

# Forum Update

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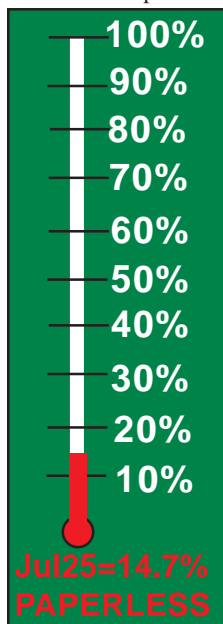
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## President's Message

*Don Lewis, Tupelo Department of Parks & Recreation*

Summer time in Mississippi, this is our most intense time of year. This time of year not only brings an increased demand on our park and recreation system it challenges our staff to help find ways to keep kids busy and out of trouble.

"Park facilities no longer merely provide a place to hang out." Parks still provide this opportunity, but parents and citizens expect more from our summer programs. With these increased demands our departments have the additional burden of hiring and training qualified staff-- not only in programming, but maintenance, trash pick up, and customer service.

These challenges can result in opportunities for park and recreation departments to make a case for the crucial role that we play in the quality of life for our communities. Most of the departments have already started their budget process, and we know that this will be tight year. What better way to get advocates for funding than creating a positive fun environment for both children and their parents? Quality maintenance and well-used facilities are the best way to show our elected officials the importance of our role in the community.



## Pascagoula Awarded Tony Hawk Foundation Grant

The City of Pascagoula is building a new concrete skate park at IG Levy Memorial Park this summer. The skate park was designed by Site Design Group along with a group of young skaters in the Fall of 2007. The project plans were completed in the Spring of 2008, and then the bid process began. The Pascagoula City Council awarded the bid to Jefcoat Recreation in July and construction should begin soon. The \$150,000 Park is being funded from three sources; the City of Pascagoula has a hotel/motel tax of 3% which is dedicated to Recreation (\$100,000), the Mississippi Power Foundation has contributed \$25,000 and the Tony Hawk Foundation awarded a \$10,000 grant. The remaining funds will be paid out of general funds already obligated from the City of Pascagoula. The local skaters also raised \$742 towards the park. They look forward to the Park being open for skaters in late October or early November 2008.

## NPS Now Accepting Applications

The National Park Service helps partners plan successful locally-led outdoor recreation and natural resource conservation projects. August 1 is the deadline for the next round of assistance from their Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) Program.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to discuss project ideas with RTCA staff before submitting an application. In Mississippi contact Liz Smith-Incer

Rivers, Trails & Conservation Assistance Program  
c/o Gulf Islands National Seashore  
3500 Park Road  
Ocean Springs, MS 39564.  
liz\_smith-incer@nps.gov (228) 875-9057 x120

Visit [www.nps.gov/rtca](http://www.nps.gov/rtca) for more information.

## NRPA 2008 Congress

Early Bird Registration for the 2008 NRPA Congress ends August 22. Take advantage of discount registration rates by registering before that deadline. This year's Congress will be held October 14–18, 2008 at the Baltimore Convention Center, Baltimore Maryland. Visit [NRPA.org](http://NRPA.org) or call 703.858.0784.

## Proposed Rule to Allow Loaded Firearms in National Parks and National Wildlife Refuges

On Wednesday, April 30, 2008, the National Park Service published a proposed rule on the controversial issue of concealed carrying of firearms in National Parks and National Wildlife Refuges. The new rule would, for the first time, allow a person to carry a loaded operable firearm in a park or wildlife refuge if the person has a state permit for a concealed weapon and the park or refuge is located in a state that presently allows the concealed carry of guns in parks.

The public had 60 days to comment on the proposed rule, which closed June 30, 2008. NRPA's BOT Public Policy Committee prepared official comments from NRPA. Here is an excerpt from that letter,

"The current Department of Interior rules permit the possession and transportation of firearms in national parks and national wildlife refuges, although such firearms must be inoperable and inaccessible. NRPA supports retaining the current rules and believes that the National Park Service should serve as the model for promoting parks that are safe and enjoyable places for all visitors. NRPA agrees with the seven former National Park Service directors, the Coalition of National Park Service Retirees and park law enforcement professionals who say that the current rules are effective and that the proposed rules would threaten visitors' safety and could adversely affect the family-friendly atmosphere of the parks."

The recent Supreme Court decision (*Heller vs. District of Columbia*) ratifying the individual right of citizens to keep and bear arms is likely to have an effect not only on national parks and wildlife refuges, but also on state and local parks and public lands. NRPA takes no position on the issue of the right to own firearms, and noted this fact in the comments on the proposed rule: "NRPA does not take a position on the constitutional right to bear arms nor does it oppose the appropriate and controlled recreational use of firearms in the nation's parks."

With the recent Supreme Court ruling and the current attention to this issue, MRPA park professionals might be well served to spend a few minutes dusting off your park firearms policy and give it another review. Better to be prepared than to have to defend your policy in a court of law.

## Important Deadlines

- ☐ Aug 6 - Deadline to Register for the 2008 Conference  
September 15-18  
Vicksburg, MS

[www.aboutmrpa.org/conference.htm](http://www.aboutmrpa.org/conference.htm)

- ☐ August 14 - Miss-Lou Regional Summit
- ☐ August 22 - Awards Nominations Due, Sponsored by MUSCO Sports Lighting

[www.aboutmrpa.org/membernews.htm](http://www.aboutmrpa.org/membernews.htm)

## Possible Third President's Commission on Americans Outdoors

There is a new study group being formed by Sen. Lamar Alexander and Sen. Jeff Bingaman to lay the groundwork for a possible third President's Commission on Americans Outdoors (PCAO). The first meeting of this group took place on Monday, July 14, 2008.

There is a strong expectation that the report from this group will lead to a recommendation to the next President to convene a new President's Commission on American's Outdoors. This group apparently intends to get the issues of parks, outdoor recreation, and conservation on the radar screen of a new Administration in the first days.

By way of history, NRPA participated directly and indirectly in the two preceding President's Commissions the first of which was convened in the mid 1960's (ORRC) and the second (PCAO) in the mid 1980's. Sen. Alexander has been very much behind the idea of a new, bipartisan commission, and this "study group" is the first tangible step.

Pat Noonan, Chairman Emeritus of the Conservation Fund, and an advisor to this group along with Henry Diamond, consulted with NRPA in the lead up to the formation of this new group. As a result, NRPA trustee Joe Wynns was appointed to the group. Also, Carol Ashe, New York State park director has been appointed.

## Congratulations

Congratulations to Rob Boyd who was recently named as Director of the Oxford Park Commission. Boyd replaces the retiring Kleb Johnson.

## Thank You Tupelo

Tupelo hosted the 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual Charlie Close Tennis Tournament sponsored by Renasant Bank June 27-29 at Rob Leake City Park. This tournament served as a fundraiser for MRPA. With 80 participants, we were able to contribute \$400.00.

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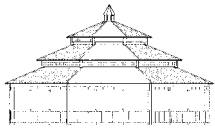
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