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## Sierra Club Celebrates Huge Victory At Church Mountain

by Wayne R. Miller

How do you defend a mountain few people have heard of and is so remote that it can't be seen from any public road?

Church Mountain, located about midway between Taum Sauk State Park and Johnson Shut-ins State Park, was the mountain in question earlier this summer.

Owned by utility company Ameren UE, Church Mtn. is managed as a wilderness area. Its vista, while not visible from any road, can be seen from a number of points within Taum Sauk State Park as well as along the Ozark Trail.

In keeping with the rugged character of the St. Francois mountain range, it has an 800-foot elevation change between its top and the valley below-ideal, in the view of the utility company Ameren, for construction of a pair of reservoirs to comprise a "pumped storage plant". Ameren's plan called for industrializing the mountaintop and damming the valley, which would drown pristine Taum Sauk Creek. John Muir would have objected; so did the Sierra Club-and we were not alone.

Before Ameren's plan became public, rumblings of it had been picked up by some conservation organizations and the Taum Sauk Coalition had come into being-described by Susan Flader of the Missouri Parks Association, it was "an ad hoc coalition of conservation groups organized to protect the natural and cultural aspects of the Taum Sauk area". Member organizations were the MPA, the Audubon Society, Missouri Coalition for the Environment, and the Sierra Club. Both our Ozark Chapter and Eastern Missouri Group Executive Committees quickly passed resolutions opposing Ameren's plan. Other groups, including the Boy Scouts, participated to some degree.

The coalition attempted to meet with Ameren executives to show them their plan's weakness, as well as the strength of conservation opposition. But that meeting was never accepted by Ameren, who went ahead and filed for federal and state permits, as reported in area newspapers on July 24. August 16 was the second meeting of the Taum Sauk Coalition; a group of EMG members met too.

The general strategy was to oppose the project by writing letters of objection to the Federal Energy Regulation Commission (FERC); to prepare to file an intervention, a step to give legal standing to the Taum Sauk Coalition; and to plan for a longer campaign to win public support and influence elected state officials.

"I was very proud," said Sierra Club representative Diane Albright, "to tell the coalition that the Sierra Club would organize a letter writing campaign, would lead

outings to take all interested to view the area, and would prepare a videotape to show the wild and scenic character of the area. These were our strengths that the other groups did not have."

A photographic expedition was rapidly undertaken, with Bob Gestel collecting video footage. I prepared "talking points" to serve as the basis of writing letters, many of which were written at the next EMG general meeting on August 27. The public comment period was set to end on September 3.

The very next weekend, Paul Stupperich led a hike to Mina Sauk Falls (our state's highest cascade, supplying imperiled Taum Sauk Creek) and a tour of the existing Ameren reservoir on Proffitt Mtn.

Meantime, editorials that strongly opposed the reservoir construction appeared in the Post-Dispatch and the Columbia Daily Tribune.

Suddenly came the day of decision, August 29. Governor Bob Holden and Attorney General Jay Nixon announced their strong opposition to the project. Only two hours later, Ameren announced that it would cancel its plan. We had won.

"I was really preparing for a long fight, said Paul Stupperich, "but Ameren miscalculated. They woke the tiger up. And how fast our politicians moved this time-now that amazes me!"

But is it over? George Behrens says, "The best use of the land would be for Ameren to donate or sell it to the state as an extension of Taum Sauk State Park."