So come get a jump start on angling this year.

SOUTHEAST REGION

Eagle Days

Saturday • Jan. 31 • 8 a.m.-4 p.m.

Puxico Activity Center (FEMA Building), 481 N. Bedford St., Puxico
Registration is not required. For more information, call 888-283-0364 or visit short.mdc.mo.gov/ooU.

All ages

We're celebrating the return of bald eagles to Mingo National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), Duck Creek Conservation Area (CA), and Wappapello Lake. This special event includes indoor live bald eagle shows from our friends at the World Bird Sanctuary. Programs will be held at the Puxico Activity Center (FEMA building) at 9 a.m., 10:30 a.m., 12:30 p.m., and a special show at 2 p.m. Opportunities to view bald eagles in the wild, with the assistance of volunteers and spotting scopes, will be available from 8 a.m.-4 p.m. at Wappapello Lake's Bill Emerson Memorial Visitor Center, two locations on Mingo NWR, and one location at Duck Creek CA during event hours.

Mingo NWR's Visitor Center will have presentations on the restoration project that took place on the refuge. Eagle shows have a capacity of 400 people and will be filled on a first come, first served basis.



Sumac berries are eaten by deer.



Ozark witch-hazel is Missouri's first native plant to bloom.

Call Before You Cut

Learn if harvesting is right for your woods.

5 REASONS TO CALL BEFORE YOU CUT

- ✓ Improve wildlife habitat
- ✓ Protect water quality
- ✓ Enhance air quality
- ✓ Harvest the proper trees to keep the forest healthy
- ✓ Ensure your overall satisfaction with the timber harvest

Request a free informational packet about working with a professional forester to take care of your woods.

callb4ucut.com
877-564-7483

Places to Go

SOUTHWEST REGION

Drury-Mincy Conservation Area

A first day walk and a walk through history

by Larry Archer

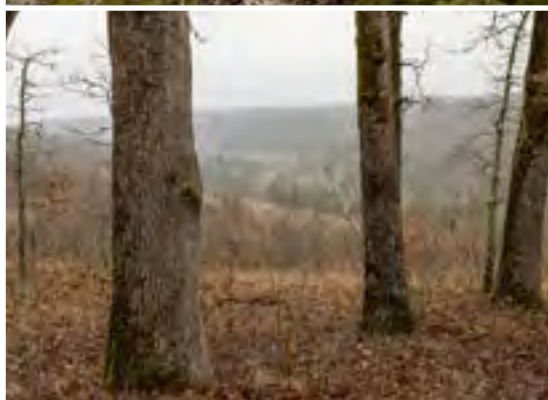
✦ With nearly 20 miles of roads and trails, Drury-Mincy Conservation Area (CA) in southwest Missouri's Taney County not only makes a great place for a first-day hike, it also offers visitors a chance to walk through Missouri's conservation history.

Located on 4,134.8 acres, the area now known as Drury-Mincy CA played an important role in the restoration of both the deer and turkey populations of Missouri during the mid-20th century. Along with an adjoining private wildlife ranch, the area provided more than a third — nearly 750 — of the white-tailed deer that were used during restoration efforts that began after the creation of the Missouri Conservation Commission and MDC in the 1930s. Two decades later, nearly 300 turkey were trapped from the area for relocation throughout the state.

"I see a direct tie between the success of the Department of Conservation and areas like this," said MDC Forester Stephen Short, who manages Drury-Mincy CA.

In January, the area is quiet, but the hiking opportunities exist for those who want to start the year with a challenge, Short said.

"You'll definitely have your elevation changes," he said. "Around the office and on the Mincy portion, everything is uphill."



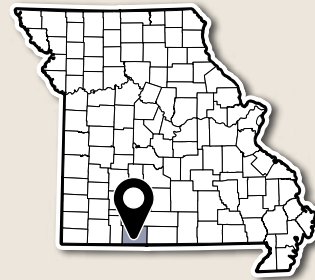
"They have a large expanse of glades. There's one that's almost 900 acres of woodlands and glades, a huge expanse of a glade on what we call the Bear Mountain complex."

—MDC Forester Stephen Short

DAVID STONNER



With nearly 6 miles of frontage on Bull Shoals Lake, almost 20 miles of roads and trails for hiking and biking, and over 4,100 acres of savannas, forests, and glades, Drury-Mincy CA offers plenty of recreational opportunities, even in the depth of winter.








DRURY-MINCY CONSERVATION AREA

consists of 4,134.8 acres in Taney County. From Branson, take Highway 76 east 5 miles, then Route J south 6 miles, and Gunnison Road right 0.75 mile.

36.5609, -93.1081

short.mdc.mo.gov/oZC 417-895-6880

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU VISIT

-  **Bicycling** Includes nearly 20 miles of improved, service, and unimproved roads open to bicycling year-round.
-  **Birdwatching** Included in the National Audubon Society's White River Glades and Woodlands Important Bird Area (short.mdc.mo.gov/4sR). Included in the Missouri Birding Trail (short.mdc.mo.gov/oZH). The eBird list of birds recorded at Drury-Mincy CA is available at short.mdc.mo.gov/oZ9.
-  **Fishing** Stream frontage and Bull Shoals Lake shoreline totaling 12.12 miles. Black bass, catfish, crappie, suckers, sunfish, white bass.
-  **Hunting Deer and turkey** Regulations are subject to annual changes. Refer to MDC's regulation page online at short.mdc.mo.gov/Zjw.
Also **bear, dove, rabbit, and squirrel**.
-  **Trapping** Special use permit required.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR WHEN YOU VISIT



Black bear



Sharp-shinned hawk



Dark-eyed junco



Northern flicker



Red-Tailed Hawk

Buteo jamaicensis

Status

Common

Size

Length: 22 inches; wingspan: 50 inches

Distribution

Statewide



The red-tailed hawk is a large hawk, brown above and white below, with a brown-streaked band on the belly. Adults have a rust-red tail with a narrow black band near the end.

They usually nest in open woodlands or in trees in a grassland and cropland area. They frequently nest within city limits, especially along larger highways that have grass-covered median strips for foraging. Their diet consists of rabbits, squirrels, snakes, and other small animals. They play a vital role in controlling rodent populations.



LIFE CYCLE

Red-tailed hawks are known to pair up and stay together on the same territory for years. Known as Missouri's earliest nesters amongst hawk species, red-tailed hawks nest in mid-March. They may build a new nest of sticks and bark or renovate the same nest used the year before. Nests that have been used for years may be 3 feet high or more. They add fresh greenery to the nest to repel parasites and hide nestlings, of which there are usually two.



HUMAN CONNECTIONS

Red-tailed hawks are often used in falconry. Many Native American tribes consider these hawks and their feathers as sacred. American commuters enjoy seeing these "highway hawks," perched on roadway signs, fence posts, telephone poles, trees, or hay bales, where they watch for prey.

Outdoor Calendar

MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION

FISHING

Black Bass

Impounded waters and non-Ozark streams:
Open all year

Most streams south of the Missouri River:

- ▶ Catch-and-Keep:
May 24, 2025–Feb. 28, 2026

Nongame Fish Gigging

Streams and impounded waters,
sunrise to midnight:
Sept. 15, 2025–Feb. 15, 2026

Paddlefish

Statewide:
March 15–April 30, 2026

On the Mississippi River:
March 15–May 15, 2026

Trout Parks

During the catch-and-release season,
Maramec Spring Park is open daily; other
trout parks are open Friday–Monday.

Catch-and-Release:
Nov. 14, 2025–Feb. 9, 2026

TRAPPING

Badger, Gray Fox, Red Fox

Nov. 15, 2025–Jan. 31, 2026

Beaver, Nutria

Nov. 15, 2025–March 31, 2026

Bobcat, Coyote, Mink, Muskrat, Opossum, Raccoon, River Otter, Striped Skunk

Nov. 15, 2025–Feb. 28, 2026

Rabbits

Nov. 15, 2025–Jan. 31, 2026

For complete information about seasons, limits, methods, and restrictions, consult the *Wildlife Code of Missouri* at short.mdc.mo.gov/Zib. Current hunting, trapping, and fishing regulation booklets are available from local permit vendors or online at short.mdc.mo.gov/ZZf.



Free MO Hunting and MO Fishing Apps

MO Hunting makes it easy to view permits, electronically notch them, and Telecheck your harvest. MO Fishing lets you view permits, find great places to fish, and ID your catch. Get both in Android or iPhone platforms at short.mdc.mo.gov/Zi2.

HUNTING

Badger, Gray Fox, Red Fox

Nov. 15, 2025–Jan. 31, 2026

Bobcat, Opossum, Raccoon, Striped Skunk

Nov. 15, 2025–Feb. 28, 2026

Coyote

Restrictions apply during April, spring turkey season, and firearms deer season.

Open all year

Crows

Nov. 1, 2025–March 3, 2026

Deer

Archery:
Nov. 26, 2025–Jan. 15, 2026

Firearms:

- ▶ Alternative Methods Portion:
Dec. 27, 2025–Jan. 6, 2026

Pheasant

Nov. 1, 2025–Jan. 15, 2026

Quail

Nov. 1, 2025–Jan. 15, 2026

Rabbits

Oct. 1, 2025–Feb. 15, 2026

Squirrels

May 24, 2025–Feb. 15, 2026

Turkey

Fall:

- ▶ Archery Portion:
Nov. 26, 2025–Jan. 15, 2026

Waterfowl

See the Migratory Bird and Waterfowl Hunting Digest or visit short.mdc.mo.gov/ZZx for more information.



ILLUSTRATION: MARK RAITHEL



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The winter landscape can get drab, but pops of color remain if you know where to look. The bright red berries on this deciduous holly are just one example. Get outside and find what shines through on a winter's day. What will you discover?

📷 by **Mark Sullivan**

Free to Missouri households

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