

Head outdoors on MDC public lands on Friday after Thanksgiving

Here's a fresh-air option for the Friday after Thanksgiving – head outdoors. If you need a break from the hubbub or need to walk off some turkey dinner trimmings, the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) offers forest, prairies, woodlands, and wetlands for the public to visit.

Missouri's quail hunters, duck hunters, and archery deer hunters have long headed outdoors during the Thanksgiving holiday weekend. Families that gather for turkey dinner also often share hunting traditions. But a growing tradition in recent years is hikers, birders, and wildlife watchers heading afield, too.

The outdoor gear retailer, REI Co-op, made a public pitch by creating an #OptOutside promotion for the Friday after Thanksgiving. REI gives their employees paid time off on that Friday to enjoy time with family and the outdoors. The company argues that the program is worthy because nature benefits people. That vibe has been picked up by other private and public outdoor advocates.

“Being outside in nature has such positive benefits for both kids and families, including increasing physical activity and lowering stress levels,” says MDC Director Sara Parker Pauley. “Missouri has so many incredible places to discover nature, including walking trails, fishing spots, and wildlife-watching areas, that are all free, so we hope families will #OptOutside the day after Thanksgiving to spend time together out in nature making memories.”

Some MDC areas with forest habitat have hiking trails or service roads for public access. Wildlife such as deer and wild turkeys are sometimes more easily spotted in a season without foliage on trees and shrubs. MDC wetland areas attract migrating flocks of ducks and geese during early winter. Bald eagles and trumpeter swans are often seen at wetlands, too.

To find a conservation area near you for a day after Thanksgiving outdoors, including in urban areas, visit <https://nature.mdc.mo.gov/discover-nature/places>.