

# **Old Jamestown Association Statement on Florissant Karst Preservation District**

MARCH 3, 2009

PUBLIC FORUM STATEMENT

ST. LOUIS COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

Ken Smith

I am speaking tonight as President of The Old Jamestown Association.

Pending final action at tonight's meeting, I wish to commend St. Louis County for enacting environmental legislation to preserve the unique geological karst formations located in North St. Louis County. This is truly environmental legislation for which the County will be proud that future generations will benefit.

Karst geology is fragile, but relatively common in many parts of the world. It is characterized by underground rivers, caves, springs, losing streams, voids, and fissures. All of these conditions are the result of millions of years of water dissolving limestone formations that eventually result in surface collapse and ultimately, visible sinkholes on the surface.

This area, often called the "Florissant karst" is well known by geologists worldwide and was recognized at the 2007 National Cave and Karst Management Symposium held in St. Louis. The four square mile area is regarded as self-draining, since all storm water runoff discharges directly into sinkholes and then to the network of underground water aquifers. The "Florissant karst" is particularly recognized for the intense density of deep, steep sided sinkholes and although millions of years in geological formation, and still changing, the general topographical appearance of the area remains unchanged.

The earliest written record of the area dates back more than 200 years to 1797 when the "sinkhole area" was a part of the original Patterson Settlement that was "the first successful English speaking settlement in Spanish Territory". Life in the "sinkhole area" was sparse and settlers subsisted by hunting, trapping, digging ginseng roots, and harvesting fencepost timber out of the sinkholes.

The opportunity today, to still experience such a large, essentially undisturbed, environmentally unique area can be largely attributed to the planning and zoning management in the past 25 years. Drafters of the 1987 Old Jamestown Community Area Study recognized the fragile environmental characteristics of the karst geology and included protective provisions in the final document. Since that time, through several cycles of administration, the Department of Planning staff, supported by the Planning Commissioners, has managed to adhere to the recommendations of the Community Area Study, sometimes in spite of the undue pressure by other interests.

Our special thanks to Councilman Mike O'Mara for his total support going back to 2001, and the support of former councilman Jim O'Mara extending back to the initial concept of the project.

Jim Van Dike, of the Missouri Department of Natural Resources has provided invaluable support services since 1987

Director of Planning Glenn Powers and his staff, particularly Gail Choate and Debi Salberg have written a document of which to be proud, and one that could well become a model for other communities.