



State of Missouri 2020 Governor's Award for Quality and Productivity Executive Summary

Project or Team Name: Missouri State Parks Virtual Interpretation Project

Nominator: Dawn Fredrickson

Nominating Department: Missouri Department of Natural Resources

Category: Customer Service

Executive Summary:

Connecting to our visitors, teaching them about Missouri's significant natural and cultural resources, and providing them opportunity to enjoy those resources is a core purpose of the Missouri State Parks system. During a typical year, over one million visitors attend at least one of the more than 30,000 interpretive, educational or recreational programs hosted by our state park and historic site staff. These programs and events run the gamut from traditional amphitheater programs, to cave and historic building tours, to music concerts, to hikes through the woods, to bike rides and kayak trips, to weekend outdoor skills demonstrations, to field trips for seniors, to summer day camps for youth, and to a myriad of other programs and events in between.

During 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic threatened our ability to maintain this connection with our visitors and hampered our capacity to provide opportunities to the public to experience the wonder of Missouri's natural history, to discover the diversity of its cultural history, and to engage in adventurous and entertaining outdoor activities that create lasting memories. Because of the need to implement social distancing practices as a safeguard for both visitors and staff alike, on-season openings were delayed for campgrounds, visitors centers, and museums; and tours, trips and events were canceled or postponed. This resulted in the loss of the traditional platforms through which our staff typically interacts with our constituents.

In order to fill this void, staff began researching innovative ways to virtually connect to visitors through online platforms. This research consisted of querying other park systems and other organizations for best practices; attending industry webinars and online workshops that addressed use of social media for programming; and studying online tutorials through MO Learning and YouTube that covered the fundamentals of video filming and editing. Additionally, staff from the Communications Office and the Interpretation Section spearheaded the implementation of video review procedures that streamlined the approval process and gave field staff greater creative license to develop content. Staff from the Grants, Recreation and Interpretation Program took the lead on researching the most cost-effective and easy-to-use video equipment, resulting in the purchase of 15 video kits that were distributed to the field. A handful of field staff then began producing and posting eye-catching and dynamic videos that inspired an increasing number of their colleagues to follow suit.

To date, videos produced by staff have ranged from recreational videos that demonstrate the basics of kayaking and archery; videos that provide do-at-home activities such as birdwatching; videos that highlight natural history topics; videos that provide tips on invasive plant removal; videos that transport watchers to other worlds through storybook reading; and videos that explore the fascinating artifacts of some of our historic sites. Efforts to maintain connection with our visitors through this initiative have resulted in more meaningful engagement with our virtual audiences and an increase in requests for the development of topic-specific videos. It is our hope that these efforts will in turn provoke in-person exploration of our tremendous state park system.

Video Summary: <https://youtu.be/WPI8RxuKaJw>