

Winter 2010



ST. FRANCOIS STATE PARK

Nature Notes

From the Naturalist



Last year brought about many changes in Missouri state parks. Like many of you, our agency has felt the sting of a slow economy. Missouri state parks have always ranked as one of the top state park systems in the country. The main reason we are able to accomplish all that we do is because of the parks, soils and water sales tax. This 1/10 of 1% sales tax funds everything—operations, equipment purchases, and personnel. As the economy has slowed down, so has the money from that sales tax.

Unfortunately, that has caused the Division of State Parks to make some very tough decisions. In October 2009, the division had to eliminate over 100

positions from state parks. Some of those were positions that were already vacant, but more than 40 state park employees had to be laid off. Additional cuts have been made to each park's operating budget.

I feel that it is important for us to let you know that the visitor may see some changes this year when you visit Missouri state parks. Many parks have had to reduce hours of their facility, like a visitor's center, for example. Most parks will see a reduction in our temporary staff. You may even see a reduction in the services offered, such as interpretive programs. Other changes visitors will notice are an increase in user fees. See the box on

page four for the latest changes.

This year will be a big adjustment period for both the employees and visitors of Missouri state parks. As we learn how to be more efficient, we still aim to provide the visitor with high quality experiences in our state parks and historic sites. Here at St. Francois, I hope to maintain the program schedule you saw last year. The spring program schedule will be published in the next newsletter, due out in early April.

If you have any questions or comments, we encourage you to contact the park or visit the Web site.

--Jamie Hubert
Park Naturalist

Frost Flowers?

If you brave the cold morning in late fall after the first hard freeze, you could witness one of nature's most delicate miracles.

Frost flowers are not made of frost at all. It is only certain plants that can produce a frost flower, for

reasons we do not know. When moisture in the plant's stem freezes, it bursts through cracks that form in the stem. The ribbons of ice ooze out of the fissures, creating the unique frost flower. Each one is different, and they



don't last long. The ribbons of ice are so delicate, the slightest touch will shatter their petals. Be sure to step out next fall and search for this treasure.

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Missouri State Park Mission

- To preserve and interpret the finest examples of Missouri's natural landscapes
- To preserve and interpret the finest examples of Missouri's cultural landmarks.
- To provide healthy and enjoyable outdoor recreation experiences to Missourians and visitors to the state.

Winter's Hidden Secrets Revealed

Photos courtesy of Aaron Smith



For many people, winter sparks an end to the outdoor playtime we all enjoy during the summer months. It is easy to feel down during the cold grey months of winter, but it doesn't have to be that way!

While you may not feel like braving the chill to go camping, there are still many activities that you can enjoy in Missouri state parks in the winter.

One way to combat the winter blues is through exercise. Why walk on the treadmill when you can hit the trail in a state park near you? Experts say that exercise is a sure-fire way to boost your mood AND your health. You may think that there won't be anything to see in the winter-but that isn't the case! While many animals do hibernate in the winter, there are still a lot of ani-



Deer are crepuscular-meaning they are active in early morning and early evening.

mals that are active when it's cold outside. A favorite of many wildlife watchers is the white-tailed deer. Deer remain active year round, and the best time to view them is early in the morning, or early in the evening.

While hiking through the woods on a cold Missouri day, you are likely to hear the "Peter, Peter, Peter" call of the tufted titmouse, or the screech of a red-tailed hawk soaring overhead. While some of Missouri's songbirds migrate south for the winter, many do not. Winter is a



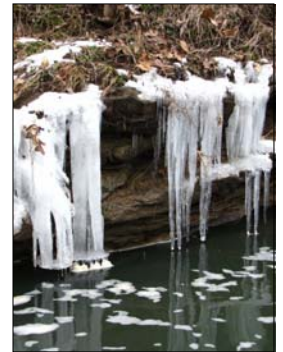
The white-breasted nuthatch is the only bird that can go head-first down a tree.

great time to see these birds up close, when they aren't being hidden by the leaves on the trees. You can hear woodpeckers drumming on the trees, you can see cardinals in their scarlet brilliance, and watch the antics of the white-breasted nuthatch as he hops head-first down a tree. And, of course, our nation's symbol, the bald eagle, is most abundant in Missouri in the winter. In fact, most ea-

gles leave Missouri in the summer to go north to nest. While you aren't likely to see a bald eagle at St. Francois State Park, they are abundant along bigger rivers and lakes throughout the state.

The area surrounding St. Francois County is one of the most beautiful in the state. There are numerous state parks and conservation areas within a short driving distance, making winter outdoor opportunities plentiful.

Remember, nature's beauty does not end when the leaves drop in the fall. Many of nature's secrets can be discovered in the winter. The area around St. Francois County is one of the most beautiful in the state. Even I did not realize the awesome beauty that existed here! Put on a stocking hat and coat, and get out and enjoy your state parks, conservation areas and forests. You may be the only one out there, but the solitude and one-on-one time with nature is one that you aren't soon to forget.



Visit www.mostateparks.com or www.mdc.mo.gov for links to places near you to enjoy nature in any season.

Winter Photography Tips

One of the hobbies that knows no season is photography. Winter brings out photography opportunities that are unique, and unlike anything you will find during any other season. One tip to remember: the sunlight during early morning and late afternoon offer the best lighting. So get an early start, if you can.

Photography is a fun and relaxing way to discover nature. Your senses are

heightened as you walk through the woods looking for the perfect photo opportunity. You don't have to be a professional or spend a lot of money on equipment to pull amazing shots.

Technology in digital cameras today allows for high quality photographs even in a point-and-shoot camera. I, myself, use a Canon S5 IS, a mid-range camera.

Finally, photography "field trips" are a great family activity. Children don't get a lot of "outdoor time" during the winter. This is a

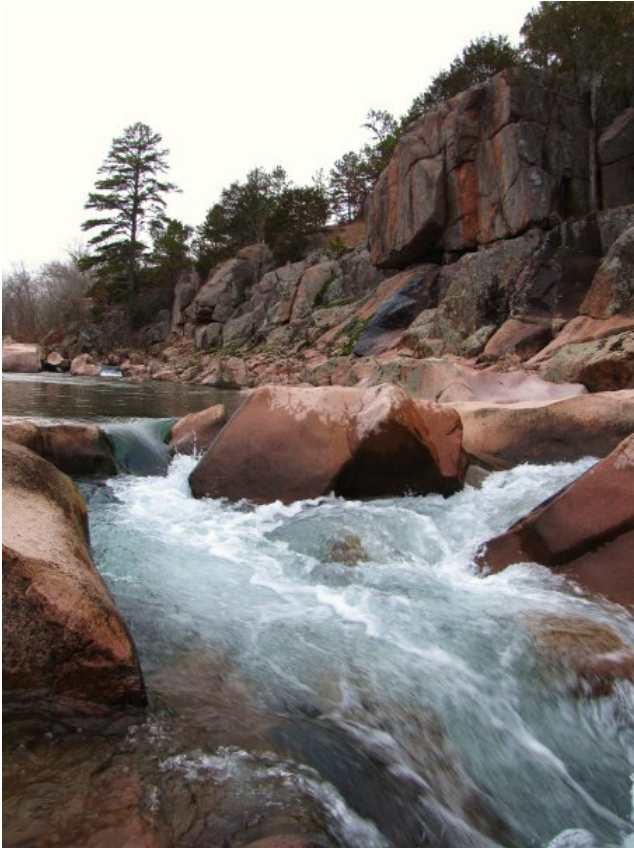
way to enjoy some time outside as a family. Besides, children love playing with the camera. You'll probably be surprised at what they see from their level, and the things that catch their attention.



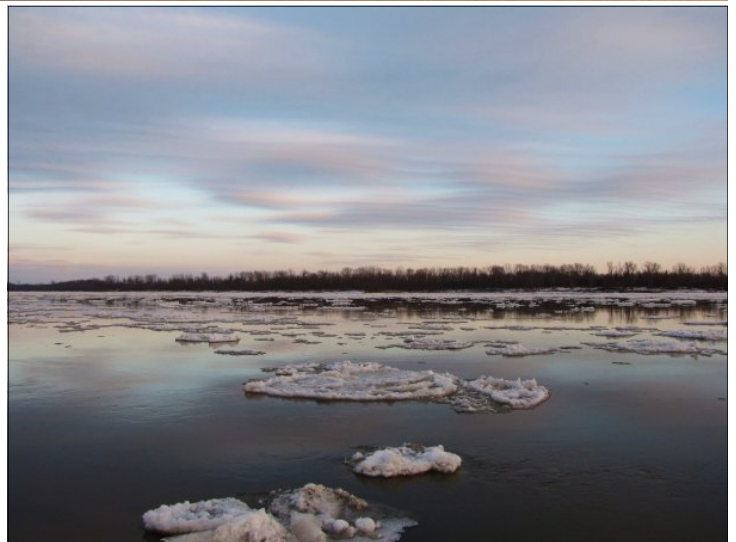
Winter Scenes from around the Parkland

Winter offers unique photo opportunities that other seasons do not. Within a 20-mile radius of Farmington, you can visit rivers with whitewater rapids, shut-in valleys and dense pine forests.

These photos were taken around the St. Francois County area, courtesy of amateur photographer Aaron Smith of Farmington.



Amidon Conservation Area near Fredericktown



*This photo of the Mississippi ice flows was taken in Cape Girardeau.

ST. FRANCOIS STATE PARK

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GET OUT AND PLAY
IN MISSOURI STATE PARKS!



Check us out on Facebook

**Search for Missouri State
Parks and Historic Sites**

New Camping Rates for the 2010 Camping Season (On Season Rates)

Basic Campsite- \$13.00

Electric Campsite- \$21.00

Electric/Water- \$23.00

Sewer/Electric/Water- \$26.00



\$2 discount for seniors and persons with disabilities.

*Note that at St. Francois, we offer BASIC and ELECTRIC campsites. To make a reservation, call 1-877-422-6766 or visit www.mostateparks.com.

Run, Salamander, Run!



Every year, during the first warm rainy night of early spring (or late winter), instinct tugs at the mind of the salamander. It is time to go to the pond to breed. He knows where he must go, but his timing must be right. If he's too early, a cold snap could kill the eggs. If he goes too late, he will miss the females. No, it has to be just right. Somehow, though, the salamanders know when that time is. And every year, during one magical night, the salamanders run.



The salamanders must have fishless ponds surrounded by forest in order to lay their eggs. If there are fish, the eggs will get eaten, so it's very important that there are no fish. On that magical night, the ground will be alive with the wiggling bodies of salamanders making their way to the very pond that they were born in. They will breed, and then leave the pond to return to the forest. The salamander eggs will hatch with gills, and will remain in the pond for the rest of the summer. Then they will go through metamorphosis. They lose their gills and will live on land for the rest of their lives-until the spring rains call to them again.



What is a salamander?

A salamander is an amphibian-meaning they have slimy skin, are cold-blooded, and spend part of their lives in water. Salamanders, toads and frogs are all amphibians. Mature salamanders have a body shape similar to a lizard-with a slender body, long tail and four limbs.