



25TH ANNIVERSARY REPORT

Part II

Recreation ...

Currently twelve governments/institutions own and manage parks and conservation areas in the Meramec Greenway. Each strives to fulfill their individual missions while cooperating with the overall Greenway recreational goals. The result is a rich diversity of opportunities that the people of our region are discovering and enjoying.

The 68-acre **Arnold City Park** is located in the Meramec Greenway. Its intent is to serve the active recreational needs of Arnold residents and visitors. Features include a fishing lake, asphalt walks, athletic fields, playgrounds, picnic pavilions, an exercise course and a stage for special events. These events include an Independence Day Celebration and Arnold Days in September.

To families in the neighborhood this type of park becomes a home away from home. It is a place of wonderful experiences such as being the hero of the softball game or the memories of eating cotton candy during the fireworks display. It is a place of those memorial family reunions and outstanding barbecues. There are several of these active, bustling parks in the Greenway.

St. Louis County's **Simpson Park** and the Missouri Department of Natural Resources' **Castlewood State Park** are larger, more regional type parks, blending a mix of passive recreational opportunities in a more natural setting. Picnic areas and playgrounds mix with more extensive trail systems, lake and river accesses for fishing, forests and scenic vistas.

Areas of this type attract more specialized enthusiasts. Mountain bikers flock to Castlewood for the challenges of its extensive trail system, which include some pretty tough hills. Road bikers, meanwhile, enjoy the level, asphalt-surfaced trails of Simpson Park. Crappie fishermen know that the 70 acre Simpson Park Lake is a hotspot, especially if they know where the brush piles are. Veteran fishermen

also know where the deep holes in the Meramec at Castlewood are located that will undoubtedly contain channel catfish.

The Missouri Department of Conservation's **Forest 44** and **River Round Conservation Areas** are examples of passive, natural public lands. Here the management emphasis is on natural resources, hence facilities are limited. Both of these sites have trail systems; Forest 44 features the Henges Firearm's Range and River Round has a River Access with a boat ramp. Visitors to these areas may be searching to spot a migrating Magnolia Warbler, to begin a day long float trip or simply enjoy the solitude of a quiet walk in the woods.

The list of recreational opportunities goes on and on. Campers at **Meramec State Park** can explore Fisher Cave with lanterns; float fishermen can seek the elusive
(Continues on page 2)



Above: Fishing from the dock at Simpson Park Lake.



Volunteers helping to keep the Meramec clean

OPERATION CLEAN STREAM



Recreation continued from Page 1

smallmouth bass after launching their jon boat from the Chouteau Claim Access; and joggers have miles of trails to enjoy in **Fenton City Park** and in the **Fenton Meramec Greenway**. Hence as the people return to the valley they are pleasantly surprised at the richness and diversity of recreational opportunities available to them.

Clean Water ...

Twenty five years ago the lower Meramec River was one of the most degraded streams in the State of Missouri in terms of water quality. The stream was in violation of state water quality standards from River Mile 30 downstream. Today water quality has improved dramatically, though that recovery is still not complete.

From its once pristine condition two centuries ago, the Meramec suffered from our uses and abuses. Forests were clearcut, farm fields were cleared to the water's edge, agricultural chemicals leached into the river, improperly functioning sewage treatment plants discharged waste-



Above: Black-Crowned Night Heron

water into the stream or its tributaries, cottages along the riverbank accelerated bank failure and erosion. Urbanization of the watershed increased stormwater runoff, which can produce ten times more runoff than a forest environment.

The recovery has been commendable, and from a number of sources. The **Metropolitan St. Louis Sewer District** has completed four major wastewater treatment plants that handle most sewerage in the watershed from Keifer Creek downstream to the Mississippi River. The removal of structures from the floodplain and the revegetation of the land helps control non-point pollutants via filtering contaminants and reduces stormwater surges by increasing absorption. Then there is that famous last Saturday of August when hundreds of volunteers show their care for the river in **Operation Clean Stream**, which through the years has hauled away literally tons and tons of debris and litter.

Good water quality is, of course, the most essential component of the recovery of the Meramec River. The progress that has been made thus far has had a cumulative effect, allowing the consequent return of the natural beauty of the river environment as well as a spectacular renaissance of the riverine flora and fauna.

Natural Resources ...

All species of wildlife require food, water, nesting and escape cover, and living space. The removal or degradation of these essential components can lead to the reduction or extirpation of species from an area. Prior to 1975 this type of degradation was commonplace in the Meramec Valley and the loss of wildlife was despairing. In recent years, however, the reverse has been true.

With improved water quality came a return of the aquatic "critters" of the river, the larva of stoneflies, dragonflies and caddis flies that are an important foundation to the river's food chain. These animals are most sensitive to water quality, and simply cannot survive in polluted environments. With their recovery came a corresponding rebirth of the rich and diverse fishery. Sport fishing is again popular. Most exciting is the return of such species as the Paddlefish and Lake Sturgeon.

(Continues on Page 3)

Other fauna that was missing from the riverscape a quarter century ago, but that has now returned, include the American egrets, black crowned night herons, cormorants, river otters and bald eagles. Folks exploring the Greenway commonly convey excitedly their sightings of red foxes, coyotes, osprey, turkeys and beaver.

Also being preserved in the Greenway is a variety of natural communities, which are defined as an interrelated assemblage of plants and animals found in a given area. Some outstanding examples may be found in the Meramec Upland Forest Natural Area in **Meramec State Park**. Elsewhere, highly degraded communities such as the glades at the **Missouri Arboretum** are being restored, and a Wet Mesic Prairie has been established at **West Tyson County Park**.

Into The Future ...

We of this region can be extremely proud of the recovery of the Meramec during the past quarter of a century. There are few similar efforts that have been so successful. There are few similar efforts that have enjoyed the involvement of literally thousands of people through the years. But, of course, much still remains to be done.



Future challenges will include dealing with urban sprawl, with such threats as further increases of intense stormwater discharges into the Greenway and visual intrusion into the valley setting via developments. Water quality concerns in such tributaries as Saline and Flat Creek must be addressed.

In addition, some outstanding natural areas remain unprotected as well as some segments of the riverbank itself.

Ultimately, however, the future success of the Meramec Greenway can be assured if it retains the one key element that it enjoyed during its first twenty five years, and that is the strong and continued desire and support of the people to save this magnificent resource.

Meramec River Recreation Association:



MERAMEC GREENWAY
41 South Central
St. Louis, MO 63105

Below: The prairie in West Tyson Park.

