

JOHN KAREL

“To preserve and interpret the finest examples of Missouri’s natural landscapes; to preserve and interpret its most significant cultural landmarks; and to provide healthy and enjoyable outdoor recreation appropriate to these resources for all Missourians and visitors to the state.”

These are words that John Karel lives by. His vision, passion, perseverance, and his love of history have literally changed the landscape of Missouri. His focus of preserving wilderness, managing lands for their natural, cultural, and recreational values, and inspiring others through his leadership and dedication have made him one of the most accomplished parks professionals in the history of our state.

In 1977, after graduating from University of Missouri-Columbia, John was the key leader in the participation of State Parks in the Missouri Natural Areas System, and the Missouri Natural Areas Committee. In state parks alone, there are now more than 40 designated natural areas totaling more than 20,000 acres, many of them added during his tenure. He also helped establish a new State Wild Area System, which has since grown to 11 Wild Areas encompassing some 23,000 acres in nine state parks.

In 1979, at the age of 31, John Karel was appointed director of DNR’s Division of Parks and Historic Preservation. As the first—and to date, only—state park director with degrees in both history and natural resource management, John was key in developing the concept for passing and renewing Missouri’s innovative Parks and Soils sales tax which secured a larger appropriation for parks than ever before or since.

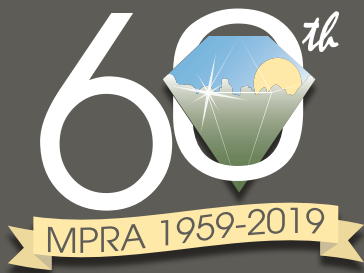
John also was engaged in an entirely volunteer capacity as a leader with Missouri Wilderness Coalition. He was a principal pacesetter who fought hard with meticulous preparation and political skill in the effort to successfully designate eight federal wilderness areas in four separate Congressional acts, for a total of 78,000 acres in the state.

As the Director of Tower Grove Park in St. Louis from 1987-2014, John’s vision, experience, and fundraising abilities elevated the park to a new level of excellence and gained national recognition for the quality of its resources, and its services to the St. Louis community. John also devoted enormous volunteer time and talent to the L-A-D Foundation, serving as president from 1999-2017. John’s most significant service was to guide its transition to a major private operating foundation after it received Leo and Kay Drey’s gift of the 143,000-acre Pioneer Forest in 2004. Time magazine listed it as one of the five largest philanthropic gifts in the nation that year, and the foundation in one day became the largest private landowner in Missouri.

John has also been involved with the historic preservation of Ste. Genevieve since his days as state park director. With the help of John’s involvement, Ste. Genevieve has recently gained the status as a National Historic Park among other accomplishments.

As a leader and a doer, John Karel has paid remarkable attention to detail, while still keeping the vision moving forward. These accomplishments listed, and many others, are John’s significant and enduring contributions to the preservation, restoration, and public understanding of so many of the great parks, wild lands, and cultural resources of Missouri.

Congratulations to the 2019 inductee into the Missouri Recreation and Parks Hall of Fame: John Karel



2019 MPRA

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Awards Banquet

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2019

Invocation

Dinner

Recognition of Conference Committee & Sponsors

Introduction of Head Table

Presentation of President's Award

Presentation of the Missouri Recreation and Parks Hall of Fame

MPRA Professional Development Scholarships

Musco Giveback Award

MPRA Scholarship Charitable Trust Recipients

Retirement Service Awards

Individual Citations

Organization Citations

Public Official Award

Support Staff Award

Associate Fellow Award

Fellow Award

Conclusion and Invitation to 2020 Conference

Did you think of someone you want to nominate for an award next year? Quick! Before you forget, write it down on the post card on your table! Leave it with us on your way out the door and we will send you a reminder next year when we begin accepting award nominations.

Thank You, Conference Sponsors!

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