

# Spring **FEVER**

Hunting, fishing & Outdoors Guide



April 3, 2019 | Pages 1B-12B  
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Republican



## Tri-County Friends of the NRA event raises record \$20K

Chris Lairmore and her daughter, Katie Schaning, display an Andy Thomas print of Republican presidents playing cards which was auctioned off during the Tri-County Friends of the NRA banquet held Feb. 28 at the Lions Club Den in Owensville. Joey Gross (left) was calling the auction on the print which was one of only 40 produced in Missouri specifically for NRA events. This was the 19th year for the event in Owensville and 275 NRA supporters in attendance raised a record \$20,000 to support shooting sports programs in the area through the NRA Foundation, a 501c3 non-profit which has been in existence for 26 years. Last year, 37 Friends of NRA events were held across Missouri and more than \$640,000 was awarded in NRA Foundation grants across the state. In the past 19 years, over \$100,000 has been awarded in Gasconade and adjacent counties. Funds raised at NRA Foundation like in Owensville are used strictly for shooting programs (primarily youth focused), training and education, school safety and awareness and for range development and improvement programs. Friends of NRA event dollars are not used for salaries, political action or for any legislative purposes.

PHOTOS BY DAVE MARNER

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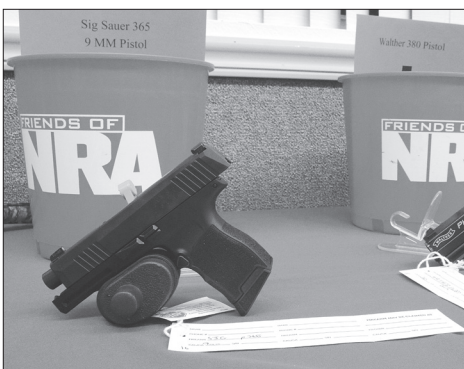
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**TIM BESANCENEZ**, a NRA field representative, holds up a painting which was being auctioned off Feb. 28 with the caveat that the winning bidder donate it to one of the veterans at the event. Prizes awarded in raffle drawings and the auctions included NRA collectible items, historic prints and various sporting good items including over 25 firearms. Besancenez and Kyle Lairmore (below) draw for one of the rifles given away through the sale of raffle tickets. Proceeds from these events support NRA Foundation grants which are typically awarded to 4H, FFA, Boy Scouts and Junior ROTC competitive shooting programs along with other church and home-school network based shooting programs, according to Lairmore. Locally, funds have been awarded to 4-H shooting sports programs and shooting range renovations at the Owensville Gun Club.



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## DRIFTWOOD OUTDOORS

# Start preparing now for a successful turkey season



by **BRANDON BUTLER**

Turkey season can't arrive soon enough. It's been hard looking at pictures of my friends on social media who have been down in Florida turkey hunting for the last month. Seasons are now opening in a bunch of southern states and the turkey photos are really piling up, making my turkey fever heat up. Thankfully, it won't be long.

Missouri's Youth Turkey Season is April 6-7, and the regular Spring Turkey Season runs April 15 – May 5. With less than a month to go, there are many preparations to be made. Most importantly, locating some birds. This is accomplished by scouting. There are those lucky folks who basically return to the same tree year after year to tag out each spring. But most of us mere mortals aren't so lucky and need to spend some time searching for this year's flock.

Longtime turkey hunter Jay Anglin is a firm believer in pre-season scouting. He credits a strong understanding of where turkeys are moving through the day as a big secret to his success.

"Listening to turkeys when they vocalize on the roost at dawn, and again when they fly up in the evening is one of the easiest ways to assess their numbers and location. This may be as simple as quietly easing your vehicle into a farm lane or pulling a safe distance off the road," Anglin said.

As Anglin says, turkey scouting doesn't

have to require long hikes into remote wilderness. You can accomplish a lot from the comfort of your vehicle.

"Observing birds with binoculars at peak activity times is also a great way to judge the potential of a given area. Specifically, it can tell you how many gobblers are present and which ones have achieved maturity," Anglin said.

While you can often observe a lot from your vehicle, there are still many advantages to taking a hike. Not only will you be able to find turkey sign, but during the magical time of early spring you might also find a shed antler or morel mushroom.

"Looking for turkey is easier in early-spring because of a lack of foliage and understory growth. Look for scratching, fresh tracks and droppings that reveal where the birds are traveling. Using maps such as Gazetteers, Google Earth and smart phone apps that are specifically tailored for hunters, like OnX Hunt Maps, allows you to mark promising locations when you find them,"

Anglin said.

Hunting wild turkeys is both challenging and rewarding. The opportunity to get out in the woods during spring and take in the wonders of nature as they begin to bud for a new year is a wonderful experience. The sound of a male turkey gobbling is in my opinion one of the most beautiful vocalizations nature has to offer, and working these birds with calls is utterly intoxicating. Knowing where to be opening morning, and being ready to go increases your chances of success.

While the use of calls is the favored way of targeting turkeys, it is not the only way. Turkeys, like deer, can sometimes be patterned. If a hunter is knowledgeable about roosting and feeding areas of a specific turkey or flock of turkeys, the hunter may be able to set up on a travel route. This tactic worked for me last year. After watching a group of turkeys on numerous occasions

See **Driftwood**, Page 5B

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**MISSOURI'S ENDANGERED** prairie chickens are diminishing to very low numbers despite decades of conservation efforts to boost them and other declining grassland species. A lack of enough large, connected grasslands is the cause.

## MDC finding fewer endangered prairie chickens despite conservation efforts

BY BILL GRAHAM

Mo. Dept. of Conservation

KANSAS CITY, Mo. – The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) reports that Missouri's endangered prairie-chickens have dwindled to dangerously low numbers despite decades of conservation efforts. A bird once sustained on vast open grasslands now only has relatively small islands of usable habitat for nesting, feeding, and protection from predators and weather. That's not enough for prairie-chickens, and perhaps for many other grassland species.

According to MDC, a notable historic prairie-chicken population at the Taberville Prairie Conservation Area in St. Clair County, north of El Dorado Springs, is close to extirpation, which means a species ceases to exist in a geographic area. Also, restoration efforts at the nearby Wah' Kon-Tah Prairie, including releasing prairie-chickens trapped in Kansas, have not achieved a self-sustaining population.

Prairie-chickens trapped in Nebraska and released at Dunn Ranch in Harrison County in northwest Missouri, and in a neighboring Iowa County, between 2013-2017, are showing resiliency from a low of only 3 birds in 2012. That's thanks to conservation partnerships between MDC, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, private landowners, The Nature Conservancy, and other public agencies in the Grand River Grasslands in northwest Missouri. Long-term success depends on hard work in both states.

But still, biologists are not optimistic about the future in Missouri for a bird that's an emblem of native grasslands, one as iconic as big bluestem grasses or pale purple coneflowers swaying in the wind.

"We've learned how to provide excellent habitat for prairie-chickens," said Max Alleger, grassland biologist for MDC. "But there is still not enough of this habitat across Missouri."

In 2018, MDC biologists counted only six males using the leks, or spring mating grounds, at Taberville Prairie, and only two were observed on a lek at Wah' Kon-Tah. The count was 33 males at leks on or near The Nature Conservancy's Dunn Ranch. Females are more difficult to count but their numbers are generally equal to males. Biologists will watch the leks again this spring.

### About the birds

Prairie-chickens, a member of the grouse family, are known for their

See **Prairie Chicken**, Page 9B

### Driftwood from page 4B

during my many preseason scouting trips, I decided to set up on a particular field edge in hopes of catching a turkey on his way from his roost to the field he was feeding in. I used only a single hen decoy and called

very little. The plan came together when the double-bearded gobbler ventured too close to my lone hen. See you down the trail...





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## MWA race weekend

Southern Gasconade Count resident "Wild Bill" Miles (in front, on right) and Jeff "Boot" Barrow of Columbia clear a gate during their Missouri Whitewater Association OC-2 men's expert slalom race March 24 on the St. Francis River. Miles and Barrow, whose uncle the late Loyd Barrow taught and coached at Owensville High School in the early 1930s, finished third. Missouri Whitewater Association member Bill "Bilbo" Eades looks on (below) as Miles puts in the plug for the Earth's Classroom "Bourbeuse Bluebell" canoe race on Saturday, April 13. Eades had donated an entry fee into the race for the MWA paddler's and volunteer raffle drawings at the end of the race weekend. The event begins at the Tea Access at 10 a.m. and ends at the Mill Rock Access. Entry information is found at [www.earthclassroom.org](http://www.earthclassroom.org). Willow Miles (bottom, on left) and fellow teenage racers enjoy the warm weather after the races concluded. Willow, shown dropping into the "Big Drop" rapid (middle, on right), earned a second-place finish in the K1 Men's Junior kayak division in racing held March 23. "Wyoming Mike" Warren congratulates Bill Miles (bottom, right) for earning five medals over the weekend.

PHOTOS BY DAVE MARNER





PHOTO (ABOVE) BY JOHN NIEBLING WITH THE MISSOURI WHITEWATER ASSOCIATION



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## MDC forecasts challenging spring turkey hunting season

BY JOE JEREK

Mo. Dept. of Conservation

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. – Missouri turkey hunters can expect a challenging spring season according to the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC). The spring turkey hunting season starts with a youth-only weekend April 6-7. The regular spring season runs April 15 through May 5.

Although the good hatches of 2011, 2012, and 2014 helped bolster turkey numbers in much of Missouri from a low point during the late 2000s, poor production in recent years will have an adverse effect on the 2019 spring turkey season.

“A great deal of what makes for a good spring turkey season depends on the hatch two years prior because it affects the number of two-year-old gobblers on the landscape,” MDC Turkey Biologist Jason Isabelle said. “These young gobblers are not associated with hens as often as older, dominate birds and are more likely to respond to hunters’ calls.”

Unfortunately, poor production throughout the state during 2017 will result in fewer two-year-old gobblers during this year’s spring hunting season. Isabelle added that poor production in 2016 and last year will also contribute to this year’s challenging conditions.

“We’ve had three years of very poor production,” said Isabelle. “When that happens, you’re going to see the effects on turkey harvest for several years until production and turkey numbers rebound.”

Considering the prospects for the 2019 spring season, hunters should be prepared to put in a bit more effort to be successful this year.

“When turkey numbers are down, it becomes even more important to do your homework,” said Isabelle. “Hunters should get out to their hunting areas as much as possible before the season to listen for birds gobbling at daybreak.”

Isabelle noted that it gives hunters an advantage to know where turkeys are spending most of their time after they fly down.

“Using binoculars to spot turkeys feeding in open areas or looking for signs of where turkeys have been feeding in the timber can help hunters be in the right area when the hunting season gets here,” he said.

Although the prospects for this year’s spring season aren’t encouraging, this isn’t the first time poor turkey production has reduced turkey numbers in Missouri. After reaching a population peak in the early-to-mid 2000s, Missouri’s turkey population experienced four years of poor production from 2007–2010, causing the population to decline. However, Isabelle noted that turkey numbers rebounded following several years

of improved production.

“In much of the state, production rebounded in 2011, 2012, and 2014,” said Isabelle. “As a result, turkey numbers increased, and hunters generally had better hunting seasons in the years that followed. The variability of turkey production can result in wide fluctuations in turkey numbers.”

### Get more information

Get detailed information on spring turkey hunting from MDC’s 2019 Spring Turkey Hunting Regulations and Information booklet, available from MDC offices and nature centers, other places where permits are sold, and online at [huntfish.mdc.mo.gov/spring-turkey-hunting-regulations-and-](http://huntfish.mdc.mo.gov/spring-turkey-hunting-regulations-and-)

information.

For more information about spring turkey hunting, visit MDC’s website at [huntfish.mdc.mo.gov/hunting-trapping/species/turkey](http://huntfish.mdc.mo.gov/hunting-trapping/species/turkey)

### Hunter safety

See **Turkey**, Page 11B

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## Prairie Chicken from page 5B

spring mating rituals on leks, also called booming grounds. The “booming” comes from a sound males make as they puff out the orange pouches on their throats while stomping their feet and fanning their feathers in a dance to attract females.

Greater prairie-chickens are the species of grassland grouse native to Missouri. They numbered in the hundreds of thousands across open prairies as the 1800s began. A diverse mixture of grasses, wildflowers, and shrubs provided food and shelter. That habitat helped prairie-chickens survive and produce lots of young to overcome high mortality rates from predators, nest predation, and weather events.

### What happened

But the prairies were converted to farms and towns. Less than one-tenth of one percent of the state’s original prairie remains. The remaining unplowed prairie parcels are small remnants, unconnected islands in a greatly changed landscape. Non-native pasture grasses such as smooth brome, timothy, and red top when interspersed with crop lands can also support prairie-chickens. Yet even those favorable grasslands are relatively scarce and scattered on Missouri’s landscape today.

Prairie-chickens have survived far beyond the elk and bison that also roamed and grazed on the state’s grasslands until the 1800s. Yet their decline has been steady. In the World War II era, estimates of the state’s prairie-chicken population ranged only from 5,000 to 13,000 birds in scattered flocks. By 1998, the tally was estimated at 1,000 birds. They dropped to 200 birds by 2006. Today, less than 100 remain and those birds are imperiled.

During the decline, prairie-chickens held on near prairie remnants. But those remnants became pockets of usable habitat for a bird that can sometimes range for several miles seeking food and shelter. With such a great distance between populations, there were no neighboring birds to replenish populations if a significant predator or weather event decimated a flock in a local grassland.

### Impacts to other species

The ecological challenge is not limited to a high-profile species like prairie-chickens. Other species of grassland birds are also declining in alarming trends. Surveys show that even meadowlarks, oft-seen with their bright yellow breast feathers as they trill atop fence posts in summer, are declining in numbers.

MDC’s efforts to restore prairie-chickens and boost all grassland plant and animal species has been ongoing for decades. Those efforts intensified in recent years as prairie-chicken numbers dropped sharply. Birds were trapped in western states and released in core areas. Some released birds

were outfitted with small transmitters so biologists could track their habitat preferences.

### What it takes

Research showed the varied mix of native grasses and wildflowers that prairie-chickens preferred for nesting, brood rearing, and over wintering. They like high ridges with grass low enough for them to see over but tall enough to hide them from predators. Variety in vegetation helps. They need heavier cover for nesting, more open areas for brood rearing, and the medium vegetation heights for feeding and resting. Plants that harbor insects and seeds they feed upon are essential. Controlled and limited grazing by livestock mimics buffalo and elk, providing variety in vegetation height and opening travel lanes.

MDC and conservation partners tailored habitat management on public and private prairies to help prairie-chickens. Some private landowners assisted by utilizing grants or cost-share programs to incorporate favorable grassland management, or to remove trees that harbor predators and inhibit prairie-chicken movement.

### What’s ahead

Still, in the last two decades, several longtime flocks in north, west central, and southwest Missouri completely vanished from old strongholds. MDC has learned much about what land use practices help prairie-chickens, and what uses are detrimental. But the scope of good habitat establishment has not been large enough to stem declines. Biologists estimate at least a 10,000-acre core area is needed to sustain prairie chickens. The core area can include crops and cattle grazing pastures that are managed in ways not detrimental to prairie-chickens. But prairie-chickens would likely need to be trapped in western states and released once a decade to maintain genetic diversity in the core area.

Currently, there are no plans to conduct more trapping of prairie-chickens in the West and releasing them in Missouri unless sufficient habitat is there to sustain them.

MDC will continue to work with private landowners to restore functioning grassland ecosystems, regardless of the success or loss of prairie-chickens. Many other important prairie species remain to be preserved, such as the regal fritillary butterfly and the Mead’s milkweed wildflower. Healthy native and non-native grasslands benefit agriculture, fisheries, and wildlife.

Prairie is an important part of Missouri’s natural and cultural heritage. MDC and conservation partners are committed to saving and restoring prairie species, and making native grassland acreages both large and small an important part of the state’s future.

For more information on prairie chickens in Missouri, go to [mdc.mo.gov](http://mdc.mo.gov).



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## OUTDOORS IN THE OZARKS

### Big fish, big risk

In my new book "Recollections of an Old-Fashioned Angler" I begin by writing about going trotlining on the river with my dad. I was only six or seven years old and I sat there in the old wooden johnboat watching him run that line, which was lunging in his hands. Then I caught a glimpse of that huge fish coming up from the depths with a tremendous struggle, looking bigger than I was in that dim light.

The story of that night, which eventually was featured in the 'Believe it or Not' section of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, can be read in the book when it comes out this summer, but it is too long to tell here.

Our quarry was never anything but big, hefty flathead catfish. The river had no channel catfish, but my grandfather said they were too small to interest him anyway. To me, when I began floating the river and camping

on gravel bars, setting my own trotlines at the age of 13 or so, any catfish above ten pounds was fine. To Dad and Grandpa, a flathead, also known as a yellow cat, needed to be at least 25 pounds to be called adequate.

But when you are as young as I was, setting and running those weighted lines that often lay across the bottom of 15-foot depths could be dangerous.

Grandpa and Dad, as they trained me in all the ways of a riverman, stressed the danger of trotlines. Grandpa told me of several men who had drowned when they became hooked or entangled in a weighted trotline after falling overboard or being pulled from the boat after losing their balance.



by **LARRY DABLEMONT**

Because of that Dad wanted me to wear a sheathed knife on my belt always. "If you get pulled over by a hook on a weighted line," he told me, "hold that knife as tight as you can and cut the line. If you drop the knife, you'll drown." Because of that, I actually wore two on my belt.

About a year ago I read an article about trotlining by a media specialist who had never been trotlining in his entire life. It never mentioned the things you learn by doing what you write about. It said exactly what a hundred such articles about the subject had said in the past. Few outdoor writers who write about trotlining know much about it if they haven't actually done it, and in this day and time, most writers haven't done much of what they write about.

In high school, I spent nights trotlining several holes of the Big Piney not far from my home, at the age of 13 or 14, trying hard to catch a bigger flathead catfish than Grandpa had taken. Of course I never did, he caught some over 70 pounds. It was easy for me to set trotlines in the river because Mrs. Kelly kept one of our johnboats on the river below her farm, and several big deep

eddies were nearby. When I was 16 years old, Roy Wayne Morton and I drove down to the Sweet Potato Eddy and used her boat to set a couple of trotlines in the deep water beneath the bluff, baited with live chubs and sunfish we had seined earlier in the evening.

About 11 o'clock that night, we ran the line. About halfway across the eddy a hook was hung on something, likely a big rock. In the dim light of a lantern in the boat and a carbide headlamp on my forehead, I stood up and began to yank on the line, pulling it for all I was worth. It wouldn't give... until it did; and I stumbled backward, caught my balance briefly in the rocking boat and then pitched forward right out into the cool water, still clutching the line. A hook, sharp as the tip of a locust thorn, caught my jeans and bore into my thigh, instantly pulling me under.

I suppose I have never been that scared in all my life, but I remembered what I had been taught, and with that knife I cut the stagion line attached to the hook. Roy told me that even though I had been pulled under,

See **Dablemont**, Page 12B

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### 2019 Event Schedule

**50 Bird Trap Derby—Mondays, 6:00PM, April 8 to Oct. 7**

NO Derby on May 27 & Sept. 2 • Field Captain: Glenn Oder 573-301-6475

**Trap Practice—Tuesday, 4:00PM** ~ Field Captain: Glenn Oder 573-301-6475

**Skeet Practice—Thursday, 4:00PM** ~ Field Captain: John Kansteiner 315-651-0725

(Dates may be rescheduled due to weather) No practice on National Holidays or during the Hunting Season and Gasconade County Fair weeks.

**Sporting Clays: 9AM-2PM**

Field Captain: Shane Achterberg 573-263-0021

Sunday, April 7  
Sunday, June 2  
Sunday, June 30  
Sunday, Aug. 4  
Sunday, Sept. 8  
Sunday, Oct. 6

**Shotgun Triathlon: 9AM-2PM**

Sunday, May 5  
Sunday, Oct. 27

**Work Days**

Sat. & Sun., April 27 & 28;  
Volunteers needed and appreciated.

**Board Meetings @ 6PM**

Thursday, April 11  
Thursday, June 27  
Thursday, Sept. 19  
Thursday, Nov. 14

**CMP vintage Rifle, M1 Garand**

**& Carbine** (Field Captain, Jim Miller 636-583-8613):

**Saturday, March 30 ~**

Appreciation and awards day

Sunday, April 14\*

Sunday, May 19\*

Sunday, June 9\*

Sunday, Aug. 18\*

Sunday, Sept. 15\*

Sunday, Oct. 6\*

\*M1 for Vets Presentation at 08:00 AM;

Field Captain: John Colombo 314-604-3005

**ARA Rim Fire Bench Rest Dates: ;**

Sign up 8AM Start 9AM; Field Captain: Dennis Sallin 573-619-4578

Saturday, April 13

Sat. & Sun., June 1 & 2

Saturday, July 27

Sat. & Sun., Aug. 24 & 25

Sat. & Sun., Sept. 21 & 22

Saturday, Oct. 12

President: Glenn Oder 573-764-3220

Vice Pres.: Jim Laimore 573-619-5696

Secretary/Treas: Linda Thiedke

**CHECK OUR WEB SITE FOR UPDATES: www.OwensvilleGunClub.org**

NOTE: The Club requests that members who have moved or changed their mailing address to please notify the club by mail at: OGC, PO Box 518, Owensville, MO 65066



**LEARN MORE** about turkey hunting in Missouri through MDC's free 2019 Spring Turkey Hunting Regulations and Information booklet, available where permits are sold.

## *Turkey from page 8B*

Isabelle stressed that hunters can easily avoid the main cause of turkey-hunting incidents —mistaking or being mistaken by another hunter for wild game.

“Each year, most turkey hunting incidents typically involve hunters who fail to positively identify their targets,” said Isabelle. “Unless you are absolutely certain that what you’re looking at is a wild turkey, remember that any movement you see or any sounds you hear while you’re hunting could be another hunter.”

He also advised hunters to wear some hunter-orange clothing when moving through the woods or fields, particularly when hunting public land.

“Bringing along an orange hat is an easy way to stay safe”, said Isabelle. “Wear it when you’re moving and switch it for your camouflaged hat when you sit down to work a bird.”

“If you’re hunting with someone else and you split up, be certain you know where your hunting partner will be at all times,” he advised.

### **Brag a bit**

MDC hunting certificates are great ways to memorialize a hunter’s first turkey harvest. To create free MDC commemorative certificates, go online to [huntfish.mdc.mo.gov/hunting-trapping/trophies-certificates/certificates](http://huntfish.mdc.mo.gov/hunting-trapping/trophies-certificates/certificates).

Hunters can share photos of their harvests through MDC’s Hunting Bragging Board by using #mdcbragboard when posting pictures to their social media accounts. Learn more at [mdc.mo.gov/huntingbragboard](http://mdc.mo.gov/huntingbragboard).

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*Dabelmont from page 10B*

I had held on to the edge of the boat with my left hand. It didn't take me long to get back in the boat and cut the hook out. I was so shocked it didn't even hurt. I have taken lots of folks on trotlining trips since then, but I never allowed anyone

to run a line unless they had a good knife on their belt and the training about what to use it for.

Since that night there have been lots of big flatheads hooked and landed from my boat, many between 40 and 50 pounds. Sometime this summer I will tell you about some of them. But I will end this with a warning... do not ever go trotlining in a canoe or boat that you can tip over. The only outdoor

writers who will tell you that are those that have been there and done that, and perhaps have lived through the terror I experienced that night in 1963, many many catfish ago.

If you want to contact me, or get one of our spring magazines, just call our office at 417-777-5227 or e-mail me at [lightninridge47@gmail.com](mailto:lightninridge47@gmail.com). Or write to me at Lightnin' Ridge Publishing, Box 22, Bolivar, Mo. 65613.

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