

Tennessee Sierran

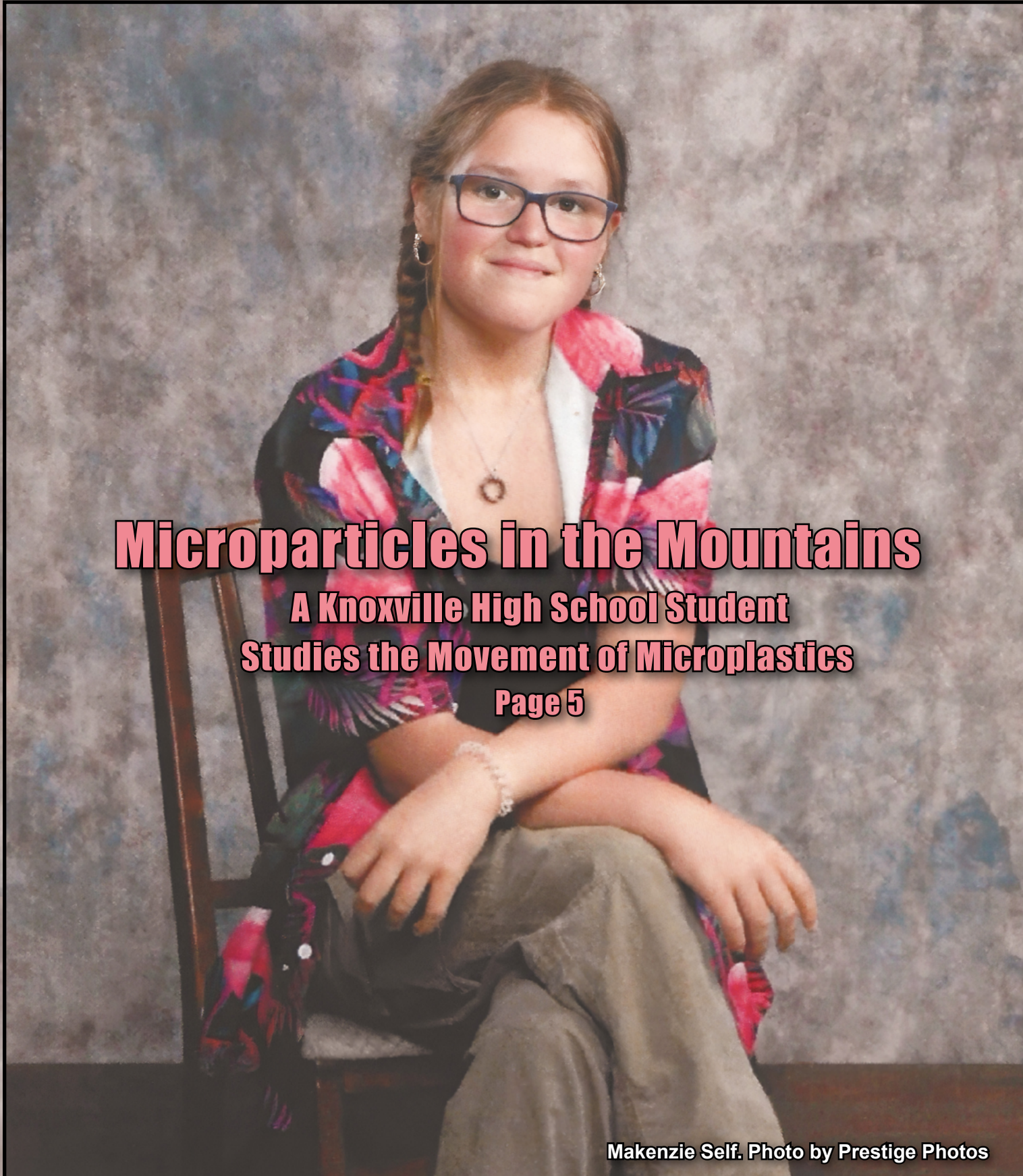
SIERRA
CLUB
TENNESSEE CHAPTER

Gregory's Bald in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Photo by Ron Shrieves

Bimonthly Newsletter of the Tennessee Chapter of the Sierra Club

Volume 59, Number 4 — July/August 2026



Microparticles in the Mountains A Knoxville High School Student Studies the Movement of Microplastics Page 5

Makenzie Self. Photo by Prestige Photos

Also Inside

- | | |
|---|---|
| Natural Gas Pipeline Cuts Through Tennessee: Surely TVA Wouldn't Do <i>That</i> | 3 |
| Farm Park Concept for New Greenspace in Chattanooga | 4 |
| An Assault on the Environment: Has the EPA Abandoned Its Mission? | 6 |
| The Best President We Never Had: Sierrans Go for Climate Reality Training | 7 |

From Tennessee Chair JoAnn McIntosh

Getting Things Done: Recognizing Limits, Redefining Expectations



“OK, OK! Uncle!” Story time again this month:

A few years ago, Hubby Doug and I did a self-guided bicycle tour of the Umbria region of Italy. There were many tours to choose from, and I thought I had picked the one labeled The Valleys of Umbria. I found out differently when the amused Italian tour rep handed us our maps labeled The Hills and Valleys of Umbria. Well, sure, you can't have valleys without hills, but somehow I'd thought our travel was primarily routed in between those hills, enjoying their scenic elevation from a relatively flat road that also featured charming cafes every 10-20 kilometers.

The first day started with a long downhill which turned out to be a misreading of our map. So a long uphill immediately followed, retracing our route, and leading to more climbing and an appreciation that centuries-old towns were built to be defensible — i.e., on top of hills.

Our leisurely eight-day vacation turned into a daily test of my physical abilities as well as of Hubby Doug's patience. Fortunately there were visions of the evening's guilt-free fresh pasta pulling me up those hills. Even so, there were some afternoons when I discovered my breaking points, so tired that I forgot to unclip my feet from the pedals and just fell over at stop signs, sitting in the road with big old tears of exhaustion streaming, wondering how I could possibly pedal another two hours before sunset. And then, catharsis completed, I'd be ready to ride on.

Some days, Sierra Club reminds me of those moments. In our present world, does our work seem like the labor of Sisyphus, pushing the immense boulder up a hill? Has today's political climate steepened the hill? We get tired. We get discouraged. I hear this manifested in many ways in Sierra meetings and correspondence. I do understand the need to vent, especially within the safety net of like-minded individuals. But we all have different breaking points, different thresholds and limits, and we are not all going to agree on every plan or strategy or tactic. And thank goodness for those differences! Being tolerant and understanding with our peers is good practice for when our limits are tested by those outside our regular circles.

Those limits are constantly being tested, but they are also dynamic so can change as needed. Remembering my Italy trip, there was some adaptation as the week went on. We learn from experience. What seems impossible one day might become doable with time. I remind myself of this when I reach a breaking point with Sierra drama and overwork. But I'm also learning that recognizing practicable limits in the first place is healthier and more productive than repeatedly exceeding the limits, both for me and for Sierra's work.

The Sierra Club Tennessee Chapter is currently working on our annual plan for 2026-27, and we will be finalizing this at our July 11 Chapter ExCom meeting. Let's set ourselves up for success, not frustration. Let's redefine some expectations, make a To-Do List that is achievable, and start by identifying specific priorities and setting concrete goals. Let's also recognize how we are both limited and enabled by current resources. As the largest grassroots environmental organization in the country, Sierra Club's greatest strength is its volunteers. For a variety of reasons, our volunteer numbers have declined recently, but our passion for protecting the environment has not. Let's make best use of our volunteer resources by channeling our time and efforts into projects with realizable gains, projects that provide satisfaction for hard work, projects that build on each other and lead to bigger wins and increased resources. Trying to do too much, either individually or as a group, is not productive in either the short- or long-term.

Pick our battles. Focus. Learn. We can and will still cry *Uncle* sometimes — but let it not be for the same reason tomorrow as yesterday.

Contact JoAnn at mcijoann@gmail.com

To the Editor:

Thanks for running this highly informative and pertinent article about yellow slime mold. You solved a mystery that had lain dormant in my mind for years.

Knoxville's Sharp's Ridge Memorial Park, long known as a hotspot for birders, now has an excellent system of trails that rarely fails to surprise. Hiking a loop there several years ago, on a steep, narrow section, I was forced to slow down, passing between a stump, root cavity and the bank above. Looking down, I noticed a strange yellow blob, like a melting loaf of bread, draped over the roots. After passing quickly several days — is it contagious? — I stopped to check it out. Feeling cautiously, it was firm and heavy, slightly yielding, so I left it alone. In a couple of weeks it disappeared, forgotten until now.

Thanks for the info.

Stan Wallace, Knoxville, Tennessee



Fuligo Septica, as featured in the May/June 2026 issue of this paper.

The Tennes-Sierran

The bimonthly newsletter of the
Tennessee Chapter of the Sierra Club
Volume 59, Number 4 — July/August 2026
Digital Edition

Online with clickable links: <https://bit.ly/TENNSRN>

Change of Address

Email: Address.Changes@SierraClub.org

Online: MyAccount.SierraClub.org

Snail Mail: Send new address AND the mailing label on page 1 to:
Sierra Club, P.O. Box 421041, Palm Coast, FL 32142-1041

Request no paper copy: bit.ly/Stop_My_Paper_Copy

Submissions

July Issue of the Chapter E-Newsletter by June 27

August issue of the Chapter E-Newsletter by August 1

September/October Issue of *The Tennes-Sierran* by July 31

Chapter News Team

Communications Coordinator: Gary Bowers sierra@totheforest.net

Tennes-Sierran Editor: Emily Ellis tnsierran.editor@gmail.com

E-Newsletter Editor: Allie Stafford enews.sierratn@gmail.com

Poetry Editor: Alan May

TENNESSEE CHAPTER

<https://www.sierraclub.org/tennessee>

Chair: JoAnn McIntosh, 931-338-2530
mcijoann@gmail.com

Vice Chair: Yolonda Spinks
yolonda.ejwork@gmail.com

Secretary: Joanne Logan, 865-310-1171
loganj@utk.edu

Treasurer: Craig Brandt 865-924-0597
brandtcctn@gmail.com

Conservation Chair: Cynthia Willett, 615-556-9300
cwforearth@gmail.com

Outings Chair: Jerry Thornton 865-719-9742
gatwildcat@aol.com

Political Chair: Joanne Logan 865-310-1171
loganjojolo@gmail.com

Chapter Director & Staff Manager

Pat Cupples pat.cupples@sierraclub.org

Beyond Coal Campaign Staff

Amy Kelly, Field Organizing Strategist, Tenn. Valley Region

amy.kelly@sierraclub.org

Bonnie Swinford, Senior Organizing Representative

bonnie.swinford@sierraclub.org

GROUPS

Cherokee Group—Chattanooga

<https://www.sierraclub.org/tennessee/cherokee>

Chair: David Hoot 423-503-9482

sierra.tn.cherokee@gmail.com

Harvey Broome Group—Knoxville

<https://www.sierraclub.org/tennessee/harvey-broome>

Chair: Dana Moran 865-719-9742 morandana2@gmail.com

Chickasaw Group—Memphis

<https://www.sierraclub.org/tennessee/chickasaw>

Chair: vacant

Middle Tennessee Group—Nashville

<https://www.sierraclub.org/tennessee/middle-tennessee>

Chair: Tim Weeks 615-293-8178 timweekstn@gmail.com

GEOGRAPHIC CONSERVATION COMMITTEES

Clarksville-Montgomery County Geographic Conservation Committee

Chair: JoAnn McIntosh 931-338-2530 mcijoann@gmail.com

Care NET Geographic Conservation Committee (Claiborne, Grainger, Hancock, and Hawkins Counties)

Chair: Steve Rondeau rondeau@westriv.com

Holston Valley Geographic Conservation Committee

Chair: Dan Firth 423-390-0882 dan.firth.sierraclub@gmail.com

Watauga Geographic Conservation Committee (Johnson & Carter Counties)

Chair: Gloria Griffith 423-972-1717 GLa4797@gmail.com

A Pipeline and a Bike Ride: Surely TVA Wouldn't Do That



Participants in the Ridgeline bike ride May 16-17 included (left to right) Sherman Neal II, Pat Cupples, Maureen Cianciolo, Vince Cianciolo, Haley DeLoach, Jasmine Vazin, and Diana Hun.

by Vince Cianciolo, Harvey Broome Group

A group of 16 cyclists and supporters — including Sierra Club Tennessee Chapter volunteers and staff with national campaigns (Beyond Dirty Fuels and Outdoors For All) — got together May 16-17 to do our part in fulfilling the Club's mission to explore, enjoy and protect the wild places of the Earth. We enjoyed companionship and beautiful weather in beautiful rural Tennessee. But our purpose was to bear witness to destruction caused by a pipeline, and to learn how communities can protect their local environment should they find themselves in their own pipeline fight.

Roughly five years ago, the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) shared that they were interested in retiring the Kingston coal plant and building

a new gas plant. The plan included construction of a natural gas pipeline — the Ridgeline Pipeline — to run parallel to an existing pipeline for more than 100 miles through Middle and East Tennessee. That construction would require cutting a swath more than a 100 feet wide through forests and farmland, crossing hundreds of streams that form the watershed of the Cumberland River. Surely they wouldn't do that.

But, a few years later, Enbridge, a Canadian energy delivery company, began approaching neighbors for access to build the pipeline. Enbridge's gas pipelines have a record of explosions. The existing Enbridge pipeline that Ridgeline runs parallel to has exploded twice in Smith County, Tennessee, as recently as 2018. And in Lincoln County, Kentucky, a 2019 Enbridge pipeline explosion killed one person, hospitalized six, destroyed five homes, damaged 14 other homes, and burned 30 acres.

Mobilizing Residents

Opposition to this pipeline and other TVA pipelines in the state grew during this time. Sierra Club partnered with grassroots organizations like Ridgeline Voices, SAGE TN, and Appalachian Voices to mobilize affected residents to file official public comments, attend rallies (such as the protests at the TVA headquarters), and share their stories to highlight public safety, explosion risks, and high utility bills. You can read many landowners' stories at <https://www.notvapipelines.com>.

Construction began in October 2025, with permits in place that prevented Enbridge from taking the most destructive path to construction, thanks to Sierra Club and community advocacy. That same week, communities rallied in front of the TVA headquarters, and began monitoring water quality while Enbridge built the pipeline. Just this month, the Sierra Club sent a letter (with partners) to the State and regulatory authorities asking for construction to halt due to many reports of permit noncompliance along the route.

The Ridgeline pipeline will deliver methane to the new Kingston fossil fuel plant, even after TVA announced its plans to keep the Kingston coal boilers operating for the foreseeable future. Arguably, methane is better for air quality than coal — having fewer toxic byproducts and releasing less CO₂ per unit of energy. Even so, the Kingston gas plant will send approximately 500 million tons of planet-warming CO₂ into the atmosphere per year. The pipeline construction, and the fossil fuel power plant it enables, have negative impacts at all levels — individual, regional, national and global: (Continued on page 7)

A 180-Degree About-Face: EPA Reverses its Mission

by Kent Minault, Chapter Ex-Comm At Large Member



When Trump returned to office in 2025, he set about totally reshaping the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in over 70 actions that experts refer to as a "war on all fronts" against environmental regulation. As a result, the EPA has become the opposite of its title: it no longer protects, but assaults, the environment. Jeremy Symons, a former EPA policy advisor, says the EPA has "abandoned" its mission.

The most recent example is the new EPA proposal to weaken requirements that utilities clean up toxic coal ash residue at impoundments near their plants. The law still forced them to hold a hearing though. On May 28, the environmental

community from across the country showed up in force with a powerful array of public comments condemning the proposal.

Sierra Club members were prominent with Todd Waterman, Jonathan Levenshus, and this writer laying bare the disastrous consequences should the rules be rolled back. Powerful allied voices spoke up as well, with Bri Knisely and Angie Mummaw from Appalachian Voices; LaTricea Adams from Young, Gifted and Green; investigative journalist Jamie Satterfield; and Caroline Weinberg from Earthjustice. Strong Latino voices were present, including a young man from Green Latinos whose name was clipped from the front of the recording. He mentioned Beto Martinez from Kansas City. He and Angel Martinez testified from the same group. Ruth Santiago spoke from Puerto Rico about contamination from the ADS power plant there. Dr. Kristina Zierold from the University of Mississippi gave excruciating testimony about the neural and mental health impacts of coal ash on children. Attorney Nancy Stoner from the Environmental Law and Policy Center thanked the EPA staff for holding the agency together during these trying times. The care, compassion and detail of the remarks did little, however, to conceal the waves of rage behind them.

Commonsense Changes?

A couple of speakers from the American Cement Association and the American Coal Ash Association spoke in support of the rollback, which EPA Director Lee Zeldin referred to as "commonsense changes."

Lisa Evans, senior counsel at Earthjustice and a former EPA attorney, made a statement after the hearing. "The Trump administration has jeopardized the nation's drinking water supplies as a favor to polluters. It's just not right."

"EPA set the first federal coal ash rule in 2015 under President Obama, and expanded those protections in 2024 under President Biden. But industry groups have been lobbying President Trump recently to loosen the rules, and Thursday's proposal is the result," Evans said. "Ultimately, if this rule is finalized, human health will suffer and taxpayers will be left with the cost of cleaning up their rivers and drinking water."

"Letting coal-burning utilities set the agenda has been a disaster for communities across the South, resulting in coal ash spills and hundreds of families forced to live on bottled water for years," Nick Torrey, senior attorney at the Southern Environmental Law Center, said in a statement.

"An Explicit Handout to Big Coal"

"Coal ash pollution has already cut too many American lives short," Sierra Club Senior Attorney Bridget Lee said. "Our government should be strengthening safeguards against this toxic threat. Today's proposal doesn't even try to hide the fact that it's an explicit handout to Big Coal."

The proposed rule would exempt coal ash sites from regulation and allow power plant owners to minimize, delay or avoid dealing with the coal ash at their facilities.

Jennifer Cassel, also with Earthjustice, said water near coal ash becomes thick with pollution, like a tea that is steeped for too long. People who live near coal ash dumps continue to discover cancer at a rate that makes them think, "This cannot be normal."

Brianna Knisley, Appalachian Voices' Director of Public Power Campaigns, said, "The 2008 Kingston coal ash spill was the worst industrial disaster in U.S. history. It's what happens when the EPA leaves coal ash management up to state regulators and utilities. The 900 workers who cleaned up the spill were denied protective gear and told the coal ash they were removing was clean enough to eat. (Continued on page 7)

Farm Park's New Concept for Chattanooga Greenspace

by Blake Wright, President & Founder of Luthe Land Legacy



I have grown up in the Southeast frustrated with the countless, fruitless, tiny deaths sacrificed in the name of “progress” that work against people. I am a lifelong Chattanooga and an environmental activist.

2026 is a year where six-in-ten Americans say countries around the world, including the U.S., will not do enough to avoid the worst effects of climate change. I, like many of my allies, have done what my country’s government won’t: fight for the future.

I didn’t set out to create Farm Park or make a nonprofit, just to stay true to my desire to steward the land that has cared for me. In my environmental activism work, I’ve learned that when we address the root of our own problems, we also solve larger societal ones.

A Piece of Land Slipping Away

Ten years ago, I had the great fortune to purchase my own home in a historic community called Missionary Ridge. My backyard is in another historic community, East Lake. The home suffered from erosion, storm-water intrusion, and the yard was choked with kudzu. I bought it because it was surrounded by established woodland trees like tulip poplars, white oaks, magnolias, shagbark hickory, and American elms. My husband and I would sit for hours admiring their massive boughs and giving thanks to their roots that literally provided the foundation for our life. Every day we would look at the wild land below and wonder, “what could this be if we allowed it to thrive.”

Three years ago, my husband and I learned that 13 acres behind our home was available for sale. We anxiously worked to get a deal signed between the former land owner and a Land Trust partner who aligned with our vision, as the asking price and timeline was outside of our ability. We celebrated that, at the very least, the land was protected. Then the deal fell through without our knowledge.

The land was instead sold to an out-of-state developer, who proceeded to purchase an additional four acres around the land, resulting in 17+ acres of uninterrupted green space. His plans were to turn it into high-end luxury housing. We were devastated by the loss. Still we reached out, negotiated, adapted, and secured the two acres we were lucky enough to afford. That was enough to begin, even though our hearts were squeezed by grief. The loss wasn’t JUST land to us. It was a place teeming with life. Not a single bulldozer or chainsaw had to start for us to mourn the bare clay of development to come.

With the future destruction in mind, we worked diligently on the additional two acres. Starting the project that has become known today as Farm Park, we became stewards of the land encouraging the healing from generations of neglect. Owls and hawks ruled the skies, their nests no longer at threat from kudzu or bulldozers. Groundhogs, foxes, and coyotes moved into a land reawakened for them. To address the erosion of the land, we planted over 100 edible trees and shrubs, predominantly native, and used the removed bodies of Japanese honeysuckle, nandina, and kudzu to place along pathways. This created berms, which allowed water to run unimpeded while collecting biomatter. Ultimately, our stewardship helped the land start to rebuild itself. As the kudzu fell away, we discovered aquifer-fed springs and fell even more in love with this incredible ecosystem. In our success, we grew stronger in our resolve to preserve the land around us. We watched as adjacent lots were cleared, fearing that one day the heavy machinery would come for the 17+ acres.

A Big Step Taken: Luthe Land Legacy

After much hesitation, my husband and I founded Luthe Land Legacy to expand our conservation, as no land trust was willing to acquire the land and protect it, due to its smaller acreage. We received an initial endowment of \$100,000 and approached the out-of-state developer with hopes of acquiring a hard-to-develop gorge next to the two acres we already owned. Our determination was rewarded when, at the beginning of the year, he responded to us with a desire to sell all 17+ acres for \$1.22 million. The reasons we want the land are the reasons he doesn’t.

Since January, we have secured a list of partners that someone told us looks like “a roster of everyone who’s anyone you could possibly talk to about a project like this.” We are determined to not lose this land again. It represents for us not only our dream of an urban food forest, but also the captured imagination of hundreds of people.

We are rich in dreams, willing hands who can’t wait to work, and artists



Illustrated Plan for Farm Park in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Image by Sam Naomi.

who dream along with us, but we still need funds. We need \$1.22 million in order to buy the land thus preserving it in perpetuity. Once the money is secured, we will have everything we need to build a brighter future. In a place so abundant in native berries, foods, and water, no one should have to go without. We see a future where the lessons we learn on living with nature are used by people all over the world.

What we’re building is meant to be studied, improved, and adapted in other parks, cities, and states across the country. This includes:

- how to turn underused urban land into productive, community-supported spaces;
- how to integrate food systems, education, and local economic activity in one place;
- how to use natural systems like water capture and native planting to support long-term sustainability;
- how to solve the problem of public land acquisition for green space in an urban environment.

A Future Worth Fighting For

This is the future that is worth fighting for and is necessary for humanity to embrace. If the land slips away, so do we. Hope is walking among the old growth trees, eating berries, and seeing an owl on a branch. Together, we plant the future today to honor the Chattanooga we know we can become tomorrow.

Learn more: www.farmparktn.org

Contact Blake at blake@luthelandlegacy.org



Edward Hewitt, co-founder of Luthe Land Legacy and Farm Park, (right) shows JK Willis of Kind Hearts Community the old aquifer-fed spring house on the 17+ acres. Photo by Blake Wright.

Knoxville High Schooler Studies Microplastics

A conversation with Knoxville high school student Makenzie Self about her research into how microplastics move through the atmosphere. Find her paper here: bit.ly/MSelf-Atmospheric-Microplastics

by Dan Firth, Chair, Holston Valley Regional Conservation Committee

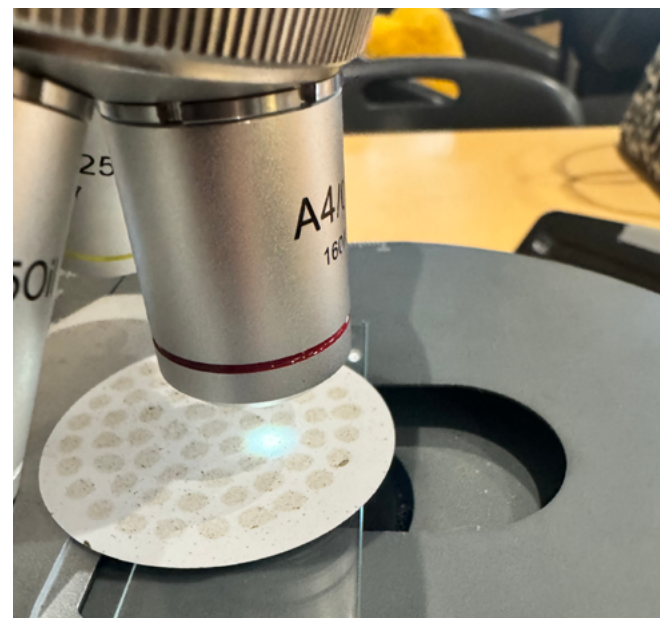
Why don't you just tell me a little bit about yourself and where you went to school and that.

So I am 17. I graduated from the L&N STEM Academy in downtown Knoxville. I was a part of the PME pathway, which is physics, mechanics, and engineering. I am a true lover of math and science and all of that stuff. And what actually got me started in microplastics is my school does this thing called the Junior Research Project. I had zero idea what I wanted to do. And one of my friends had an idea of working with microplastics. But he didn't love writing papers, and I was good at writing papers. I didn't even know what microplastics were at the time. And basically, we got to work at a University of Tennessee lab with Professor McKinney. Through this research, I started wondering, how are these things transported? How are they bridged and built off of each other?

I'm really curious about the world around me. My partner, Sam, and I looked at the difference in microplastics in open and closed waterways, focusing on how marine microplastics are transported through our water systems. And that kind of led me to wonder how they're transported atmospherically. Because I knew they were in our air.

My hypothesis was that it was through the water cycle, actually, just because of my research in water. But you'll see that with my project this year, it could be much different. It's actually posing more to certain wind patterns and things, which is really cool. But because of the experience that STEM gave me, and just being really curious and passionate about this, I started reaching out to colleges in the area, asking if anyone had a lab that I could use for a project I wanted to pursue, and any professors who would be willing to help me. And Professor Grant at Pellissippi State Community College said he would love to work with me.

And then Professor Grant partnered with Professor Vieth at Pellissippi's chemistry department, asking them if I could use their lab. They talked me through the steps. I had to get a permit. I had to reach out to



Microscope set up with the filter paper that filters microplastics from rain water. Photo by Makenzie Self.

all the parks. I got to work in their lab. My professors at Pellissippi helped me with my final draft of my paper to make sure it looked professional. But for the most part, they were there mainly as moral support and helping me walk through the steps. And that's why I call it a stepping stone project, because it's definitely done by a high schooler, but it's still something that's important. Because whenever I was doing my background research, I learned

that there's actually almost no real microplastic research, especially in America, that focuses on atmospheric microplastics and elevation. In America, most of the microplastic studies are done in soil and water.

So what did you learn about the impacts of microplastics pollution and why should we be concerned?

My project really looked at, like, atmospheric microplastics in relation to elevation. Going into it, I thought obviously the main implication is going to be *microplastics are everywhere* — they're taking over everything. And if we can't even drink rainwater without these pollutants, really, what's going on? We don't know what microplastics do to us. Because of the way they're transported over long distances, whether through wind or just through plastic degradation, they're everywhere. There's not a single child born without microplastics inside of them. There's not a single place on this Earth without contamination of microplastics just because that's how our water cycle works and how our wind patterns work.

What could be implemented out of this research?

If we do find that microplastics largely have to do with wind patterns, we could control certain production facilities to make sure that whenever they do release certain pollutants, if this wind pattern's going this way

toward this naturally protected area, then they can't put out their pollutants this way because that's going to mess with the environment that should be protected.

What advice do you have for others interested in research?

So it's just something that I really encourage any high schooler in the East Tennessee area to reach out to Pellissippi, UT, ETSU, MTSU if they're in any part of Tennessee, and just ask them and be like: I have this idea, I want to research this, will you please help me? I had my friends come to me and be like, how did you do this all on your own? Even if the process might not be perfect or might not go exactly as you plan, you're still going to get something fundamentally good out of it because I found actual results. It's not like my data points are scattered everywhere and completely incomprehensible. I found actual results and it was fabulous and it felt wonderful.

So what was your favorite part of the project?

I got a fossil. That's not actually my favorite, but that one's pretty high up there. The guy from Frozen Head State Park said the boars rummage around, and they will dig up old tree fossils. And he found one while we were out there setting up samples and he was like, do you want this? Seriously though, my favorite part is presenting it. I love learning about it. I love doing my research and talking to all these people. But my favorite part is definitely, like, whenever I was able to talk about this with all of my teachers. And that was the first time it really hit me, like, holy cow, I actually did something here because I did bridge major gaps in research.

Sounds like you've gotten a great introduction to scientific research.

Yeah, I really have and I man . . . do I love it! Actually, this research actually helped me decide where I'm going to college because I got accepted by Washington College in Maryland, and what really led me to do that was I got accepted into a fellowship program and that means I'll be able to do one-on-one or small group research with a professor.

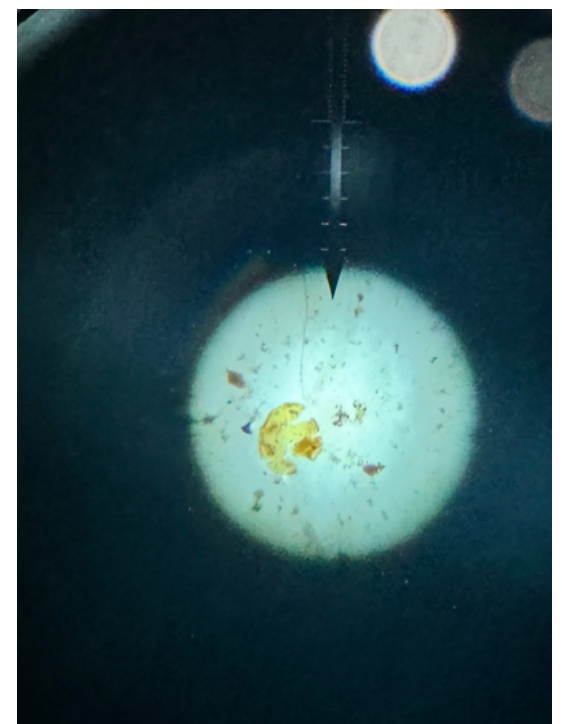
Tell me a little bit more about what your career ambitions are.

Currently I'm planning to major in physics. I'm not really sure what subset yet. I really like classical physics but I also like theoretical physics too. I really like theoretical physics actually. But then I also plan to minor in business. I could be a project manager. I've also really thought about getting my PhD and just becoming a physics professor and being able to do this research and teach people. But also, I know that I'm like 17 right now. And if you ask me in five years, I might want to do something completely different. I might be an environmental researcher, who knows?

Contact Dan at dan.firth.sierraclub@gmail.com



Makenzie Self, Knoxville High School student, did research into how microplastics move through the atmosphere.



Microplastics viewed through a microscope. Photo by Makenzie Self.



A passionate round of applause for former Vice President Al Gore at the Climate Reality Training in Nashville, May 1-2. Photo by Todd Waterman.

Sierrans Attend Climate Reality Training

In Nashville, Sierrans celebrate, then learn about, the Climate Reality Project from the best president we never had

by Todd Waterman, Harvey Broome Group

On Thursday, April 30 through Saturday, May 2, hundreds of Sierrans spent the weekend in Nashville, first celebrating the 20th anniversary of the game-changing climate change film *An Inconvenient Truth*. Then we learned to present the compelling Al Gore slideshow that inspired the film — from Gore himself. The events also featured an all-star cast of activists, scientists, musicians, and other leaders at the Climate Reality Flagship US Training.

At Thursday's celebration, between projected clips from the film, Pulitzer-winning biographer Jon Meacham interviewed Gore, who bewailed our slow climate progress in the face of the fossil fuel industry's doubt-sowing disinformation and massive dark money campaign contributions. He angrily exclaimed — chopping his hand down through the air — that after Citizens United, climate bipartisanship STOPPED — because every Republican knew the fossil industry would anonymously primary them if they did anything on climate. But Gore also had much to celebrate. The film and its sequel had awakened millions worldwide to the urgency of kicking our global fossil fuel addiction, and sparked a worldwide climate movement. Gore's climate slide show, on which the urgently fast-tracked film was based, had spawned the Climate Reality Project, which had trained 31,000 activists to present his constantly-updated Powerpoint. To cap off the celebration, Kathy Mattea, one of Gore's original 50 trainees, sang for us. We lingered to drink and chat, to more music from Scoot Teasley.

Over the next two days, seven hundred of us, including many Tennessee Sierrans, would ourselves qualify to present Climate Reality.

On Friday morning, Gore masterfully repeated the slide show he'd refined over a thousand performances throughout the world. It was a perfectly condensed, rapid-fire, utterly convincing avalanche of data and dire projections impossible to fully remember — and impossible to forget. I scribbled notes: 750,000 Hiroshimas a day of trapped heat, 365

days a year; superstorms; wildfires; floods; drought; disease; vital glaciers vanishing; coral reefs dying; rising seas; food and water crises; the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC) running amok; \$25 trillion lost by 2050; warming feedback loops; ever more dangerous heat waves. "We're reaching the limits of human survivability." How much longer could polluters use the atmosphere "as an open sewer"?

As always, Gore followed the bad news with a passionate message of hope. We know what we need to do. We know we can build all the cheap, clean energy we need. We lack only the will. And we can build that, too.

Over those two days we'd hear much more from Al Gore and the events' 33 other extraordinary presenters and panelists, including Nashville Mayor Freddie O'Connell; *Merchants of Doubt* author Naomi Oreskes; venture capital firm Kleiner Perkins chair John Doerr; Nature Conservancy Global Chair and former Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist; banjo virtuosos Béla Fleck and Abigail Washburn; scientists Rosina Bierbaum and Dr. Michael E. Mann; Indivisible co-founder Matt Traldi; and key Climate Reality staffers and volunteers. Gore would introduce us to the Climate TRACE climate pollution tracker: <https://climatetrace.org/> and its beautiful, interactive 3-D graphics. We'd discuss and plan and table and ask questions and connect — and learn how to stay connected with Climate Reality's presenter-only Reality Hub.

Gore quoted Wallace Stevens:

"After the final no there comes a yes
And on that yes the future world depends."

Learn more: www.climaterealityproject.org

Todd's Climate Reality Photo Albums: bit.ly/ClimateReality2026

Contact Todd at jtoddw@mail.com

UPDATE: Hawkins County Versus Exotic Ridge

See *Tennes-Sierran May June 2026* for previous article.

by Joanne Irvin, CareNET Regional Conservation Committee

In February of this year, the Hawkins County commissioners refused to even vote on an agreement to allow Exotic Ridge Cryptocurrency Mining to locate in Bulls Gap, Tennessee. We all knew it was only a matter of time before the disagreement would be in court. Exotic Ridge is being represented by The Beacon Center of Tennessee, a conservative, non-profit organization. In their own words they have "successfully pushed for bold reforms in education, healthcare, economic regulations and tax policy, among other things."

According to *The Rogersville Review*, on Monday, April 27, the Hawkins County Commissioners met for their monthly meeting. Attorney Crystal Jessee introduced the commissioners to George Nolan, Director of the Tennessee office of the Southern Environmental Law Center (SELC) and two of its senior attorneys, Trey Bussey and Joe DeGaetano. She referred to The Beacon Center as a "hammer," and then she said "I give you a sledge hammer" and introduced the SELC.

Director Nolan then addressed the commissioners, telling them a bit

about the SELC and its mission. "We cover the entire state, doing what we can to help communities protect the pristine landscapes and natural treasures that our state enjoys," he said. "One issue that's a big concern for us is how fast things are changing in our rural communities, and the fact that out-of-state interests come in and change things in a way that's bad for nature and bad for the rural communities that live there."

Nolan offered the SELC's services *pro bono*. The commissioners asked some background questions about how the SELC was funded and for a copy of the *pro bono* agreement that would have to be signed. The commissioners would vote on accepting SELC's representation at their next meeting, and the SELC board of directors would have to approve its involvement.

On Monday, May 18, the Hawkins County commissioners met for their monthly meeting and voted to accept representation by SELC. The county attorney also confirmed that the SELC board of directors had approved the firm representing Hawkins County in federal court.

Contact Joanne at joannetheelder@gmail.com

ACT LOCAL! SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL SIERRA CLUB GROUP!

by Mac Post, TN Chapter Fundraising Chair



The Sierra Club, while a national organization, is most impactful at local scales. This is where we make important actions happen — leading outings to experience and learn about wild places, organizing rallies and petition campaigns to prevent harmful environmental damages, participating in local government meetings, tabling events, producing informational program meetings, blogs, and social media — all to inform our neighbors of actions that can be taken to make our communities environmentally sustainable.

This work costs money. I know that you get many fundraising appeals from the Sierra Club but these are all for supporting the national organization or the Tennessee Chapter. Only a tiny sliver of these funds filter down to your local group. To support local work, groups must do their own fundraising. The Chapter is forgoing a fundraising appeal this summer so that your group can make their pitch directly to you.

Many of you have gotten, or will soon get, an appeal from your local group as an email. This email contains a short list of significant recent accomplishments and upcoming plans on how your contributions would be used this year.

Some of you will not see this email due to preferences set with the Sierra Club or your own email system, so the information on how to donate to your group is below. Please consider supporting your local group in the critical, grassroots work they do to protect the environment where you live.

Harvey Broome Group

Mail your check to:
Harvey Broome Sierra Club
c/o Dana Loseke
7228 Settlers Path Ln
Knoxville, TN 37920

Or donate through Paypal:
bit.ly/HBG-Donate

Middle Tennessee Group

Mail your check to:
Sierra Club MTG Treasurer
Cynthia Willett
103 Sanford Ct
Smyrna, TN 37167

Or donate through Paypal:
bit.ly/MTG-Donate

Cherokee Group

Please contact David Hoot
sierra.tn.cherokee@gmail.com

Chickasaw Group

Please contact Paul Kline
pkboatnut@gmail.com

TVA (continued from page 3)

- Individual. The pipeline runs through many people's yards, mere feet from their homes. Their trees have been cut down, their ground dug up, their property value decreased. They now live well within the "blast zone" that would cause severe damage if there's ever an explosion.
- Regional. Folks who live a little farther from the pipeline's path are subjected even so to massive disruptions for months — traffic nightmares and nearby dynamite blasts — and more permanent effects, including the visual impact on the region's character and degradation of river water quality due to construction-related sediment runoff.
- National. By turning away from solar and wind and doubling down on fossil fuel, the United States risks ceding the renewable revolution to China. Solar cells are an American invention, but China now completely dominates the solar market, currently valued at more than \$150 billion dollars a year, and growing rapidly.
- Global. Finally, every ounce of CO₂ emitted into the atmosphere brings the coming climate change crisis nearer.

Standing on the pipeline's path, the scar on Tennessee's rural landscape is painfully obvious to us cyclists, stretching to the horizon as far as the eye can see. But the damage goes far beyond what can be seen from a single vantage point.

Our route covered nearly 100 miles, paralleling the pipeline from Cummins Falls State Park to the Kingston fossil fuel plant. Only a few of us were experienced riders, so we organized the outing as a relay spread over two days.

For Sue and Keith Havens, It Was Déjà Vu All Over Again

Midway through the first day, we stopped at the home of Sue and Keith Havens. The Havens retired to Tennessee so they could indulge their whitewater passion right from their backyard, which borders White Creek (one of the many creeks the pipeline cuts through). The environment near their previous home in Michigan was sorely impacted when an Enbridge oil pipeline burst, dumping more than a million gallons into the Kalamazoo River — one of the largest inland oil spills in U.S. history. So news that the same company was planning to build a natural gas pipeline passing within a few hundred yards of their house rubbed salt in an open wound.

The Havens joined with concerned community members from Morgan, Roane, and Knox counties to form a group called Ridgeline Voices. They held community info sessions, organized a local music festival, and were

successful in getting many people involved. However, when they tried to get the support of the local county commission, Enbridge proved to be more powerful than the people the county commissioners represent, and the commissioners ultimately sided with the company.

As a result, property owners within the pipeline path were left to negotiate with Enbridge on their own. They felt powerless when the company warned them that they should take what they were offered or risk getting nothing, when their land was taken by eminent domain. Enbridge stands to make a profit of roughly half a million dollars per day, while the community whose environment is being damaged, and who are now living with a timebomb in their midst, received almost nothing. State and local governments, which are supposed to serve and protect their citizens, could have negotiated for higher payments, community centers, solar panels to provide energy independence, greenspaces, or any number of things. Instead, they did nothing. They didn't even secure a bond to ensure that Enbridge would pay for construction-related road damage.

When it became clear that the pipeline was happening, the Havens worked with Sierra Club, Tennessee Citizens for Wilderness Planning, and other partners to organize an extensive citizen science effort to monitor water quality where the pipeline crosses local streams. There has been relatively little impact observed thus far. But we'll never know how much credit for that good news is due to the fact that Enbridge knows they're being watched.

After leaving the Havens' haven, we biked to the Lillypad Hopyard Brewery and Campground, a mecca for rock climbers near the entrance to the Obed Wild and Scenic River. There we spent the night in Sierra Club fashion: under the stars, singing around a campfire and sleeping in tents. We woke up refreshed and ready for the last leg of our journey.

Kingston Fossil Fuel Plant

When we got to the end, we were looking across the Emory River at the Kingston fossil fuel plant. The sight was haunting, a grim reminder of the damage caused by fossil fuel. This is where a dike burst in 2008, releasing more than a billion gallons of coal fly ash slurry, the largest industrial spill in U.S. history. Dozens of premature deaths have been linked to inadequate worker protection during the cleanup. Our team was a bit tired, and quite hot — temperatures that day were 10°F higher than normal. A single hot day cannot be blamed on climate change, but it was a reminder of what awaits us if we continue CO₂ emissions unabated. And, even though we were tired and hot, we were also invigorated by the joy of new friendships and a sense of shared purpose — a recommitment to the difficult task of weaning society off of fossil fuels.

Contact Vince at cianciolotv@alum.mit.edu

EPA (continued from page 3)

Hundreds of workers EPA became sick and dozens are dead." Knisley has seen TVA's coal ash used to fill children's ball fields and seen it piled up behind a public playground, open to the wind. "This is coal ash management without strong federal regulation and enforcement," Knisley said. "States and utilities are not going to keep communities safe."

At the end of the day, Lisa Evans from Earthjustice sent a note to us all:

"We showed up **in force** yesterday for the EPA virtual hearing! More than 150 people testified from 9am -7pm, representing impacted communities from Alaska to Puerto Rico — and everywhere in between!

"Your powerful and informed testimony was moving, and it undoubtedly made an impression on the staff, who will be there long after this horrible administration is gone."

Contact Kent at kminault@gmail.com



SIERRA CLUB

**Be a champion for the environment.
Join today for \$15.**

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____

Zip _____ Phone (____) _____

Email _____

Check enclosed. Please make payable to Sierra Club.

Please charge my: Visa Mastercard AMEX

Cardholder Name _____

Card Number _____

Exp. Date ____/____/____

Signature _____

Membership Categories	Individual	Joint
Special Offer	<input type="checkbox"/> \$15	
Standard	<input type="checkbox"/> \$39	<input type="checkbox"/> \$49
Supporting	<input type="checkbox"/> \$75	<input type="checkbox"/> \$100
Contributing	<input type="checkbox"/> \$150	<input type="checkbox"/> \$175
Life	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1000	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1250
Senior	<input type="checkbox"/> \$25	<input type="checkbox"/> \$35
Student/Limited Income	<input type="checkbox"/> \$25	<input type="checkbox"/> \$35

Contributions, gifts and dues to Sierra Club are not tax deductible; they support our effective, citizen-based advocacy and lobbying efforts. Your dues include \$7.50 for a subscription to *Sierra* magazine and \$1 for your Chapter newsletters.

Enclose a check and mail with this full ad to:
 Sierra Club
 P.O. Box 7059
 Merrifield
 Virginia 22116-7059
F94QB43001

Or click JOIN on our website:
sierraclub.org/tennessee

HIKE AT RADNOR LAKE

Thursday, July 9, 5:30 PM Central

Location: 1160 Otter Creek Rd, Oak Hill, Tennessee

See wildlife and enjoy views of the lake. We plan to hike on the north side of Radnor Lake on a natural path approximately 2 miles. Please note that dogs are not allowed on this trail.

Register for Radnor Lake hike: <https://bit.ly/RadnorLakeHike>

Come for the hike, stay for the program meeting!

The Way through the Woods

by Rudyard Kipling

They shut the road through the woods
 Seventy years ago.
 Weather and rain have undone it again,
 And now you would never know
 There was once a road through the woods
 Before they planted the trees.
 It is underneath the coppice and heath,
 And the thin anemones.
 Only the keeper sees
 That, where the ring-dove broods,
 And the badgers roll at ease,
 There was once a road through the woods.
 Yet, if you enter the woods
 Of a summer evening late,
 When the night-air cools on the trout-ringed pools
 Where the otter whistles his mate,
 (They fear not men in the woods,
 Because they see so few.)
 You will hear the beat of a horse's feet,
 And the swish of a skirt in the dew,
 Steadily cantering through
 The misty solitudes,
 As though they perfectly knew
 The old lost road through the woods.
 But there is no road through the woods.

From *Rewards and Fairies* (Doubleday, Page & Company, 1910) by Rudyard Kipling, best known for his novels *The Jungle Book*, *The Second Jungle Book*, and *Kim*, and his most famous poem, "If."

This poem is in the public domain.

Harvey Broome Group Third Creek Greenway Clean-up

Tuesday, July 14, 6:00 pm Eastern

Evenings on long summer days should not be spent indoors undergoing death by Powerpoint, so let's take a walk on Knoxville's first greenway and do a bit of cleanup. Gloves and litter grabbers will be provided, but if you have your own please bring them. We'll start with a little food and drinks provided at TVUUC (note the earlier time - 6:00) before heading down to the greenway just a short distance away at 7:00 pm.

Register at <https://bit.ly/3rdCreekCleanup>
 or contact Bob Grimac bobgrimac@gmail.com