

# Tennes-Sierran

The bi-monthly state newsletter of the Tennessee Chapter of the Sierra Club

Volume 53, Number 5 - September / October 2020

## Is TVA's Fight to Keep Memphis Light, Gas, and Water an Opportunity for More **Clean Renewable Energy?**

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Explore, Enjoy, and Protect

# From Mac Post, State Chair



On April 22, 1970, the first Earth Day mobilized 20 million Americans, roughly 10% of the U.S. population, to take to the streets and auditoriums to raise awareness and to protest against the impacts of 150 years of industrial pollution and unchecked development. They demanded clean air, clean water, and preservation of public land and wildlife. This Earth Day led directly to the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency in 1970, and the passage of landmark environmental laws including the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, and the Endangered Species Act.

Earth Day 1970 achieved a rare political alignment, enlisting support from Republicans and Democrats, rich and poor, urban dwellers and farmers, business and labor leaders. It ignited political action and was an expression of the need for collective

action, for corporations and politicians to do their part.

Since then Earth Day activities have become largely perfunctory and mostly focus on individual lifestyle choices – for example, recycling, composting, reducing our home carbon footprint, buying “natural” products, etc. While these things are important, they are not nearly enough. With the 50th anniversary of Earth Day just past, while we are focused on the COVID-19 pandemic and racial injustice, it is apparent that corporate interests with the help of many politicians are working hard on rolling back hard-won regulations rather than stepping up to their environmental responsibilities (see [Regulatory Rollback Tracker](#)).

It is time that we elect politicians who are environmental champions. The Sierra Club has launched its bold **2020 Plan to Win** (see [Sierra Club Plan-to-Win](#)) campaign to elect officials that are concerned for the earth’s environment. To find out how you can help Tennessee local elections, contact the Chapter’s Political Committee Co-Chairs Bill Moll ([whmoll@aol.com](mailto:whmoll@aol.com)) or Rick Herron ([rick.m.herron@gmail.com](mailto:rick.m.herron@gmail.com)). By electing people who share our values for a healthy environment and a sustainable natural world, we will be able to protect what is important to us.

It is also time that the Sierra Club, a 128-year-old organization, reckon with its own complex history in perpetuating white supremacy. The Sierra Club executive director, Michael Brune, has started a series of posts that take an unflinching look at this history including John Muir’s role and those of other early Sierra Club members and leaders. The first post can be found at [Pulling Down Our Monuments](#). Please take a look at this compelling document and the plans underway to redesign the leadership structure of the Sierra Club to redress the harm this history has caused.

For too long the outdoors natural areas have been seen by many in the Sierra Club as a white sanctuary to explore, enjoy, and protect. This persistent but misguided idea will cause some members to protest about the Sierra Club not staying in our narrow environmental lane and expanding into issues of race, equality, and privilege. But it is now clear - we cannot achieve our goals of a healthy and sustainable environment, clean water and air, improving biodiversity, preserving wilderness, and environmental justice without a commitment to becoming an actively anti-racist organization. Here again, another action is to work towards electing candidates who stand up to polluters and speak up for the people who too often shoulder the burden of pollution and public health failures.

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## The Chapter Has a PAC!

After many years without a Political Action Committee (PAC), the Tennessee Chapter now has one - Tennessee Sierra Club Political Committee. The previous PAC had been created to make contributions to candidates. This new PAC has a more modest goal - make the Chapter’s supporter list available to endorsed candidates.

Because of election financing laws, the Sierra Club cannot spend money to advocate for or against candidates beyond its membership. When the Sierra Club contact list is used to promote a candidate, the candidate or a PAC must reimburse the Sierra Club for that usage in advance. The Tennessee Sierra Club PAC has been created to provide that reimbursement. In the Sierra Club *Insider* email, you may have seen the line “Paid for by Sierra Club Independent Action, [www.sierraclubindependentaction.org](http://www.sierraclubindependentaction.org), and not authorized by any candidate or candidate’s committee.” Since the *Insider* is available to the public, a PAC must reimburse the Sierra Club in advance for the expense of any article encouraging the election or defeat of a candidate for office.

The Chapter has endorsed several state candidates in competitive races. We now have a PAC to help support those candidates and we need contributions. We will only accept checks - no cash or credit card payments. There are no limits on the amount of contributions that may be made to a PAC, so don’t feel constrained. Foreign nationals may not contribute. *If you contribute more than \$100 to our committee, the committee is required to use its best efforts to collect and publicly disclose on campaign finance reports your name, address, occupation and employer, as well as the date and amount of your contribution.*

Contributions to the Tennessee Sierra Club Political Committee are not tax-deductible. Please make your check out to: “Tennessee Sierra Club Political Committee” and mail to:

Tennessee Sierra Club Political Committee  
500 Paragon Mills RD. Apt. G6  
Nashville, TN 37211

## Tennes-Sierran

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Email: [address.changes@sierraclub.org](mailto:address.changes@sierraclub.org)

Snail Mail: Mail new address AND the mailing label on page 1 to:  
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Request no paper copy here: [http://bit.ly/Stop\\_My\\_Paper\\_Copy](http://bit.ly/Stop_My_Paper_Copy)

### Submissions

Oct Issue of the Chapter E-Newsletter by Sept 25

Nov Issue of the Chapter E-Newsletter by Oct 23

Nov/Dec Issue of The Tennes-Sierran by Sept 30

Request Submission Guidelines at [sierratnnews@gmail.com](mailto:sierratnnews@gmail.com)

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# Rita Harris Elected to National Sierra Club Board

by Marshall Adesman, Vounteer Writer



More than 49 million Americans like to fish. Freshwater, saltwater, fly fishing, catch-and-release or catch-and-keep – doesn't matter, we bait our hooks, toss 'em out, and hope for the best. Rita Harris remembers that her late mother just loved to fish. "But she didn't really know all that much about water pollution. Probably a good thing that she didn't catch many fish, who knows what she might have brought into the house!"

A deep and abiding love and respect for the environment has driven Harris for more than two decades, and now it has taken her to a whole new level – this past spring, she was elected to the Sierra Club's national Board of Directors. She became active with the Club in a rather unusual way. "They hired me in 1999 as an Environmental Justice

Organizer," she said in a recent telephone interview. She served in that capacity, as well as a great many others, for eighteen years, until she retired in 2017. "At my retirement party," she remembered, "I mentioned that I would love to serve on the National Board." Someone must have tattled, because more than a year ago she was called and asked if she still had "Board fever." She did, and went through a background

check, three interviews, and town hall video campaigns before becoming one of five new members elected this past April.

In her Sierra Club career, all spent with the Chickasaw Group in Western Tennessee, she has worked on a great many campaigns. The biggest one took place around fifteen years ago. "A company wanted to build a nuclear waste incinerator on President's Island," she said (despite its name, it is actually a peninsula on the Mississippi River in southwest Memphis.) It is only a mile from an area that is predominantly African-American. Harris organized the community and, over a ten-month period, they conducted vigorous rallies and spoke out forcefully against the incinerator. It was never built.

In addition to water issues, air pollution gets her motivated. There was, for instance, an illegal dumping problem in Memphis – people were bringing their trash into other neighborhoods. Harris once again got people mobilized, and they raised a stink (pun intended), which forced City officials to keep a sharper eye out in certain "violated" areas in town.

She has also been active in teaching how discrimination fits into the ecological scheme, leading anti-racism workshops all over the country. She served on the Sierra Club's original Diversity Council, which has now morphed into the Office of Equity and Inclusion, and she is eager to help turn this into a success. "We need to be able to work with all people, in all neighborhoods, to help fight global warming," she says with great emphasis.

Fight – that's a good word. In Rita Harris, the Sierra Club has a real fighter on its Board of Directors. Polluters, climate change deniers, and any others who stand in the way of the "greening" of Mother Earth, will soon learn what Western Tennessee learned over and over – if you try to oppose Rita, it won't end well for you.

Contact Marshall at [msadesman@gmail.com](mailto:msadesman@gmail.com)

## A City of Two Tales: Rogersville Community Splits Over Rumoured Threat

by Rick Sanders, Vounteer Writer



Hawkins County Care NET CCC Secretary Bobbi Smith, front and center; and behind her, two members of the New Panther Initiative from Tri-Cities/Johnson City on July 11, 2020, at a rally for racial justice in downtown Rogersville, TN, organized by members of the New Panther Initiative.

Rogersville is a small town in eastern Tennessee with a rich heritage dating back to 1775. Its citizens are proud and protective of their community, and say they are ready to defend it from any outside agitators who would do them harm. The problem is that no such threat existed, but some local folks showed up at the Hawkins County Veterans Memorial and Courthouse anyway – many armed.

Members of the Sierra Club's Hawkins County Care NET Community Conservation Committee (CCC) had reached out to the Black community in Rogersville for a peaceful gathering planned for June 26 to have "prayer and dialogue" and to discuss social justice. One of the group's members contacted the pastor of Hasson Street Church, which is historically Black. Others reached out

to the keepers of the Price Museum, formerly a "colored" school. It was when Care NET CCC member Guerry McConnell contacted the city to see if she needed a permit to meet at Swift Park that things went strange.

Between word-of-mouth from some people at the city and county offices, and social media, the meeting was misconstrued as a planned protest, and the misinformation soon went viral. Many of the locals got upset about what they saw as a violent, disruptive event coming to their community, and the Rogersville Police Department (RPD) was flooded with calls. When the RPD realized that a counter-protest was being planned just a couple of blocks away, they called members of Care NET CCC and suggested that they postpone the event. And they did.

Nevertheless, a crowd of about 300 people showed up downtown for what some of them described as "a show of support for veterans, heritage, and police." Rumors had abounded that Black Lives Matter (BLM) protesters and Antifa were coming into their peaceful community with the intent of defacing the county's Veterans Memorial. In addition to the police presence, many of the citizens of Rogersville showed up armed. Ironically, no one showed up to counter-protest at Swift Park, the original site for the prayer and dialogue. The pastor of Hasson Street Church gave a prayer and a sermon at the park that evening.

Given the scope and the intent of the original peaceful gathering organized by Care NET CCC, the escalation of fear and unnecessary preparedness for violence from the local populace disturbed members of the community. Although, considering the difference of opinions surrounding protests and events after George Floyd's death, perhaps Rogersville is just a microcosm of our country, amplifying the negative discord between people of different mindsets. Even Hawkins County Mayor Jim Lee made the following statement on Facebook: "I'm not worried about the thugs destroying our town with all these vets out here!" Bobbi Smith, Secretary of Care NET CCC was offended by the "radical language" of the mayor. "Elected officials should represent everybody," she said, "and not attack certain factions of the citizenry as if they were criminals."

Throughout that evening there was much conversation between the assembled crowd and reporters, perhaps because there were no protesters there to counter-

protest with. Most statements centered around their desire to protect their town, while pointing out that they are normally very peaceful people. "There is not a racist bone in my body," said a man who had been holding a Confederate flag. "I don't hate anybody, of any color," said another. Those statements and others like them create pause to wonder. If these people have assembled in such numbers, armed, with the sole intent of protecting their community, then why are they bringing up the issue of racism when nobody has even asked them?

Although white people have joined their Black brothers in protests over time, especially since the Civil Rights era, the recent BLM protests are getting more and more white support. Indeed, in some of the news videos of BLM protests, sometimes one has to look hard into the crowd to spot Black protesters among all the white ones.

Following the cancelled dialogue at Swift Park, Care NET CCC members met with around 50 others from the Black and white communities of Rogersville for a peaceful dialogue July 3. There were no protesters, no media, no police, and no counter-protesters.

On July 10, three members of Care NET CCC met with Hawkins County Mayor Jim Lee for an hour to explain what Care NET CCC is and its involvement in this effort.

On July 11, members of the New Panther Initiative of Johnson City/Tri-Cities held a planned peaceful protest for racial justice in downtown Rogersville. Hundreds of people were in attendance including counter-protesters. Some members of each group were armed. Nine of the counter-protesters, six of whom were from out-of-town and part of a group of Neo-Nazis, were arrested. One image stood out—a photo of a Black man reaching over a barrier to shake the hand of a white counter-protester. In that brief instant they shared eye contact, and there seemed to be genuine, unspoken understanding. Overall, the support that people of different races showed for each other in these events was mostly positive, leaving this writer with a feeling of hope.



Hawkins County Care NET CCC members showed up armed with ukeleles and pink t-shirts at a rally for racial justice on July 11, 2020, organized by members of the New Panther Initiative of Tri-Cities/Johnson City, TN in downtown Rogersville.



Poster shared on social media promoting a march planned by the New Panther Initiative of Tri-Cities/Johnson City, TN, for July 11, 2020.

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# Lessons from the Trail

by Joan Tomlinson, Trail Name Blue Jay

## Pack Weight and Political Priorities



One of the most basic things that I consider when I prepare for a long distance back-packing journey is pack weight. I want to know the total weight that I will carry on my back day after day. There is a lot that goes into consideration of what I need that will enable me to embark on a long, sometimes solo, journey. My max, comfortable pack weight is 32 pounds, fully loaded. I can carry that load and maintain a pace and daily distance that works for me. I'm not a speed hiker, and I don't dawdle too much. I

want to go at a pace that allows me to connect deeply with the journey ahead that will take me to wild and untamed places. There is a draw to wild places in me; sometimes that draw is very strong. If my pack is too heavy, the weight will detract from the experience. A good pack weight makes a journey more fluid. The contents of my pack need to support my subsistence on the trail and what I need to feel safe, secure, comfortable, and clean — all relative to the experience. I weigh everything in my pack, and the pack itself, to the tenth of an ounce. The process of deciding what gear, what food, and what items are essential can be intense. How important are camp shoes? Is weight or warmth more important? How much water for desert hiking? How much of my favorite whiskey for nights in camp? The process of deciding the contents of my pack doesn't stop until I load my pack for that last time the night before I leave. The contents of my pack reflect what my priorities are.

It is easy for me to equate pack weight with the weight of everyday things in my off-trail life. This can be the weight (or volume) of stuff in my garage or closets. This can be the emotional weight of things better reduced from my life, like too much depressing news or personal dramas. This can be the psychological weight of thinking I need to fulfill expectations that don't work for me. I've had a good bit of experience determining my priorities for pack content, and that experience has served me well in understanding my priorities in life. Sometimes I need to add something, like advocating for social justice, to make my life-pack reflect my priorities. At other times, I need to eliminate something that is thorny.

It is also easy to correlate pack weight with the weight of the political climate in our nation's capital. Actions and statements from many individuals who are leading our country conflict often and dramatically with my values. Many of our elected officials are not adequately focusing on the realities of climate change, the need for a national response to Covid-19, social justice, and national unity. The last few years have seemed heavy to me. So heavy. These years have felt like an assault on common decency and an assault on Earth. How many times have I been negatively astounded by what some of our officials have said or done? I feel a great need to lighten this pack.

In early July, I signed up for the Sierra Club's Independent Action 2020 Plan to Win. I also joined the teams of state and local candidates. I felt the need to put some action behind my frustration with the direction in which our country is going. I wanted to jettison some bricks and stones. It felt great finally to be doing something that could potentially make an impact on the November election. I shouted out loud and pumped my fists in the air. I didn't want November to roll around and look back thinking I should have done more. I had taken steps to lighten my load.

The Tennessee Chapter of the Sierra Club and local Sierra Club groups are endorsing candidates, national to local. I encourage you to consider these endorsed candidates, each of whom has gone through a rigorous process to ensure their values and positions align with those of the Sierra Club. The Sierra Club strategic plan includes: supporting solutions to solve the climate crisis in an enduring way that protects the environment, diversifying the environmental movement to reflect the demographics of our society, and stewarding our natural resources to safeguard them for present and future generations. Does the Sierra Club align with your personal values and ethics? If so, I hope you will consider working in some way between now and November to elect those who stand with, and not against, the Sierra Club.

There are huge issues confronting us as inhabitants of our beautiful planet, as citizens of our democracy, as people living through a pandemic and social unrest. Who will we elect to lead us forward and in what direction will they take us? What weight will we be asked to carry? What actions will we take as individuals during this campaign season to help determine our country's path forward? Let's stand together and with the Sierra Club to ensure our efforts during the remainder of this campaign make a positive impact on our collective future. Let's look at the contents of our packs and ensure they reflect our priorities.

*Blue Jay seeks the wisdom of Earth in wild places. She has completed hikes of the Appalachian Trail, the Pacific Crest Trail, and all the trails in the Smokies. She is a member of the Harvey Broome Group and may be contacted at [BlueJayAT@gmail.com](mailto:BlueJayAT@gmail.com)*

# Award-winning 'Build It Green' Program Creates Leaders



Above: Build It Green participants learn advanced framing techniques from professionals at New Blue Construction.

*This is the first in a series highlighting winners of the Governor's Environmental Stewardship Awards which recognize exceptional voluntary actions that improve or protect our environment and natural resources with projects or initiatives not required by law or regulation.— editor's note*

by Allie Stafford, Tennessee Chapter E-newsletter Editor

Allen Shropshire is an Organizer for Chattanooga in Action for Love, Equality, and Benevolence (CALEB). He grew up in East Chattanooga/Avondale. Before getting into community outreach, Shropshire was working as a line cook at a downtown cafe when he heard about a program called Build It Green (BIG). He was reluctant at first but decided to give it a shot.

BIG is a workforce and leadership development program that started in 2018 as a partnership between green|spaces and Build Me a World. It was modeled after two programs: Socially Equal Energy Efficient Development (SEED) in Knoxville, Tennessee, and Manitoba Green Retrofit in Alberta, Canada. The 12-week program offers paid training and job shadowing opportunities using a blend of personal development, technical training, and community outreach to create workforce-ready young adults. BIG is specifically focused on energy efficiency, sustainability, and residential weatherization improvements.

The need for energy efficiency is great, because energy-draining housing puts an expensive burden on low-income Tennesseans. But BIG is helping fill a service gap in these neighborhoods. According to Dawn Hjelseth, Chief Development Officer for green|spaces, "There are homeowners that make \$1 too much to qualify for current home improvement programs or have absentee landlords. We can work with these residents to make home improvements and help them lower their utility bills."

For Shropshire, learning about the technical side of green building was interesting, but what he valued most was the sense of "community that was built in my class of ten brothers from all different sides of town." He found it inspiring to come together and work on projects and discuss issues of daily life. Participating in BIG turned out to be even more lucrative than Shropshire expected; after graduating from the program in Spring 2018, he was hired by green|spaces as a Program Outreach Coordinator for the Empower Chattanooga program, and later by CALEB. In June, Build It Green was awarded a 2020 Governor's Stewardship Award in the category of Environmental Education and Outreach. The Governor's Environmental Stewardship Awards program, now in its 34th year, recognizes exceptional voluntary efforts that contribute to the protection and improvement of Tennessee's natural resources and wildlife.

Since 2018, BIG has graduated 38 people, with an 80 percent placement and retention in employment. One of the most powerful factors of BIG's success is its focus on leadership and personal development. As Hjelseth explains, one reason the program is important is because it is designed to "create pathways out of poverty" and build community leaders. With other cities interested in creating similar programs in their towns, green|spaces has been giving presentations across the Southeast about BIG.

In the wake of pandemic uncertainty, the future of Build It Green will look a little different. Green|spaces is currently in the process of becoming an AmeriCorps Opportunity Youth Service Initiative (OYSI) host site. As a result, Hjelseth says that they "will be able to work with individuals for a longer period of time and do even more for the community through home improvements, community projects and supporting other nonprofits." In October, they will begin to host 12 half-term members and 2 full-time members through the program.

Shropshire is thankful that the BIG crew "saw something in me that at first I couldn't see or put my finger on." Seeing the potential in others is transformative, and Shropshire intends to pass it on. He says, "Now I am in a position of leadership and I plan to continue to build more leaders in my community and build more people power." Despite being a relatively new program, Build It Green has made an impressive impact, and it's clear that they are just getting started.

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# Memphis Explores Alternatives to TVA Power

By Aaron Butler, Volunteer Writer

Wherever you are in Memphis, whether you're strolling into a bar on Beale Street or flipping your lights on in the Cooper Young area, there's one thing that doesn't change: the power keeping the lights on is generated by Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) and delivered locally by Memphis Light, Gas and Water (MLGW). This relationship has been ongoing for approximately eight decades, but the winds of change are blowing and presenting Memphis residents and the environment with an exciting opportunity.



In the fall of 2018, MLGW received multiple proposals from energy consultants to leave TVA and potentially save hundreds of millions of dollars. Fast forward to April 2019 when MLGW began taking this opportunity more seriously and put the word out that they were interested in partnering with a consulting firm to research and analyze their options.

Technological innovations have paved the way for competition in the industry. The cost of clean, renewable energy has fallen to the point where it may be possible

for MLGW to simultaneously save money and provide energy from cleaner sources to their customers. In August 2019, MLGW selected Siemens Industry, Inc. to study their options and develop an Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) analyzing the costs and benefits of making such a change.

The IRP from Siemens was made available for public review in May, and since then stakeholders have had much back-and-forth as to the accuracy of Siemens' analysis.

Here's what we know:

- Siemens analyzed 11 different portfolio options. Ten portfolios consisted of power generated from a mix of various providers and self-generation options, and one portfolio consisted of all power being purchased from Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO).
- By contractual agreement, should MLGW choose to sever their exclusive power agreement with TVA, they must provide TVA with a five-year notice.
- The IRP projects that Memphis could save as much as \$120-\$150 million annually if MLGW leaves TVA for a power portfolio that consists of a combination of self-generation and power purchasing through MISO. Additional non-financial benefits of cleaner air and water would also be obtained.

Now comes the squabbling:

TVA immediately hit back with criticism. TVA claims that the savings projected by the IRP are far too optimistic. TVA President Jeff Lyash stated, "We believe that critical assumptions, such as construction costs and schedules, capital recovery costs and ongoing operating expenses are understated in the IRP."

Both the Southern Alliance for Clean Energy (SACE) and the Sierra Club have reviewed the alternative portfolio options presented in the IRP and believe that the lowest cost option also happens to be the cleanest portfolio for power generation in terms of renewable energy sources and carbon emissions. The gist of Sierra Club's formal response was that the savings projections provided in the IRP are actually too conservative and don't account for the following benefits:

- A conservative estimate of up to 1000 megawatts in local solar capacity: Memphis could purchase even more if it so chooses. This increased capacity would lead to a further reduction in carbon emissions
- Future improvements in energy efficiency
- Future ability to import clean power and reduced investments in gas-fired power generation.

What comes next? The Sierra Club and others are encouraging MLGW to send a Request for Proposal (RFP) to various power generation companies like TVA, MISO, solar installers and others. It won't be until MLGW receives



Pearl Eva Walker, Leader of the Memphis Has the Power campaign, with Sierra Club's Dennis Lynch

and evaluates the RFP responses that we will have more clarity as to whether or not these companies can do what Siemens says they can do at the price Siemens says they can do it.

MLGW struck a nerve with TVA by even broaching the subject of leaving. TVA quickly came back in July of this year with a proposal providing 500 million dollars in incentives if MLGW would drop the subject and stay with TVA. These proposed incentives include everything from community initiatives and reducing the energy burden (see box) on customers to helping Memphis expedite the development of a 5 billion dollar Port of Memphis. Generally companies don't offer such concessions without a legitimate concern that they may lose a valuable customer.

Something else that local activists encouraged MLGW to consider is TVA's long history of environmental degradation and spreading of misinformation to cover it up. In just the last two years:

- Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) sued TVA over issues at their plant in Gallatin. TVA agreed to clean up over 12 million cubic yards of coal combustion residuals and further remediate the area.
- In 2019 the United States Supreme Court unanimously ruled against TVA's claim of immunity from environmental and other injury lawsuits related to their crimes against the environment.
- TVA is currently in court with Roane County over what has been called their "coal ash disinformation campaign" in which they've compared coal ash, a toxic by-product from coal fired power plants, to being as safe as dirt. That's right, as safe as dirt.
- TVA has a history of "planning for" more clean renewable energy in their own IRPs, but then failing to make much real progress when the rubber meets the road.



TVA has argued that it has been 100% reliable and never failed in its job to provide power to Memphis, but it's been shown that they've been reliable in taking responsibility for their actions and the environment only when forced to do so in a court of law.

What comes next is anyone's guess, but as of right now MLGW is exploring their options and TVA is offering concessions to entice them to stop exploring. It is important to note that should TVA make any concessions in a contract with MLGW, other local power companies could opt to have the same concessions applied retroactively to their contracts with TVA. Looks like Memphis is onto something.

Contact Aaron at [thegoodfightnow@gmail.com](mailto:thegoodfightnow@gmail.com).

## What is the "Energy Burden"?

The term "energy burden" describes the percentage of household income that goes toward energy costs. Homes are often described as being "energy poor" when they spend over 10% of their household income on energy. Memphis residents have the highest energy burden in the country with an average of 6.2% of household incomes being spent on power. But Memphis has a relatively large percentage of the population that falls below the poverty line, which puts the energy burden for low-income households at a whopping 13.2%. Energy burden is one of the issues that the local activists including the organization Memphis Has the Power insists that MLGW consider when reviewing RFPs.

# Be a Force for the Future! Support our State Lobbyist.

by Bill Moll, State Conservation Chair

What are *you* doing to combat the climate crisis? If you are not already a member of the Defenders of Tennessee, we urge you join us in our fight to have laws that upgrade, not degrade, the environment. The Defenders is your Tennessee Chapter's program that lobbies the state legislature to achieve that goal.

Whenever a single party, Democratic or Republican, holds the governorship and a super-majority in both houses, the real legislative business takes place in committees and subcommittees. Lobbyists for industries that want to expand pollution are very active and very effective at that level. To counteract their influence we have a full-time lobbyist and Conservation Program Coordinator, Scott Banbury. As Sierra Club members, it is important that we back up Scott's work with phone calls, letters, and emails to our legislators when bills are on the table that impact the environment. In the past many members have sat in on committee meetings and met with their legislators, but due to the pandemic this may not be possible during the next session, making it more important than ever to have a lobbyist there on the job.

Over the past several years the national administration has wiped out an astounding number of environmental protections, with many more on the chopping block, transferring a bigger burden of stewardship to the states. The same forces that are removing our regulations at the national level are busy in Tennessee. To have clean water, clean air, sustainable land practices, and healthy Tennesseans, it is crucial that we have a lobbyist combating the expansion of destructive environmental policies.

Banbury tracks bills daily from initial introduction through the hearing and committee process. He provides technical information to the legislators, who



would otherwise have to depend upon industry representatives.

In the split 2020 legislative session, the Sierra Club and our allies made significant progress in promoting a statewide plastic-bag ban and regulation of used-tire disposal. Although neither passed this session, the strong support we were able to get makes us hopeful that they will pass in 2021. We were able to fend off bills to remove the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) from control of a hazardous sewage-treatment process, to subvert the

affordable clean energy rule, to implement the change to coal primacy in our state, and last but not least, to create a rule that states if you make one regulation, you have to repeal an old regulation.

When a legislative session is over, the Chapter focuses on assisting members and the public in enforcing existing regulations for air and water pollution, landfills, forest management, and construction projects. Scott knows the regulations and the officials at TDEC who can enforce them. He also provides technical information and expert contacts to reporters who can bring issues to the



attention of the public, which is often our most effective defense. With massive reductions in the number of newspaper reporters and their resources, the Sierra Club is an important source of information for their work.

The 112<sup>th</sup> General Assembly will see a major effort to weaken the Waters of Tennessee definition, which would gut our clean-water protections. All of the bad bills stopped with the help of a shortened 2020 session will be back, and our good bills need to be reintroduced. **You can help!**

In this time of greatest need, donations to the national Sierra Club have dropped off because of Covid-19. We need to raise funds to help pay our lobbyist so that we can continue to have a strong presence on the Hill to defend Tennessee's environment. *We need your support.* Let's keep our beautiful state clean and green!

*Though we are nonpartisan, the Defenders is a 501(c)(4) organization and donations are not income-tax deductible because we are politically active.*

## TAKE ACTION TODAY – SEND THIS FORM WITH A DONATION TO SUPPORT OUR LOBBYIST!

\$25  \$50  \$150  \$250  \$1000 \$\_\_\_\_\_ Surprise us!

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

CITY, STATE, ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

Please select a method of payment. Make checks payable to Sierra Club Tennessee Chapter with "Defenders" on the memo line, or use your credit card.  Mastercard  Visa  Discover

Credit card number \_\_\_\_\_ Expiration date (mm/yy) \_\_\_\_\_

Name on card \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Receive email alerts when there is a critical vote and the Sierra Club needs you to contact your State legislators.

Receive weekly email updates from Tennessee Conservation Voters during the legislative session.

Email address \_\_\_\_\_

May we publish your name in the Tennes-Sierran as a donor?  Yes  No

I do not need an acknowledgment letter. Please save Defenders funds for program purposes.

As a politically active group, the Defenders is a 501(c)(4) organization and donations are not income-tax deductible.

Mail to: Sherry Loller, Sierra Club Defenders, 2313 Pennington Bend Road, Nashville TN 37214. Thank you!

### Special Offer!!!

Upon request, a free 3-night stay at VRBO #979779 (value \$966) will be given to donors of \$1000 or more.

To view this property online, go to <http://vrbo.com/979779>. Call Sherry at 615-889-2968 for details.

**Mail to: Sherry Loller, Sierra Club Defenders, 2313 Pennington Bend Road, Nashville TN 37214. Thank you!**

# Tennessee Rare Plants Changemaker: Thomas Wiegand

by Sarah Ellis, Volunteer Writer



Sierra Club member Thomas Wiegand always knew he'd end up working in the sciences. He grew up in Knoxville and spent his childhood weekends in a small town in the Smoky Mountains, soaking up every chance he got to spend time in nature. "My parents humored my obsession with plants and animals from a really young age," he says, helping to propel his interests into an eventual career in plant ecology.

Wiegand, now 22, is a graduating senior at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. He has spent the last three years working with Dr. Jennifer Boyd on the "Reasons for Rarity" plant research project, which pairs up rare plants from the Southeast with common

plants that are closely related, in an effort to better understand the ideal environment these plants need to thrive.

"Reasons for Rarity" is a collaborative project with the University of Georgia, Oxford University, and others. The goal – to learn how to better protect rare plant species – could have major impacts on the local ecosystems that rely on these plants (some of which are limited to a single county or to a location along the Ocoee River). "It all comes back to conservation and making sure we protect what is oftentimes an integral part of the ecosystem," Wiegand explains.

Wiegand specializes in using network analysis (a computer science model often used to power social media algorithms) to understand trends in the data across decades of rare plant species research. This technology can be used to link research

concepts together in a way that's never been studied before, and it's already proven helpful to the UTC team in furthering their work. "It's really cool to see that something like this can be applicable not only to rarity, but really to any field," he says. But if you'd told him ten years ago that he'd be using computer science models to study plants in a lab, you probably would have surprised him.

His childhood dream was to be a pediatrician, but things changed when his high school biology teacher introduced the class to ecology. "I was really fascinated by this idea of how human activity can change the environment – climate change induced by humans, or just the day-by-day processes that we as humans contribute to," Wiegand recalls. He saw research as a way to study science on a broader scope, without focusing solely on human health.

Now, Wiegand aims to contribute to conservation efforts through his academic work. His undergraduate thesis has been accepted for publication in the journal *Ecology & Evolution*, and Wiegand hopes it will open up new avenues of research in his field. He'll spend the next two years pursuing a Master's in Environmental Science at UTC, continuing his work on the rare plant species project. Eventually, his goal is to get a PhD and to research and teach at the university level.

Wiegand credits his persistence with helping him learn as much as he has, and he hopes other young people will show a similar tenacity in fighting to make a difference. "I think the biggest and most important thing I can say would be to tell students in my position to stick with it," he says. Where he once found academic research overwhelming, he now feels confident in himself and his ability to do important work – in large part thanks to the mentors who guided him.

"I want to spend my career doing impactful research, so that I know I've done my part when it comes to the preservation and protection of natural spaces," Wiegand says – in the Southeast and beyond.

Contact Sarah at [SarahAbbottEllis@gmail.com](mailto:SarahAbbottEllis@gmail.com)

## Citrus Longhorn

by Amy Wright

To the single  
adult *Anoplophora*  
intercepted at an Athens,  
Georgia nursery on a crape  
myrtle bonsai shipment  
from China, I say no  
attempts are being made  
to Cadillac-grill mount  
your headgear décor,  
twilit fruit pest, your dorsum  
a painter's drop cloth  
daubed with white speckles  
prompting the moniker  
starry sky, sky beetle  
from someone who saw you  
simply, pretty quarantine,  
gave you a beautiful name  
like Anaktoria as anodyne  
for hatred you rebuff,  
being so loved by night  
you wear its beaming  
senseless as plum fruit  
under wax bloom.

Amy Wright lives in Clarksville, Tennessee. "Citrus Longhorn" first appeared in her book *Everything in the Universe* (Iris Press, 2016).

## Dear Eartha: Advice from An Eco-Guru

Dear Eartha,

*As our country confronts its racist past in the midst of a pandemic, the Sierra Club's beloved founder John Muir is revealed as a white supremacist who, along with Planned Parenthood icon Margaret Sanger, praised a eugenics movement which advocated the genetic control of certain populations of humans. I'm heartbroken by the destruction of our "monuments" that represent those essential beliefs we still hold to be true. How do we manage the loss of venerated icons?*

— Grieving Once-Admired Heroes

Dear Grieving,

I share your heartbreak. John Muir has long been one of my heroes for what he did and wrote about environmental protections. I've often quoted his advice to those exploring a glacier: always be sure your way back will still be solid ice!

Now the conversation has opened up to questioning whether destroying the *Ahwahnee* tribe in the Yosemite Valley was the only answer to creating a national park. Michael Brune, the Sierra Club's Executive Director, is owning that our founding father was a racist.

What I focus on is that we're being asked to move forward in alliance with those Muir, his pal Osborne, and others sought to exclude. As Brune writes: "Black communities, indigenous communities, and communities of color continue to endure the traumatic burden of fighting for their right to a healthy environment while simultaneously fighting for freedom from discrimination and police violence." I see Brune owning our past and allying with our future to engage in the "preserving wilderness" fight on a wider battlefield, one without racist monuments, figureheads, or heroes.

Our activism in working together for equal access to national parks, the outdoors, healthy food, clean transportation (and the list goes on), for "all the people" has just become clearer and stronger.

I understand the difficulty some have with pulling a glorified Robert E. Lee off his bronze horse, but the larger issue is that we as a country realize now we can't afford to glorify those fallen generals. Those statues—many erected by racist organizations—represent the deepest discrimination forced upon human beings. We're now looking closer and seeking to change other forms of slavery: farmworker wages, the inequality of Congress fighting over an unemployment package for the most vulnerable Americans while Jeff Bezos reels in 13 billion dollars in one day, and the global effects of a warming planet as the number of vulnerable people living in poverty rises—now, more than ever, we are all in this together.

Grief, dear Grieving, is about love, isn't it? We'll move on and keep loving the truth – and acting accordingly. Perhaps the message now is we must be the heroes of this new revolutionary story.

Stay safe on this and every glacier,  
Eartha

[ Dear Eartha is written by Rita Bullinger.

Submit your question for Eartha to [SierraTNNews@gmail.com](mailto:SierraTNNews@gmail.com) ]

### Call for Nominations: MTG Executive Committee

This year five of the nine members of the Middle Tennessee Group Executive Committee (ExCom) reach the end of their terms. The Sierra Club uses democracy to hold itself accountable to its membership, so we need good candidates to best represent our members' interests. The MTG's Nomination Committee is seeking candidates to run, so we're looking to you to self-nominate or suggest nominees! Any Group member in good standing is eligible for nomination.

The ExCom sets the Group budget and strategic direction, reaches consensus on conservation positions, raises money, appoints officers and committee chairs and makes electoral endorsements.

To accomplish all of this, the Group ExCom meets every month, and there is e-mail correspondence between meetings. The ExCom also plans additional important events throughout the year.

After receiving your nominations by September 20, 2020, the Group Nominations Committee will consider and recommend candidates for the ballot, which is published in the November/December edition of this newspaper and the State Chapter website. Candidates may also get on the ballot by petition. Candidates are allowed space on the ballot to advocate for their election. Candidates receiving the top votes will start their two-year terms in January 2021.

Any Sierra Club member wishing to be considered as an MTG ExCom candidate should indicate their intent to do so by emailing Charlie High at [cahigh1722@aol.com](mailto:cahigh1722@aol.com) or by regular mail at Charlie High, 1722 Sweetbriar Avenue, Nashville, TN 37212 by September 20, 2020.

### Tentative Plans – Fall Fun Retreat

Last year's Fall Fun Retreat was a great success. Currently, it is unknown if in-person events will be happening again in October. If they are, then the Retreat will be very much like last year's.

Mark your calendar for a wonderful time at:

Pickett CCC Memorial State Park October 25-27

Activities include:

Hikes led by Tennessee State Naturalist Randy Hedgepath

Halloween Themed Activities

Campfire ~ Live Entertainment ~ Stargazing

Please check the Chapter calendar or email Joanne Logan [loganj1023@gmail.com](mailto:loganj1023@gmail.com) for updates



### Tennessee Chapter Retreat Schedule

<b>Fall 2020</b>	<b>Pickett State Park</b>	<b>October 23 - 25</b>
<b>Winter 2021</b>	<b>Cedars of Lebanon State Park</b>	<b>January 29 - 31</b>
<b>Spring 2021</b>	<b>Fall Creek Falls State Park</b>	<b>April 30 - May 2</b>

...the economy of the planet is such that every life-form preys on another, is supported by another, and in its turn is preyed upon...[this is] not always evident to the creatures themselves who tend to become obsessed with what they consume, and forget what in turn consumes them.

– Doris Lessing in her novel *Shikasta*, 1979.

## Candidate Endorsements

The Tennessee Chapter Political Committee has been evaluating candidates for federal, state and local elections and making endorsements. To see who has been endorsed AND find out how to help elect pro-environment candidates, visit this webpage [Tennessee State Chapter Political Program](#) or scan the QR code the right. Please consider donating to or volunteering for pro-environment candidates.\* This is an especially important election year, so your good work and contributions can make a big difference.

Join the Chapter's Political Committee: contact Co-Chairs Rick Herron ([rick.m.herron@gmail.com](mailto:rick.m.herron@gmail.com)) or Bill Moll ([whmoll@aol.com](mailto:whmoll@aol.com))

\*Due to federal election financing rules, endorsements are not published in this paper.



## Meetings

The Sierra Club continues to pause all in-person meetings.

Most groups and conservation committees are meeting online. Check a meeting status:

<https://www.sierraclub.org/tennessee/sierra-club-tennessee-calendar> or scan the QR code ==>

If you would like to attend, please contact the group or committee chair. Contact information is on page 2.



### Group Program Meetings

Group	Date	Location	Time
Cherokee (Chattanooga)	Mon 9/28, 10/26, 11/23	TBA	TBA
Chickasaw (Memphis)	Tue 9/17, 10/15, 11/19	Benjamin Hooks Public Library, 3030 Poplar Ave, Memphis	6:30 PM
Harvey Broome (Knoxville)	Tue 9/8, 10/13, 11/10	Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church, 2931 Kingston Pike	7:00 PM
Middle TN (Nashville)	Thu 9/10, 10/8, 11/12	Radnor Lake Nature Center, 1160 Otter Creek RD, Nashville	7:00 PM

### Group Business Meetings

Group	Date	Location	Time
Cherokee (Chattanooga)	Mon 9/7, 10/5, 11/2	TBA	TBA
Chickasaw (Memphis)	Wed 9/2, 10/7, 11/4	Cheffies Cafe, 483 High Point Terrace, Memphis	6:30 PM
Harvey Broome (Knoxville)	Tue 9/22, 10/27, 11/24	The Church of the Savior, 934 N. Weisgarber Rd. Knoxville	7:00 PM
Middle TN (Nashville)	Mon 9/21, 10/19, 11/16	House of Kabob, 216 Thompson Lane, Nashville	6:30 PM

### Regional Conservation Committee Business Meetings

Committee	Date	Location	Time
Clarksville	Tue 9/15, 10/20, 11/17	Clarksville-Montgomery County Public Library, 350 Pageant Ln, Clarksville	6:00 PM
CareNET (Rogersville)	Thu 9/3, 10/1, 11/5	TBA	6:00 PM
Watauga (Mountain City)	Tue 9/8, 10/13, 11/10	R&D Campground Pavilion 500 Mining Town Rd Mountain City	5:00 PM
Tri-Cities	Tue 9/9, 10/14, 11/11	136 Bob Jobe Rd, Gray TN 37615	7:00 PM