

Tennessee Sierran

SIERRA
CLUB
TENNESSEE CHAPTER

Bimonthly Newsletter of the Tennessee Chapter of the Sierra Club

Volume 59, Number 3 — May/June 2026



A Dangerous and Unprecedented Attack on Science

Sierrans Stand Up for Science (Vince Cianciolo pictured)

**STAND UP
FOR SCIENCE™**

Masthead: a pool on Clear Creek in Norris, Tennessee. Masthead and cover photos by Todd Waterman.

Explore, Enjoy, and Protect

From Tennessee Chair JoAnn McIntosh

Every Day is Earth Day



Every Day is Earth Day — I don't know who first made this claim, but I do remember when it first became a guiding principle in my life.

Story time: April 22, 1970, was the first Earth Day, and I was a high school student in Champaign, Illinois. The twin cities of Champaign-Urbana are home of the University of Illinois, a land-grant university founded in 1867, and in 1970, the U of I hosted an Earth Day "teach-in." The public was invited. This invitation extended to the public schools, where students were given the day off from regular studies to go to the U of I campus and learn about, and take action on, environmental crises. At the time, pollution in the United States was profuse and unchecked — for instance, 1969 had seen a tragic oil spill off the coast of Santa Barbara, California. More commonplace was the dumping of industrial waste and sewage into waterways,

leading to another (yes) fire in the Cuyahoga River at Cleveland, Ohio, severely compromising the health of the Great Lakes. Pesticides, including DDT, were unregulated, as were vehicle emissions. Our environment was being poisoned for the sake of profit and "progress" — but this was no longer going unnoticed by American voters. By the end of 1969, Congress and President Nixon had created the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). By the end of 1970, we had the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). New environmental organizations were popping up all over the country, and California-based Sierra Club experienced dramatic growth, extending into eastern states — including Illinois.

I became a Sierra Club member because I attended the first Earth Day in 1970. That experience changed my life, and continues to do so on a daily basis. I wish I could say that, 50-plus years later, the nation's environmental crises have been eliminated or averted, but I've learned that taking action to protect our environment is a life-long commitment. There are too many people who purposefully try to disconnect from the natural world, who don't understand their dependence on it — this is as true now as it was in the 1960s. But we also know better now — we have more history to rebut the naysayers' claims. There is a wealth of knowledge and understanding that recent rollbacks on environmental policies are not in the public interest, and the public can make this clear at the polls. WE can make this clear.

In the meantime, I've resigned myself to facing some losses. This morning, I watched the federal Endangered Species Committee unanimously vote to exempt new oil and gas drilling in the Gulf of Mexico/America from rules in the Endangered Species Act. Nicknamed the "God Squad" due to its power to cause species extinction, this committee has met only three times in its nearly 50-year history, and had only one previous ruling survive legal challenges. Today's ruling was a first in citing national security as the reason for the exemption. Sierra Club and other environmental organizations will be challenging this decision.

But in the win column: last week, our Replant Clarksville group helped two nine- and 10-year old Girl Scouts finish the requirements to make their elementary school a Tree Campus USA. And our Sierra folks got both the City and County mayors to officially recognize April as Earth Month in our community. And for No Kings Day 3, our 600 waving, chanting, sign-carrying protesters got a lot more thumbs up than middle fingers from passing drivers.

Every Day is Earth Day. And in America, Every Day is No Kings Day, too. WE can make this clear.

Contact JoAnn at mcijoann@gmail.com

The Backbone of Our Chapter's Power and Flexibility

by Mac Post, TN Chapter Fundraising Team Volunteer

Help protect Tennessee's environment every month. Monthly donors strengthen our work by ensuring we can plan in advance, continue our work without pause, and take powerful steps to educate and empower communities on the climate crisis and our mission to create a safe, just, and healthy environment.

When you join our Circle of Monthly Givers, you join me and other Tennesseans that are deepening their commitment with monthly giving. As little as \$10/month (30¢ cents per day) goes a long way towards providing steady income that empowers our staff and volunteers to make progress towards a sustainable future where wild lands and waterways are protected; our biodiverse wildlife thrives; energy that powers homes, businesses, and transportation is provided from clean, renewable resources; and everyone benefits from clean air, soil, and water.

Joining our growing Circle of Monthly Donors is simple. You connect to the secure webpage with complete directions by pressing the "Become a Monthly Donor" button on the Chapter's webpage at bit.ly/TNSC-join-monthly. Have your credit card or bank account information handy.

The Tennessee Chapter is stronger than ever before and becoming more effective because we have the flexibility to fight any environmental battle at any time, from county and municipal issues to statewide legislation. Monthly donors are the backbone of that power and flexibility. Please join our monthly donor circle now and don't go a month without working for Tennessee's environment.

Contact Mac at mpost3116@gmail.com

The Tennes-Sierran

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May Issue of the Chapter E-Newsletter by May 2

June issue of the Chapter E-Newsletter by May 30

July/August Issue of *The Tennes-Sierran* by May 31

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From Cynthia Willett New Chapter Conservation Chair



First off, belatedly, I'd like to thank the members of the Tennessee Chapter of Sierra Club, and especially the Executive Committee members for having faith in me to represent them as the Conservation Committee Chair. Based on my very limited bio, I didn't expect to be elected. After all, I don't have any formal environmental education as the other nominees had. I was a little intimidated by the position as I was getting started. I am grateful that I was elected.

I have been reading the *TennesSier-ran* for years and both appreciated and recognized the depth of conservation issues these articles explored. I later joined one of the subcommittees and started learning how much more there is to learn, and it draws you in: now you're even more a part of the green movement. It is exciting to be learning what all the subcommittees are working on and how they all work together. It's actually inspiring to see how much interaction there is among the subcommittees.

Through this position I have come to understand just how blessed we are that we have the very well qualified, passionate, and hard-working subcommittee chairs who are making a real difference in Tennessee. Most of the subcommittee chairs are degreed in environmental sciences and several are university professors. I have learned much about the hours and years they have dedicated to conserving and preserving our Tennessee environment.

I'd like to highlight that the six subcommittees are active year-round. I have been truly inspired by the knowledge and dedication of each of these leaders, and other committee members.

The **Energy Committee** is focusing this year on education about and on expanding the legality and the use of plug-in solar (also known as balcony solar) in Tennessee. Joe Schiller, the chair of the committee, has presented information and some quite affordable options to get started, along with pros and cons. I'm sure you'll see information published in months to come.

The **Forests and Public Lands Committee**, led by Davis Mounger, has been documenting for over a decade the tree canopy of Tennessee forests, regrowth after clear cutting (harvesting), and the revenue provided from forestry management. The goals here are: show how different management practices affect the forest; highlight practices that maintain the biodiversity of the forest; encourage the greatest profit when it is appropriate to harvest timber; and identify how the state forestry harvests are valued at sale versus other similar sales in other states.

Kent Minault, as chair of the **Transportation Committee**, has elevated the status of electric vehicles in Tennessee. This committee has worked to ensure public charging stations are situated throughout the state in order to eliminate "range anxiety" for Tennessee drivers of electric vehicles. His committee is also looking at ways traffic congestion can be reduced other than just by adding more lanes and more roads. This would include bus rapid transit with improved schedules, and hopefully train transportation being extended into and through Tennessee.

The **Land Management Committee**, led by Virginia Dale, continues to promote the Homegrown National Park initiative, including native plants, and is also working to educate everyone on the advantages of agri-voltaics.

Axel Ringe heads the **Water Committee** with these important goals: monitor relevant legislation throughout the General Assembly session and coordinate advocacy for good bills and, of course, against bad bills; advocate with the TVA Coal Ash Working Group for the safe disposition of TVA's active and legacy coal ash deposits; comment on relevant National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) and Alteration Resource Alteration Permit (ARAP) drafts; and participate in public discussions of proposed water-related rulemaking by the Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC).

The **Solid Waste and Mining Committee**, led by Dan Firth, will continue to hold the Waste to Jobs Act as a priority, and is now looking to build a coalition to ensure testing for PFAS (aka "forever chemicals") from wastewater and in biosolids which are used as fertilizers.

We have a bi-weekly conservation roundup call that is an opportunity to hear what the committees have going on, what local or regional action is happening, and how we can make a difference. Find info on the Chapter website to start hearing more about what volunteers are busy working on, and how to get involved.

www.sierraclub.org/tennessee/conservation-issues-committees
Contact Cynthia at cwforearth@gmail.com

Hawkins County Rejects Crypto Mining Center!

by Joanne Irvin, CareNET Regional Conservation Committee



The Hawkins County Commissioners and Mayor DeWitte were to meet at the Hawkins County Courthouse February 23 at 6:00 pm. By 5:30 pm, the sitting area in front of the bar was packed, with standing room only. On the evening's agenda was a new resolution calling for a vote to rescind an earlier September 2025 vote of the County Powers Act which banned all data and crypto mining centers from opening facilities in Hawkins County.

Last year we had learned that Exotic Ridge Crypto Mining Center had been quietly buying property next to a fracking processing plant in Bulls Gap, applying for a permit from the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC), and beginning to build a center.

Bulls Gap citizens were outraged, commissioners were contacted, a resolution was written and sponsored, letters of complaint were sent to TDEC, a public meeting was held. At the County Commissioner's meeting, a resolution was voted on and passed 12-2 banning all data and crypto mining centers from Hawkins County. The citizens left the meeting relieved and feeling that they were protected. But TDEC approved the permit, so the public meeting was of little import. Meanwhile, Exotic Ridge began a charm offensive. They had meetings with office holders, bought team uniforms for local teams, attended events. Word had spread that a resolution about Exotic Ridge would be on the County Commissioners' agenda for January, but a snowstorm hit and the meeting was canceled until February.

On February 23, the fire marshal herded the overflow crowd to a room upstairs with a video and audio link to the meeting. Mayor DeWitte made a few announcements and stated that he wished to read a statement. It would also be published in the *Rogersville Review* later in the week. The article was written by him to answer rumors, innuendo and outright charges by Hawkins County citizens about his dealings with Exotic Ridge. He denied any bribes, deals and underhandedness. He stated he had not intentionally obfuscated the truth as Attorney Jessee implied, nor did he lie. He went on to state that Hawkins County needed steady leadership and the Commissioners must make decisions that were legal, not necessarily popular. Exotic Ridge had bought property and obtained permits and he did not feel we could arbitrarily deny them the opportunity to do business in Hawkins County simply because we did not like the business they ran. And at the Executive Session that was called to write a new resolution, he spoke of complaints made by Attorney Crystal Jessee, who had written about her concerns on Facebook. He reminded us that Hawkins County did not have any zoning laws.

And then he opened up the meeting for citizens who had requested time to speak. About ten people spoke, the majority against Exotic Ridge. A young mother spoke passionately about the health effects of constant noise over 40 decibels on children (Exotic Ridge will run at 80+ dB 24/7). She addressed both the commissioners and the Exotic Ridge CEO when she asked, "Would you want to raise your children near that center?" And she reminded Will Dougherty, CEO of Exotic Ridge, that when asked that question at an earlier meeting he had quietly said "No." Ms. Atkins' husband and three children were in attendance and she pointed them out to the commissioners and to Mr. Dougherty. "Aren't my children as deserving of a healthy environment?" Ms. Atkins exceeded her time limit, but Mayor DeWitte asked her to continue. She was enthusiastically applauded.

The commissioners were asked if an environmental study had been done. There are 12 endangered species in Hawkins County, two of them in serious danger of extinction. The mayor said environmental studies were done by the state, but one had not been done at the Exotic Ridge site. Crystal Jessee rebutted some of the Mayor's statements and there was some debate between them, which went unresolved.

Dougherty, Exotic Ridge's CEO, reminded everyone that the center would provide their own water and electricity — the generators would run on Ethane from the fracking processing center — and that they would try to mitigate the noise through strategic plantings. And then his tone changed and he reminded the commissioners that all his business dealings were legal, and if they arbitrarily excluded his business from the county, there would be legal action taken.

Mayor DeWitte asked Commissioner Clonce to read the resolution. Mr. Clonce agreed but asked to speak to the audience beforehand. "I have been asked to read this resolution and I will. I am doing it because I feel (continued on page 6)

Sierrans Stand Up for Science

On March 7, Sierra Club members and allies gathered across Tennessee for the Stand Up for Science rallies. From Knoxville to Nashville, scientists, advocates and volunteers raised their voices in defense of evidence-based policy, environmental protection and the research that underpins it all. Edited speeches by Sierra Club members are below. Full remarks: <https://bit.ly/SCTN-Science2026>

by Vince Cianciolo, Harvey Broome Group

I'm a retired nuclear physicist and I'm speaking today on behalf of the Harvey Broome Group of the Sierra Club, which is co-hosting this event.

The Sierra Club's mission is to explore, enjoy, and protect the wild places of the earth. Competing priorities for natural resources make the "protect" part of the mission difficult under the best of circumstances. Eliminating funding for climate research, making climate databases unavailable, disabling climate satellites, and the latest insult — rescinding the EPA's power to regulate greenhouse gases — all make it much, much harder.

I've been active in the Sierra Club for about a year now, but I've been a scientist all my life. It is the core of my being, and I take the attacks on science by the Trump administration very personally.

The Union of Concerned Scientists has documented close to 500 attacks on science by the current Trump administration in just its first year. Few, if any, research efforts have made it through unscathed, but anything having to do with gender, race, vaccines, the environment in general, and climate in particular have come under concentrated fire. This is not normal. To put this unprecedented assault in context, there were, quote "only" 207 attacks on science during Trump's entire first term. Still egregious, but a rate ten times lower. The rate under George W. Bush was forty times lower, under Obama more than 200 times lower, and under Biden more than a thousand times lower.

I've seen the effects of these attacks up close and personal. I have friends whose research programs have been canceled. Others who have felt compelled to scrub grant applications to remove any mention of the contributions their research makes towards — God forbid — understanding climate change, improving climate resiliency, or welcoming anyone other than white males into the scientific community.

Science establishes a process to systematically question received wisdom, separating truth from belief, which are so often not the same thing. As Neil deGrasse Tyson put it, "To be scientifically literate is to empower yourself to know when others are full of shit." In a functioning democracy we can, and will, debate opinions and policies. But those opinions and policies must be based on facts, facts that are so often revealed by sci-

ence, or else such debate is meaningless theater. This is why science is a cornerstone of our democracy. And I think this is the real reason Trump is attacking science. For someone who has turned lying into a perverse art form, exposure to the truth must be very threatening.

I think a big reason the attacks have had some success is that scientific opinion changes as new results come in, making communication difficult. This is the nature of the scientific process, and the reason it is so successful — by constantly checking results, incorrect ideas are eventually exposed. But for anyone not used to it, this comes off as wishy-washy. Simple, straightforward, but wrong can be much more appealing than "it depends." It doesn't help that scientific results are often counter to our common sense. And these days, more so than in the past, science is telling us things we don't want to hear. When I was a kid, science promised the Jetsons flying cars, space travel and unlimited power sources. Today, science is sounding warning bells about global warming, the sixth great extinction and looming dangers of artificial intelligence.

I suspect the only solution to the attacks on science is more and better communication from scientists. It is not what most of us were trained to do. By and large we're not comfortable doing it. But it is so important. I can say I have been consistently surprised by people's interest in topics as esoteric as my research on the origin of matter in the universe, and as topical as climate change. They usually welcome discussion.

So... I urge you to talk to people about science. Don't preach, talk. Talk about why scientists change their minds and the difference between correlation and causation. Talk about climate change and evolution. Talk about the importance of biodiversity and how a choice to not vaccinate impacts others. You may not convince people in a one-off conversation, but you may just plant a seed.

Talk about your particular area of expertise and why you love it. Talk about phenomena people are curious about — why the sky is blue, why the moon has phases, how to find the planets in the night sky. When more people understand science, fall in love with it, support for these attacks will fade away.

Contact Vince at cianciolotv@alum.mit.edu

by Pat Cupples, Chapter Director

I want to start with gratitude. I'm thankful for scientists. Those who have spoken today and so many brilliant minds that I work with at Sierra Club. I'm so lucky to learn new things from experts. I'm grateful for the people who dedicate their lives to understanding things the rest of us can't see — who spend years studying groundwater moving through limestone, the biodiversity of the Duck River, or the relationship between a native plant and the insects that evolved alongside it for ages. Through their endless hours of observation, we receive a gift of seeing clearly.

In my role with Sierra Club, I get to see the world through a scientist's eyes — we kayak and sample the water in Tennessee's rivers, we hike and survey our incredible park system, learning what's actually happening in the places people often just pass by. What working alongside scientists has taught me is that the natural world is more intricate, more interconnected, and always more astonishing than our first glance.

Take the ground beneath your feet right now. Tennessee sits on top of limestone — karst topography, scientists call it, a word I learned while hiking in Cedars of Lebanon State Park. It's porous, riddled with passages, caves, sinkholes. Water doesn't just flow over this land. It moves through it, invisibly, sometimes for miles, surfacing in springs and streams and drinking wells far from where it entered the ground.

When someone proposes a landfill, a quarry, or a massive data center on karst land — without understanding how that underground water moves — they are not just making a local decision. They are making a decision that affects every well, every creek, every community downstream. Often without knowing it. Often without asking any questions. Right here in Nashville, is the Boring Company asking what happens when you bore a tunnel through Swiss cheese — and hit a void?

In a state that runs from the mountains to the Mississippi, one size does not fit all. That is what our LOCAL campaign is about — the right of Tennessee counties to look at the geology, and point out why not every open space should be a (continued on page 7)

by Axel Ringe, Harvey Broome Group

I'm retired from the US Department of Energy as a scientific analyst and program manager. I've worked with the Sierra Club for about 20 years using my science background to help the Club advance the interests of the environment and the people who live in and depend on it.

Science has always been about a process, about searching for the truth. It generally does this through the scientific method, which ideally involves observation, hypothesis generation, rigorous replicated testing, and formulation of improved hypotheses. Science is not perfect, but that it builds on observed facts and unbiased analyses is its strength. This characteristic inevitably puts it in conflict with political, religious, and social forces that have their own economic and cultural agendas.

The Sierra Club's beliefs rest on observational data which you've all seen such as in the increase in global atmospheric CO₂ levels and the accompanying geometric increase in global temperatures, the results of climate models based on the data, and the observed changes in climate and weather-related disasters.

We believe that water polluted with sediment, toxins, hormone mimics, and oxygen-robbing nutrients is harmful to aquatic ecosystems and to humans. We believe if the air we breathe is contaminated with particulate matter, ozone, and/or volatile organic compounds, it is harmful to our health. These have also been experimentally demonstrated.

So what's the problem? There are two, really. One is that the public has lost faith in science. The reasons include educational shortcomings, the increasing complexity of scientific research, and the rise of social media which rewards emotion and opinion. The other problem is that economic and political forces believe that cleaning up the environment might cost them money. So they lie to the public, they twist regulations to favor them, and they pass laws protecting themselves.

We in the Sierra Club, mostly on a volunteer basis, don't think human and other lives and the environment should be a sacrifice zone for economic interests. We fight through education, advocacy and litigation to, for example, convince the (continued on page 7)



From left, Axel Ringe and Vince Cianciolo with fellow Harvey Broome Group ExCom members Jerry Thornton and Pat Rakes. Photo by Todd Waterman.

Sierra Club's Outdoor Program for Urban Youth

Inspiring Connections Outdoors in Knoxville



Vestal Boys & Girls Club at monarch butterfly tagging program in the Smokies, an activity of the Sierra Club's Inspiring Connections Outdoors program. This activity was led by Tyler Thomas, Tremont Manager of Science Literacy and Research. Photo by Mac Post.

by Mac Post, Knoxville ICO Chair

During the last year, the Vestal Boys & Girls Club has helped tag monarch butterflies. Amachi and Big Brothers and Big Sisters youth have rafted the wild Pigeon River and also visited the Owl Ridge Raptor Center, where they learned how to find an owl's ear. The Amachi children also hiked to a remote waterfall in the Smokies on a hot summer day. All thanks to the Sierra Club's Inspiring Connections Outdoors (ICO) program. It's hard to measure the power these intimate encounters with the natural world have, both on the individual children who participate, and on the world going forward as those children and their sense of their planet Earth are transformed.

The Sierra Club's San Francisco Bay Chapter started ICO in 1971 to promote appreciation and protection of the natural environment through outdoor adventures and environmental education. Today more than 50 ICO groups nationwide provide over 800 outings and service trips, serving 11,000+ young people annually. ICOs build support in urban communities for environmental protection as participants explore nature, discover the beauty of wild places, and appreciate the importance of natural ecosystems for the sustainability of places where they live.

It Takes a Village

The Knoxville ICO works in partnership with Big Brothers and Big Sisters of East Tennessee, Amachi Knoxville, Boys and Girls Club, Girls Inc., and several Knoxville Community Schools. Since starting in 2014, the Knoxville ICO program has grown and now sponsors 30 to 40 activities a year, including after-school programs, fishing, nature exploration hikes, whitewater rafting, service projects, Smokies trips, and zoo and aquarium education visits. Its most popular outings start with experienced interpretive specialists educating the children on various topics followed with exploration and hands-on experiences, including visits to Zoo Knoxville, the Owl Ridge Raptor Center, Lost Sea Caverns, Ijams Nature Center, and more. A special outing is to view the synchronous fireflies in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

All outings are provided free of charge for participants. As a result, we must raise funds necessary to conduct these outings to cover food, entrance fees, educational supplies, equipment, and craft materials. The largest expense is hiring child-approved buses for transportation.

Activities are led by a dozen volunteers who agree to background checks, abide by a defined code of ethics, and complete rigorous Sierra Club-specific outdoor leader training, child abuse recognition and reporting training, and first aid/CPR certification.



Sierra Club volunteers in the Inspiring Connections Outdoors program take Knoxville Big Brothers and Big Sisters participants to visit a remote waterfall in the Smokies on a hot summer day. Photo by Mac Post.

How can you help us inspire youth outdoors?

Your contribution will help with expenses. Donate here:
<https://bit.ly/SCTN-ICO-DONATE>

Want to become a volunteer?

The more volunteers, the greater the number of youth that can be served. For Knoxville, contact Mac Post mpost3116@gmail.com. For Nashville's ICO, contact Charlie High cahigh1722@aol.com

Interested in starting an ICO program in your location?

Learn how here: <https://www.sierraclub.org/ico/how-start-group>. Seeing the excitement of youth participants who do not have an opportunity to actively engage in the outdoors will reward you many times over.

The Tennessee Chapter currently has two ICO programs:

Middle Tennessee: <https://bit.ly/MTG-ICO>

Knoxville: <https://bit.ly/HBG-ICO>



Children from Knoxville's Amachi and Big Brothers and Big Sisters raft the wild Pigeon River, an activity of the Sierra Club's Inspiring Connections Outdoors program. Photo by Nantahala Outdoor Center for participant use.

Fighting for Tennessee: An Update on Environmental Legislation

by Pat Cupples, Chapter Director



Since January, Sierra Club Tennessee has been at the State Capitol three to four days every week, in hallways, committee rooms and offices, meeting with almost every member of the Tennessee Senate and over half the House. That consistent presence has opened doors, created real dialogue and created more opportunities to influence what happens across our state.

This session, we restructured how we engage the legislature, leaning heavily on our volunteer legislative committee led by chair David Bordenkircher. That team has been sifting through nearly 1,200 bills introduced this session, identifying those that touch our Chapter's priorities and getting down to work. Among so many others, Cynthia Willett, Candida Layne, Dana Loseke, and Vince Cianciolo were flagging opportunities and finding ways to engage with lawmakers in their communities. Sally Schiller and JoAnn McIntosh authored our greenbelt action alert leading to a win for farmland in the Senate. Axel Ringe has been drafting talking points and presenting on bills, while Kent Minault and Rick Herron have carried the ball on energy, transportation and rulemaking issues all session. Our Thursday coalition calls have become working sessions where strategy is created and gets shared across organizations.

We saw one of the clearest signs of our Chapter's strength during Conservation Day on the Hill. Sixty-three volunteers walked the halls of the Cordell Hull Building in Nashville, and made their voices heard. Together they held 25-plus meetings with lawmakers, attended committee hearings and delivered handwritten letters to legislators. In more than a few cases, we could see our discussions moving the needle.

We were joined by partners including the Tennessee Environmental Council, Harpeth Conservancy, Tennessee Interfaith Power and Light, the Tennessee Scenic Rivers Association, and the League of Women Voters. Crema Coffee Roasters kept everyone caffeinated. Redheaded Stranger donated a taco lunch.

Our attendees focused on three bills that all touch the same question: who gets to make decisions about what happens in your own community? They showed up for the Waste to Jobs Act, for Scenic Rivers protections along the Buffalo and Duck Rivers, and against a zoning bill that would have made it harder and more expensive for local governments to manage growth without facing endless lawsuits.

One of our most effective wins of the session was stopping that type of local zoning attack in its tracks. The Tennessee Private Property Vesting Rights Act (SB1908/HB1837) would have required local governments to pay landowners compensation any time a zoning or environmental rule reduced their property's market value — making routine protections like floodplain buffers and conservation zoning financially impossible to enforce. We reached 1300 Sierra Club members in the senators' districts and asked them to contact their county mayors. Those mayors then contacted their own senators and representatives directly. The bill was defeated with constituent pressure working exactly as it should.

Earlier in the session, our team helped stop SB1481, a bill that would have placed extra fees on EV drivers to fund road improvements, which is an unfair burden on drivers who already pay higher registration fees. We were able to meet personally with the bill's sponsor Senator Page Walley, to share our thoughts with him, and he shelved the bill. We made

the case that states like Utah are piloting vehicle miles traveled programs as a far more equitable approach.

On farmland: the greenbelt rollback bill, which would have made it cheaper for developers to convert farm and forest land by eliminating a key tax penalty, failed in committee. Tennessee has already lost 1.6 million acres of farmland since 1997. Again, this win was spearheaded by Sally Schiller and our Chair JoAnn McIntosh and their action alert.

The Scenic Rivers Bill protecting the Buffalo and Duck Rivers passed both chambers, allowing agriculture and traditional rural uses to continue, but adding protections against mining, commercial timber harvest and landfill uses within two miles of the rivers. The Scott County designation for the Big South Fork was a different story. That bill failed in the full House Ag committee, a heartbreaking outcome for the residents and advocates who fought hard for it. We will continue to support their cause and keep Tennessee from becoming home to the region's garbage.

If you've been following our proactive work over the last few years, you're no doubt familiar with the Tennessee Waste to Jobs Act. This year we took another giant leap forward, gaining bipartisan sponsorship in both chambers. Written by Sierra Club's Dan Firth, the bill would give producers the mechanism to take responsibility for the end of life of their packaging. Senator Steve Southerland took over the bill and it was passed through the Senate Government Operations Committee. Senate Agriculture Committee Chair Reeves, along with Senators Briggs, Bowling, Hensley, Massey, Walley and Seal signed on as Republican co-sponsors. Sierra Club testified before the Senate Ag Committee, before the sponsor himself called for industry to come to the table — a collaborative approach we've been actively working toward all session. When the Tennessee Chamber's alternative to funding recycling was raising taxes on Tennesseans, our argument grew stronger. This work can be a long haul, but our members' support, plus hard work alongside a strong coalition, has created incredible momentum.

The most troubling bill of the session passed the Senate 18-15. SB1958 severely limits when citizens and organizations can go to court to stop harmful state actions — requiring that real, documented damage already exist before a court can intervene. The state's own solicitor general testified that this bill was designed to prevent outside groups from challenging state laws in Tennessee courts. That includes us. But it also includes every farmer, hunter, neighbor and faith community that has ever wanted to have their say before a line gets crossed.

Our legislative team member Kent Minault broke down what this bill means in a recent video on our Instagram page (@tnsierraclub). We asked Governor Lee to veto it, and our members responded — thousands of individual actions were taken by supporters using their own voices.

This and other outcomes are still being decided at the print deadline. But this session has demonstrated clearly that a well-organized chapter with engaged volunteers and strong coalition relationships can make a real difference in a tough political environment. From helping draft amendments on data center bills, to finding sponsors for the bills we support, we've built relationships, done the work and made sure Tennessee legislators know there are constituents, not just paid interests, who are speaking up for our beautiful state.

The past three months have been filled with meaningful and challenging work — and it wouldn't be happening without your support of the Tennessee Chapter. Thank you for being part of it.

Contact Pat @ pat.cupples@sierraclub.org

Hawkins County (continued from page 3)

that all these commissioners are fine, honest people. They work hard for you. And, because I am NOT running for re-election. I didn't attend the executive session. I didn't write this resolution." And then he went into the history of the County Powers Act (CPA) as it played a role in Hawkins County.

Here's a thumbnail sketch of that history. In 2012, the Hawkins County Commissioners voted to accept the County Powers Act, in large part as a result of CareNET members meeting individually with every commissioner to inform them of the importance of the CPA. Hawkins County does not have zoning, but the CPA would give the county some control over businesses coming into the area. However, years passed and nothing occurred. New commissioners were elected and the CPA essentially sat in a file cabinet, forgotten. In 2023, the county again decided to vote to enact the CPA. This time the majority of commissioners voted against enacting it — all except Commissioner Clonce. Later the commissioners were informed that the CPA was already on the books from 2012. It was a bit embarrassing. And, within the county there was the faction that was relieved that the CPA was a viable tool the county government could use if necessary, and another faction that felt the hot breath of government incursion was already breathing down their neck.

Commissioner Clonce then read the resolution, explaining at the end that if the commissioners voted in favor of it, the county would go to

court. If they voted against it, we would be accepting crypto mining and data centers. The commissioners said no — the resolution was written so that the voting as he described it was just the reverse. Mayor DeWitte asked for a second to the resolution. NO ONE WOULD SECOND IT. And the meeting went on to other business.

Most of the room emptied, with people asking each other, "What did the silence mean? Was there a vote? What was the next step?" In the hall outside the courtroom, Jessee held an impromptu civics course explaining that since the resolution was left hanging, Exotic Ridge would no doubt take the county to court, but it would probably take a couple of years before the complaint would be heard. Is Exotic Ridge continuing to develop its crypto mining center? I don't know. But I'll let you know as events unfold.

It had started to snow again as I walked to my car.

The second County Commissioner's Meeting of 2026 was held March 23rd. I (and a large crowd) attended the meeting. No mention of Exotic Ridge was made. There has been no mention of it in the newspaper.

The second County Commissioner's Meeting of 2026 was held on Monday, March 23, 2026. I (and a large crowd) attended the meeting. No mention of Exotic Ridge was made. There has been no mention of it in the newspaper.

Contact Joanne at joannetheelder@gmail.com

When a Pipeline Comes to your Community

by Keith and Sue Havens, Morgan County Tennessee

About four months ago, workers started construction on the Ridgeline Pipeline in Morgan County. What we are going to share is information that might help other communities prepare if a pipeline is proposed for their region. As pipeline expansion is dramatically increasing in Tennessee, this is a distinct possibility.

The Ridgeline Pipeline is being buried alongside an existing 75 year-old active pipeline, and both are owned by Enbridge Inc., a Canadian-based multinational pipeline company. The pipelines roughly parallel two major state highways, Route 27, traveling north-south, and Route 62, which travels east-west. The Ridgeline Pipeline crosses these highways multiple times along its path. These roads are the two main routes of travel in Morgan County, and are often the only way to get from one part of the county to another without taking long detours on back roads. Although Route 62 and Route 27 are state highways, due to terrain they are mostly two-lane and narrow, with lots of curves and hills.

Residents of Morgan County have experienced many disruptions and frustrations due to the construction of this pipeline.

There has been a huge increase in traffic due to all the trucks and construction equipment. Some of the traffic is from construction workers' personal vehicles, and some is from the construction company Michels, whose large trucks carry earth-moving equipment and heavy loads of timbers and pipes. These big trucks travel back and forth along the roads all day long, and are large enough that they have wide-load warning trucks accompany them, and oncoming cars often have to drive off the edge of the pavement to get past them.

The construction process has covered many parts of the roads with dirt and mud, which also gets on residents' vehicles. Michels Company has trucks, called "broom badgers," which periodically try to sweep the dirt and mud off the road, which creates dust and also slows traffic, as they move very slowly as they are sweeping.

Additional traffic problems are caused by the pipeline company blocking the roadway while it moves its equipment on and off of the roadway. They sometimes block the entire road while this is happening, and it is not a quick process. People here have missed meetings and doctor appointments and have been late to work, because there is no way to know when and where these road blockages will occur. Workers' personal trucks sometimes are parked along these narrow roads, which also causes difficulty driving on them.

For those residents who live close to the pipeline route, the constant noise is a major irritant. Heavy equipment is operating for eight hours almost every day, and there is occasional blasting. Those landowners who have the pipeline crossing their property are supposed to be warned before blasting occurs, but those who live nearby have no warning, and the blasting can shake homes and scare children and pets.

Many of the property owners who have the pipeline crossing their land have not been satisfied with how they have been treated by Enbridge after they have signed the right-of-way agreements. Most of the residents who have to deal with the problems caused by the construction are not happy.

The beauty of our county has been marred — there is a mud scar running across the landscape. But, this is temporary, and eventually the land will heal, the trees and wildlife will return, and the troubles caused by this construction project will fade in our memories. However, the long term effects of continuing to use natural gas and other fossil fuels will make our future, and the future of our children and grandchildren much more difficult. We can do better.

Good luck to your communities. We hope you do not have to experience having a pipeline come to your homes. But if you do, we want you to know what to expect.

Contact Keith and Sue at princehavensdesigns@gmail.com



Sue and Keith Havens consider impact of the Ridgeline pipeline. Photo by Todd Waterman.

Cupples Stands Up for Science (continued from page 4)

home for landfill or data center. Scientists know that an open space is not undeveloped. Instead, nature is often a perfectly developed ecosystem. Science, modeling, and data inform local communities — this is the core of our independent spirit.

I want to tell you about some of the scientist volunteers in Sierra Club. A chemist in East Tennessee — Dan Firth — realized that the reason we throw away so many valuable materials is that we don't have the funding or systems to capture them. So he researched solutions that would work in Tennessee and wrote legislation. The Tennessee Waste to Jobs Act is in front of the legislature right now and has incredible momentum — the work of a scientist who understood the circular economy well enough to put it into law.

We are doing the same with energy. The sun shines on Tennessee. The wind blows. Geothermal energy sits beneath us. Scientists and engineers are unlocking innovations that would have seemed like science fiction a generation ago.

Right now, Sally and Joe Schiller are giving tours of their solar-powered farm in Clarksville — showing neighbors how to get through ice storms and volatile energy markets alike. Dan Terpstra is educating our community about plug-in balcony solar — putting renewable energy in the hands of renters and apartment dwellers who never thought solar was available to them. Through our Homegrown National Park initiative, Tennesseans in all 95 counties are planting native species — in yards, schoolyards, community gardens. These plants require less water and less maintenance because they work with our system, not against it.

So this is my invitation. To you and to every elected official, every business leader, every decision-maker in this state: Science is not your enemy. It is the most honest accounting we have of what our choices actually cost — and what they could save.

Protecting water systems now costs a fraction of cleaning them up later. Smart development costs less than the contamination that follows when we ignore facts. Investing in renewable energy creates jobs that stay here in Tennessee — jobs designed for the future. Corporate interests will always show up, pushing for short-term gain. We will always be here too — paying attention, rooted in what the science is showing us, and unwilling to be silent about what's at stake.

Contact Pat @ pat.cupples@sierraclub.org

Ringe Stands Up for Science (continued from page 4)

TVA to abandon fossil fuels (and adopt clean renewable energy technologies that won't emit CO₂, poison our rivers with coal ash toxins, or contaminate our air with mercury, particulates, and nitrogen oxides). We've been at it for a long time, and sometimes we win and a lot of times we lose, but giving up doesn't seem like a choice.

Transportation, primarily by private vehicles, is the most significant contributor to CO₂ emissions in this country. It is also responsible for lowering the quality of life in our cities, exacerbating environmental injustices, and paving over much of our countryside. That hasn't happened by accident — decisions were made by government and the auto industry 100 years ago to strangle public transit and make the country dependent on autos and trucks. We want to change that, starting at the local level. We are currently preparing a proposal to alleviate the congestion on the I-40 corridor through Knox County by developing a bus rapid transit system that will give people an alternative to sitting in traffic gridlock and get some of the cars off the road.

After the Supreme Court decided in 2023 ignoring scientific evidence that isolated wetlands were no longer worthy of protection by the federal government, Tennessee last year passed legislation that removed protections from 80% of our wetlands. We, and our allies, were able to work with legislators and the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation to retain some level of regulatory protections for many of our remaining wetlands.

We have been able to make a difference on these and other issues because we base our public outreach and our arguments before government and the courts on scientifically verifiable facts. We don't just scream "the sky is falling" to sway peoples' emotions because that doesn't work in the long run. That's what the other side does and it will eventually come back to bite them in the rear. Remember the tobacco industry? It took a long time but most of us now don't have to live in choking clouds of tobacco smoke. So we thank the scientists who ask the questions and do the mostly unsung work to give us the research results and the facts that we can use to educate the public and present to the powers that be. We couldn't do what we do without them.

Contact Axel at onyxfarm@bellsouth.net



Photo © Melissa Kuo

The Story of a Bizarre Yellow Slime Mold

by John Nolt, Harvey Broome Group

Perhaps the weirdest life form I have encountered is *Fuligo septica* — also known as scrambled egg slime mold or (less appealingly) dog vomit slime. I have seen it, rarely, on wood or bark in my yard in South Knoxville, and once on a boulder at House Mountain State Natural Area in east Knox County. It usually appears as a gaudy yellow, spongy, sticky, opaque, irregularly-shaped blob, generally no larger than a human hand. At first glance, this blob may seem stationary, but with close and patient watching it can be seen to slither and jiggle slowly over, around, or beneath rocks, bark, or soil, leaving behind a trail of slime.

F. septica is a myxomycete—that is, a slime mold. It is bizarre in many ways, beginning with its common name. Slime molds are not actually molds, which are fungi. Slime molds belong to an entirely distinct taxonomic kingdom: Protista, which consists mainly of one-celled organisms. But *F. septica* is not a simple one-celled organism either. And the yellow blob, called a plasmodium, is not the whole of it, but only a passing stage in its outlandish life cycle.

A plasmodium does not grow from a single cell as organisms usually do — it is assembled from a large group of tiny *F. septica* “swarm cells,” which hatch from spores that have fallen together in close proximity. Swarm cells are of two types: amoeboid or flagellated. An amoeboid swarm cell moves by oozing across solid surfaces. A flagellated one propels itself through water with a whip-like flagellum. A plasmodium is formed when, under the influence of a pheromone produced by swarm cells, hundreds or even thousands of them converge and merge into a single plasmodium. In doing so, they lose their individual membranes, but the developing plasmodium retains an outer membrane. Within this membrane are all the nuclei of the merged swarm cells, suspended in gell-like protoplasm.

Some authors have characterized the plasmodium as a single huge multinucleate cell, but it is not much like a cell at all. Cells are not assembled from groups of other cells, and the plasmodium does not, for example, reproduce by division, as cells do. It is best understood simply as a stage in *F. septica*’s life cycle. There are others.

The plasmodium, initially mobile, eventually stops moving, thins, flattens out, and becomes spongy. At this stage it is called an aethalium. The aethalium then produces a number of tiny reproductive structures called sorocarps, thin vertical stalks, each topped by a spherical spore-bearing head. When the spores ripen, the sorocarps release them and they are distributed into the environment, sometimes with help from certain beetles. Then from the spores, the life cycle of *F. septica* begins anew.

People unfamiliar with slime molds sometimes find them alarming. In 1973, *F. septica* sparked a widely reported ruckus in a Dallas suburb, as reported in Steven L. Stephenson and Henry Stempen’s *Myxomycetes: A Handbook of Slime Molds*:

The sudden, unexplained appearance of these “pulsating yellow blobs” in lawns and other similar situations caused a virtual panic among some of the local inhabitants. The blobs broke apart when blasted with water, but the pieces continued to crawl about and increase in size. To some people, this seemed to suggest the possibility that they were indestructible aliens from outer space, or at the very least, menacing mutant bacteria that could take over the earth.

The blobs, however, were harmless, and instead of *being* bacteria, they were *consuming* them. (Bacteria are a central part of *F. septica*’s diet.)

If you encounter *F. septica* or other slime molds, just enjoy watching them but don’t disturb them. Look for their slow and subtle behavior. They may not play any crucial ecological roles, but they enhance life’s diversity and do no harm.

Contact John at nolt@utk.edu.

Bird Calls

by Anna Laura Reeve

A familiar hollow of sickness, but here
 a sparrow following its mate hops Was there something
 I’m forgetting The eye of the sun is blue
 there is no debating that, thank god Light
 falling ruddy pine needles thatched like a basket
 or the windblown bangs of my red-haired daughter
 A bird calls, saying something Sick in the pit
 of my stomach but there is a bright sundog
 look, the right eye of the sun is a rainbow stamp, a sundog But
 there’s something I forget
 Some nights my daughter keeps me at her bedside saying
I’m worried about something but I don’t know what
 I leave her bedside to lie in my own bed worrying
 about something— what?
 I don’t believe in a god who cares so why do I care
 Finally, the towhee with his strange call
 inflected whistle, aural parhelion rainbow
 patch It moves I can’t locate it
 it moves behind me, and around The bird
 my love for it one of us which

Anna Laura Reeve is the author of *Reaching the Shore of the Sea of Fertility* (Belle Point Press, 2023) which was a finalist for the 2023 Weatherford Award in Poetry. She is the winner of the 2022 Adrienne Rich Award for Poetry and the 2024 Emerging Writers Award from the East Tennessee Writers Hall of Fame. Her poems have appeared in *The Adroit Journal*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, and others.

HARVEY BROOME GROUP PROGRAM MEETING

Patience Melnick of the City of Knoxville
Sustainability Program

Tuesday, May 12, 7:00-8:30 PM

Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church 2931 Kingston
Pike, Knoxville

Join the City of Knoxville’s Sustainability Director to learn about the City’s approach to climate action through municipal operations and community initiatives. This presentation will explore Knoxville’s progress toward its greenhouse gas reduction goals, from energy-efficient city operations and solar investments to community-wide initiatives like EV infrastructure and the BREATHE Climate Action Plan. Learn how sustainability projects are selected, how challenges are navigated, and the role of environmental equity in a rapidly growing community.



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Join today for \$15.



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