

To the Editor:

The Missouri Society of American Foresters, a group representing over 200 professional foresters across the state, is deeply concerned about recent legislative attacks on the Missouri Department of Conservation. Various bills proposed to slash funding, politicize the agency, prohibit partnerships with non-profits, and allow a panel of private industry and outside agencies to dictate plans for conservation area forests are an affront to MDC's model of success and are a threat to the state's forest resource.

It's hard to imagine that 80 years ago Missouri's forests sat stripped, burnt and grazed while the soil washed away and the wildlife nearly disappeared. When the Missouri Conservation Commission was established in 1936 with overwhelming citizen support, the founding conservation fathers wrote forestry into the mission because they understood that healthy woods were critical to restoring healthy fish and wildlife.

MDC was the leader in ending the rampant wildfires, replanting the trees, and advancing the professional, science-based management of the state's forest resources. Forests in Missouri now cover 15.5 million acres, support \$8 billion in economic activity and 42,000 jobs, clean our water and air, and provide wildlife habitat and recreation.

MDC directly manages 4% of the state's forests, which are held in the public trust and managed for multiple uses. But the agency's nationally-renowned constitutional mandate and dedicated funding allow it to do much more, like work with private landowners and support rural fire departments and the forest products industry.

The legislative proposals that have been proposed in the Missouri Legislature, if enacted, would reduce or eliminate these programs and move forest conservation backward not forward. Missouri SAF encourages all Missourians to join us in supporting MDC and keeping conservation moving forward in our great state.

Greg Hoss

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Missouri Society of American Foresters - Historian