

## Missouri Amendment 1: What It Does — and Why We're Voting No

*An Act for Missouri voter guide. We start with what Amendment 1 actually does, clear up a confusion that's driving much of the debate, lay out the real choice honestly, and then explain where we come down and why. Reasonable Missourians will weigh this differently — and that's the point of putting it to a vote. Our aim is that your vote, whichever way it goes, rests on what's true.*

### The short version

Amendment 1 is on your **August 4, 2026** primary ballot. It renews an existing one-tenth of one percent (0.1%) state sales tax that funds Missouri's state parks and historic sites and the state's soil and water conservation efforts.

Up front:

- It is **not a new tax** and **not a tax increase**. It's a renewal of a tax that has been in place since 1984.
- It **expires unless voters renew it**. The tax returns to the ballot every ten years; if a majority says no, it ends. If Amendment 1 fails, the tax sunsets in 2028.
- Voters have renewed it four times — 1988, 1996, 2006, and 2016. In 2016 it passed with about 80% of the vote, carrying all 114 counties.

A "yes" continues the tax for another ten years. A "no" lets it expire.

### First, the confusion driving half the debate

Much of the online anger about "conservation spending" is real — but most of it is aimed at a **different tax** than the one on your ballot. Missouri has two separate conservation-related sales taxes, and they are constantly mixed up:

	The 1/8-cent Conservation Tax	The 1/10-cent Parks, Soils & Water Tax
<b>Passed</b>	1976	1984
<b>Funds</b>	Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) — fish, wildlife, forestry	State parks & historic sites, plus soil & water conservation for farmland
<b>On the August ballot?</b>	No	Yes — this is Amendment 1
<b>Voter renewal?</b>	None — it's permanent	Required every 10 years

	<b>The 1/8-cent Conservation Tax</b>	<b>The 1/10-cent Parks, Soils &amp; Water Tax</b>
<b>Who oversees it</b>	Appointed Conservation Commission	DNR, with annual legislative appropriation

The expense controversies making the rounds — deer and pheasant programs, feral hog trapping, urban tree-canopy grants, the vendor-payment lists tied to MDC Director Jason Summers — all belong to the **1976 MDC tax** in the left column. That tax is permanent and is **not** on your ballot. Amendment 1 is the tax in the right column.

This matters whichever way you vote: a **"no" on Amendment 1 does not touch a single dollar of MDC's budget**. It affects state parks and farmland soil-and-water programs only. If your frustration is with the Department of Conservation's spending, Amendment 1 is not the lever — that tax has no sunset and isn't up for a vote.

### What a YES vote funds

A yes continues funding, split evenly by constitutional requirement between two purposes:

- **State parks and historic sites (50%)** — acquisition, development, maintenance, and operation of Missouri's park system, which keeps admission free.
- **Soil and water conservation (50%)** — cost-share help for agricultural landowners through local soil and water conservation districts in all 114 counties, aimed at protecting Missouri farmland from erosion.

By law the money can be used "for no other purpose," and the legislature still appropriates it each year. The tax brings in about \$140 million annually and has generated more than \$772 million since 1984. These are real programs with real constituencies — the farm cost-share in particular is why groups like the Missouri Farm Bureau, the Corn Growers, and the Soybean Association support renewal.

### What a NO vote does

Be clear-eyed about both sides of it:

- **It's a tax cut.** The 0.1% isn't redirected anywhere — it stops being collected. That's about \$140 million a year that stays with Missourians.
- **The tax sunsets in 2028**, and reviving it later would require passing a new constitutional amendment — a higher bar than simply keeping it.
- **It ends the dedicated funding** for state parks and the farmland soil-and-water program. The legislature could choose to fund these another way — out of general revenue — and would likely protect the strongest pieces. But that is a choice they would have to make, not a guarantee, and no one should tell you it's automatic.

- **A no affects the whole tax**, not just any one piece. You can't vote down only the parts you might question; parks and farm conservation are on the line together.

### **The built-in voter check**

One feature sets this tax apart from almost every other tax in Missouri: it has an expiration date and must come back to you. Most taxes stay until a legislature repeals them. This one is written to return to the ballot every ten years, and dies on its own if voters don't reaffirm it. That is why it's here now — not because anyone is raising it, but because the ten-year clock came due.

This cuts against the notion that voting no is somehow radical. The legislature built in this check precisely so the people could reassess. Using it to end the tax isn't reckless — it's the mechanism doing exactly what it was designed to do.

### **Where Act for Missouri stands**

#### **We're voting no — and not for the reason you might assume.**

Our no has nothing to do with the MDC expense controversy. As explained above, that's a different, permanent tax this vote doesn't touch, and opposing Amendment 1 on that basis would be aiming at the wrong target. We won't do it.

We're voting no for a narrower and, we think, more durable reason: **tax policy this specific does not belong locked in the state constitution, and at a moment of real budget strain, spending like this should have to compete on its merits like everything else.**

Three things drive that conclusion.

**First, the proper role of government.** Parks, historic sites, and conservation are good things — but "good" isn't the test. Much of this sits closer to what communities, private citizens, and the ordinary budget should weigh than to the core duties of state government. Historic preservation is a useful illustration: some of the nation's most treasured sites — Mount Vernon, Monticello — are sustained entirely by private effort. We are not arguing the state should abandon its parks overnight. We are arguing that a permanent constitutional earmark is the wrong tool for deciding how much of this the state funds, and for how long.

**Second, the structure.** A constitution should set the framework and limits of government. It is not the right home for a recurring 0.1% sales tax earmarked to specific programs. That kind of decision belongs in statute and the annual budget, where it can be weighed and revisited as conditions change — not written into the founding document where it takes a statewide campaign to remove. (In fairness: Missouri's constitution has long carried fiscal provisions, so this is a forward-looking reform principle, not a claim that the earmark betrays some original design. We think the principle is right regardless.)

**Third, and most pressing right now, the opportunity cost.** For forty years this spending has run on autopilot — a dedicated stream, walled off from the budget fight, never forced to justify itself against roads, public safety, or tax relief. A no vote ends the autopilot. It does not necessarily end the programs; it makes them compete. And the moment they have to compete,

every dollar spent on them is plainly a dollar not spent somewhere else. That isn't a flaw in our position — it's the whole point. Missourians deserve to see the real cost of what the state funds and to weigh it against everything else the state must do.

The timing makes this urgent. The State Auditor reports that the general revenue fund peaked near \$5.8 billion in FY2023 and has been drawn down by roughly \$960 million and \$480 million of deficit spending in FY2024 and FY2025, with more expected — and that is before the full effect of recent tax changes works through. The hard budget choices are not coming someday; they are here. The question Amendment 1 puts in front of us is exactly the question the whole budget will keep asking: should this spending keep a protected lane, or earn its place like everything else?

We will be honest about what we are **not** claiming. We are not promising that the legislature will smoothly backfill every program — we can't, and if it were painless there would be no discipline in it. What we are saying is that these programs should have to earn their funding in the open, and that a popular program with a real constituency is exactly the kind that can survive that test on its merits. And we would gently add this: a tax you only ever renew "just to be safe" never actually goes away. If you believe state government should be smaller and more disciplined, the ten-year window is the moment that belief either means something or it doesn't.

### **The bottom line**

Here is the honest choice. **A yes** keeps a small, voter-controlled tax funding parks and farmland conservation, and keeps the option to revisit it in ten years. **A no** is a modest tax cut that ends the dedicated funding, forces these programs into the regular budget to compete on their merits, and makes a statement about the proper scope of government as the state heads into a tight fiscal stretch.

Act for Missouri comes down on **no** — for reasons of scope and budget discipline, not because of any controversy attached to a different tax. But this is your vote and your judgment. If you've read this far and conclude that parks and soil conservation are worth a dedicated dime on every ten dollars, that is a defensible call, and the mechanism exists precisely so you can make it. All we ask is that your vote rest on what Amendment 1 actually does — and now you know.