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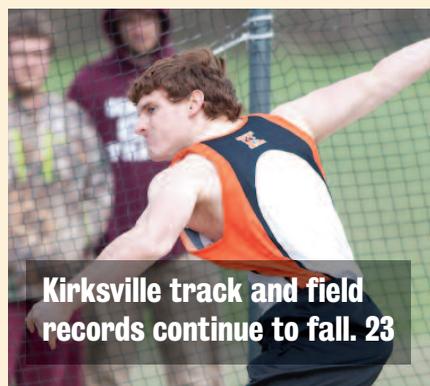
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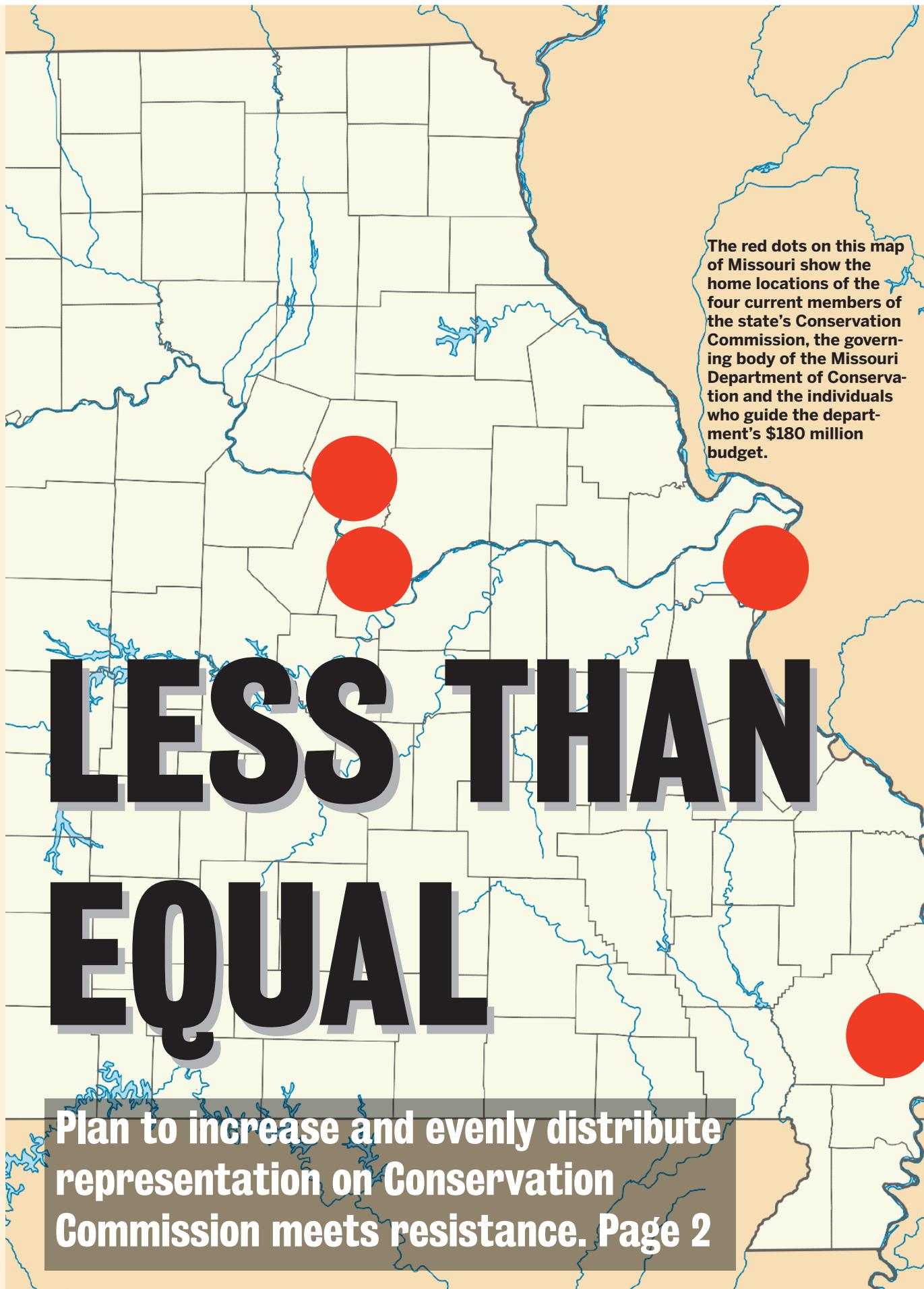
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The red dots on this map of Missouri show the home locations of the four current members of the state's Conservation Commission, the governing body of the Missouri Department of Conservation and the individuals who guide the department's \$180 million budget.

LESS THAN EQUAL

Plan to increase and evenly distribute
representation on Conservation
Commission meets resistance. Page 2



KIRKSVILLE

Plan for equal representation failing

Legislation that would have expanded Missouri Department of Conservation Commission meets resistance

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It began as a simple enough idea. The state of Missouri is divided into eight conservation districts under the Missouri Department of Conservation. Currently, the MDC is governed by a four-member Conservation Commission, the members of which are appointed by the governor and confirmed by the Missouri Senate.

At the urging of his constituents, Sen. Brian Munzlinger (R-18) pre-filed Senate Joint Resolution 19 on Dec. 1, 2015. As originally written, the legislation would have put forth to voters an amendment to the Missouri Constitution to expand the commission to eight members and require each member represent a different conservation district.

"I decided to introduce SJR 19 because the people of Missouri deserve more ideas and questions of the department's recommendations, giving us better representation," Munzlinger said. "The commission has remained virtually unchanged since the 1930s, and desperately needs to be updated. I saw the need to better serve Missourians, and am trying to fill that need.

"Our state is extremely diverse in terms of wildlife and natural habitats. Currently, only three parts of Missouri are represented on the commission. Why wouldn't we bring regional perspectives to a board that has significant impact? A commissioner from the Ozarks would be able to share their knowledge on their home area, which differs significantly from northeast Missouri. Likewise, a northeast Missouri commissioner would share their knowledge and perspective of our area."

But on its way through the Senate, SJR 19 ran into what Munzlinger called "substantial opposition," necessitating a compromise that reduced the proposed expansion from eight members to six; an increase, but not equal representation.

The key driver behind the opposition, according to supporters of the bill:

The Missouri Department of Conservation.

Why?

"We have no information to share," said Joe Jerek, MDC news services coordinator.

The MDC

According to its department overview in the MDC's Fiscal Year 2016 budget request, the Missouri Department of Conservation's mission is, "To protect and manage the forest, fish, and wildlife resources of the state; to facilitate and provide opportunity for all citizens to use, enjoy, and learn about these resources."

The MDC's annual budget accounts for less than 1 percent of the total state budget and uses no general revenue funds. All of its budget is funded through the Conservation Commission Fund, which receives money from hunting and fishing permits, commercial permits, nonresident permits, federal dollars from sources such as the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration program and the U.S. Forest Service, and the Conservation Sales Tax, a one-eighth cent statewide sales tax that generates about \$110 million annually (which represents about 60 percent of the MDC's budget).

What the state reaps in benefits from the Missouri Department of Conservation's work is, according to the MDC, much, much more.

"The economic benefits of fish, forest, and wildlife management include over \$12 billion in business activity annually in Missouri," the MDC's budget request states.

The Conservation Commission

Four individuals appointed by the Missouri governor serve on the Conservation Commission, and are charged with the following responsibilities:

- Appointing a director of the MDC
- Serving as the MDC's policy makers
- Approving Wildlife Code regulations
- Strategic planning
- Budget development and major expenditure decisions

The commission is currently comprised of: Marilyn J. Bradford, of Jefferson City, Mo.; David W. Murphy, of Columbia, Mo.; James T. Blair IV, of St. Louis; and Don C. Bedell, of Sikeston.

The commissioners receive no salary or

compensation, only reimbursement for travel and expenses related to their duties.

SJR 19

The proposed legislation was pre-filed by Munzlinger, who as majority caucus whip is the fifth-most powerful Republican in the GOP-dominated Missouri Senate.

On the second day of the 2016 Legislative Session, SJR 19 was assigned to the Senate Agriculture, Food Production and Outdoor Resources Committee. Within two weeks, the bill passed the committee - which is chaired by Munzlinger - and was returned to the Senate floor.

Then things got interesting. According to records on the Missouri Senate's website, Munzlinger offered an amendment to further increase the Conservation Commission to nine members, with a requirement that eight represent different conservation districts, while one person would serve as an at-large member.

Sen. Jason Holsman (D-7), who represents part of Jackson County and also serves as the minority caucus secretary, making him the third-most powerful Democrat in the Missouri Senate, then offered an amendment to drop the proposed membership increase to six and eliminate all requirements that the commissioners represent different conservation districts.

That amendment was adopted and that version of the legislation ultimately passed the Senate, 22-10, on Feb. 4. That same day the bill was delivered to the House, where it remained untouched until last Wednesday, when it was assigned to the House Government Oversight and Accountability Committee.

Munzlinger said the amendment was the only way to get the legislation through the Senate.

"It became clear there was substantial opposition to a large, region-based membership. However, a compromise was reached that would still increase the number of members of the body, which is better than keeping the status quo," Munzlinger said. "I still feel geographic-based representation is the way to go, but a compromise was necessary."

Holsman was the spokesman for the op-

position, Munzlinger said, and the only way to get the opposing senators to meet with him was to agree to the amendment.

Holsman's office did not return a telephone call Friday.

The opposition

"My experience with the Department of Conservation is that for some reason they are indeed against any expansion to the committee," Munzlinger said. "Expanding the commission is not an attack on their role or trying to get hands on their sales tax money, but rather to ensure Missourians are better represented and served."

Why exactly the MDC is opposed to such legislation is unclear, largely because the MDC doesn't see a need to explain its position. The Daily Express made multiple inquiries over a period of more than two weeks, providing an opportunity for the MDC to make its stance understood.

Initially, the MDC spokesperson said the department's leadership was out of state attending a wildlife conference. Thursday, a day after SJR 19 was assigned to a House committee, the MDC said because there had been no movement on the legislation since February, it had no new information.

When finally presented with a deadline to respond with comments for this story and an explanation of the department's position, the MDC's reply was short.

"We have no information to share," the spokesperson wrote in an email reply.

The support

Munzlinger is still hopeful the legislation makes it through the House and comes before voters in November.

Others are hopeful to see the legislation returned to its original form before that happens.

Northeast Missouri resident Ron Gaber has been helping to lead the effort of those citizens in favor of equal representation on the Conservation Commission. Most recently, Gaber traveled to Jefferson City with Frank Oberle and Colin Sorhus, where together with a legislative affairs

SEE MDC, 19

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KIRKSVILLE

Animal activists brace for 'Finding Dory' impact on tropical fish

PAUL BRINKMANN

Orlando Sentinel

(TNS) – Animal welfare activists and pet shop owners fear a wave of interest in tropical fish and the possible decimation of key species after the June release of Disney Pixar's "Finding Dory." The cartoon movie is a sequel to 2003's "Finding Nemo," which had prompted a surge of cute orange clownfish being caught in the wild and sold at pet stores. Many parents and children, inexperienced with saltwater aquariums, bought a little Nemo fish and watched it die.

The new movie includes the return of absent-minded Dory, a cartoon version of a Pacific blue tang voiced by Ellen DeGeneres.

"I think we are facing the same problem, and it's even worse because the blue tang is really unsuitable for a home aquarium animal," said Teresa Telecky, director of wildlife at Humane Society International. "Blue tang live up to 50 years and get big, over a foot long, which would require a 180-gallon aquarium, the size of a couch."

Telecky said the Humane Society has asked to talk with Disney about the movie and its impact on the marine pet trade. Other groups such as the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals are urging families to buy plush-toy versions of Dory instead of the real thing. Disney didn't provide answers to specific questions about its plans, but a spokeswoman said in an email that Disney's conservation team is working with the

Association of Zoos and Aquariums on a program to support tang conservation. The company also said it is preparing educational materials "discouraging personal ownership of blue tangs."

The Marine Aquarium Societies of North America reported that marine biologists have talked to Disney about the storyline, particularly suggestions that blue tang can be raised in captivity. Raising blue tang from eggs or larvae in captivity is not possible yet, because captive-breeding efforts have failed.

The baby fish die in captivity because they don't eat normal fish food that other tropical fish in tanks eat, said Matthew DiMaggio, assistant professor at University of Florida and a leading researcher on blue tang.

"We knew this movie was going to come out, and we have been trying to raise them. But they are a challenge," DiMaggio said.

After "Finding Nemo," SeaWorld helped launch a program called Rising Tide, which attempts to raise blue tang and other marine ornamental fish in captivity. The program just scored a success with raising the first yellow tang in Hawaii and has improved breeding for the clownfish. But so far, the blue tang has only been raised to 22 days old in Florida laboratories at Ruskin and Fort Pierce.

In Orlando, aquarium supply store owner Mar-cye Sweeney vowed she won't sell any blue tang, aka Pacific palette surgeonfish.

"Thousands of clownfish died after 'Finding Nemo,'" said Sweeney, owner at Sea in the City.

"People will tell you that you can set up an aquarium immediately and raise these fish, but they are generally wrong. It's not that easy."

She said she tries to educate customers about the needs of the animals.

"People will try to tell parents that they can put a small young tang in a small tank, but that's like having a greyhound living in a small apartment, or worse," Sweeney said.

Mike Bober, CEO of the Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council, said sales reports showed only a moderate increase in clown fish sales after "Finding Nemo" – contrary to many media reports and anecdotal accounts at the time. Bober said people interested in aquariums can research the right fish for them at MyRightFish.com.

Blue tang can be purchased online, and some online sales sites include a warning that large salt-water tanks are needed. One site advertised a small blue tang starting at \$50, plus \$30 for next-day air shipping from California.

Rene Umberger, executive director at Hawaii-based For the Fishes, said she and the Humane Society are organizing a publicity campaign.

"Without a concerted effort, there is a very real chance that species of fish could be wiped out, meaning near extinction in the wild," Umberger said. "The other concern is, fishermen use cyanide to capture these fish, which can damage the reef. The fishermen already report that they must go farther and farther out from land to find the blue tang, and the movie hasn't even come out yet."

MDC

From page 1

staffer from the Missouri Farm Bureau they met with various elected House officials.

"Our primary agenda item with all was that the current amended SJR 19...was not acceptable and in fact counterproductive to balanced state

representation," Gaber said. "If the House could not amend the bill to eight commissioners, one from each district, we would rather see the Senate proposed version defeated and a new bill introduced by the Senate next session."

Gaber said the group felt lawmakers were in favor of the change but they indicated that with such little time remaining in

the Legislative Session, action was unlikely.

Gaber points to resolutions from the city of Kirkville and city of Green Castle, as well as the 2016 Policy Book of the Missouri Farm Bureau, as evidence of widespread support for equal representation on the Conservation Commission. He said expanded participation and representation would address concerns about cred-

ibility, accountability and favoritism when it comes to decisions about the MDC's approximately \$180 million budget.

He also points out that the Conservation Commission has not had a representative from northern Missouri for more than 30 years.

"It is obvious that the MDC wields significant political influence and pressure on our lawmak-

ers," Gaber said. "They have evolved into a sophisticated, diverse and elaborate advocacy system that in one instance makes Missourians proud, yet in other instances creates an environment of exclusion rather than inclusion.

"We expect balanced state-wide representation that governs the MDC. Why is the MDC so fearful of a democratic republic?"