

Tennessee Sierran

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TENNESSEE CHAPTER

The Bimonthly Newspaper of the Tennessee Chapter of the Sierra Club

Volume 56, Number 3 - May / June 2023

A May 9th Call to Action for Clean Energy in the Tennessee Valley

Masthead photo: Clingman's Dome [AKA Kuwohi], Jody Clayborn, Public Domain

Cover Photo: Bull Run Fossil Plant will close by December, 2023, but coal ash questions remain, photo by Todd Waterman, February 2018

Explore, Enjoy, and Protect!

From Tennessee Vice Chair Nancy Bell Bare Feet and Promises

White puffs in an intensely blue sky and a dreamy breeze across my skin can bring on a quiet euphoria and contemplation of, say, the lady bug on my big toe. My mind drifts to something I heard on the radio on the subject of relationships: "I am because you are."

David Korten was referencing The Earth's Charter. He was talking about relationships, both within and beyond our circles of friends, family, and acquaintances. In fact, he was speaking from deep inside the web of life.

You may have plans to hike today in a wild place, to take the wonderful living world inside yourself. Or without plans, just go outdoors, look for a lady bug on the spinach you planted or in the pot of geraniums you dared to set out. Wave at your neighbors, and watch for the skink with the triple blue racing stripe zipping under your porch. Each living thing is precious in its utility as well as its beauty. In other words, we can't live without the totality of living beings — all of us contributing to the work of existence.

What is our role in maintaining the integrity of Earth's wide net, woven around us? How do we keep the living web from unraveling? In the Tennessee Sierra Chapter there are scores of members who ask that question and work to answer it every day. However, we must widen our own web of activists both within and outside the Sierra Club.

Twenty years ago, David Korten and a group of friends created a global document, a challenge and blueprint called The Earth's Charter. For well-structured details in every category of living sustainably, justly, and peacefully, refer to this document at:

<https://earthcharter.org/read-the-earth-charter/>

The Earth's Charter is organized into four pillars: Respect and Care for the Community of Life; Ecological Integrity; Economic Justice; and Democracy, Nonviolence, and Peace. The pillars hold explicit details of policy and action.

Although it seems that fast-moving events have overtaken us, the Charter's ideals and concepts hold true though our strategies may be evolving. Check out the Charter's clarity on the many facets of existence on Earth, including personal behavior and society's treatment for plants, creatures, and people — and the water, air, and soil that they depend on. The Charter also addresses the social and political structures formed to "manage" living and nonliving resources. You will note some familiar principles that you already live by, actions you have taken, and groups that tackle some of the solutions posed there. But remember that we must confront challenges if we are to solve our existential problem. How do we measure up to the Charter's promise two decades later?

How, you ask, can you possibly find the time to actively work on maintaining a functioning, living world? How can you not? How to get started using this issue of the *Tennes-Sierran*: Look on the back cover for group and smaller regional conservation committee meeting info. Look elsewhere in this issue (or older issues) for an activity, event, or meeting that would suit your schedule. Ask about childcare if needed. Bring a friend. The Chapter Spring Retreat is April 28-30 at the beautiful Fall Creek Falls State Park. Look on the right side of this page for contact information for officers, staff, groups, and regional conservation committees.

Sierrans are friendly. They'll have refreshments, and you'll have a good time! Donations are helpful, but many solutions require people power, solidarity, and physical effort, including letter writing. Every project educates more people about solutions to our ecological problems, and informing others is of course a goal of the Sierra Club, as well as part of The Earth's Charter. Keep your eyes on the prize, and I hope to see you soon!

Contact Nancy at nancywithbell@gmail.com



New Protection for the Duck River and Chickamauga Creek

by Grace Stranch, Harpeth Conservancy CEO and SC TN Chapter Ex-Com At-Large Member

Two new, exciting Scenic River designations are making their way through the Tennessee Legislature. In March, the House passed House Bill (HB) 150, which designates parts of the North Chickamauga Creek as a Class 1 Scenic River, and the corresponding Senate Bill (SB) was recommended for passage with amendments. In April, the Senate passed SB464, which designates Maury County segments of the Duck River as a Class II Scenic River. The House Bill awaits approval.

In Tennessee, Scenic Rivers receive additional environmental and other protections, preserving our State's free flowing and unpolluted rivers with unique value. Class I rivers are designated as "Natural River Areas" — meaning "shorelines and scenic vistas essentially primitive and generally inaccessible except by trail." Class II rivers are "Pastoral River Areas," meaning "shorelines and scenic vistas partially or predominately used for agricultural and other recreational activities which do not interfere with public use and enjoyment of the river and shores."

The Duck River and the North Chickamauga Creek are particularly good candidates for this designation, and each river already has other segments with scenic river designations. The Duck River is North America's most biologically diverse freshwater river and one of three hotspots in the world for fish and mussel diversity. Beyond the value of the Duck River's biodiversity, the river is also the sole water source for hundreds of thousands of people living in middle Tennessee, and adds value to the Tennessee economy through its immense outdoor recreational opportunities. North Chickamauga Creek also contains significant biodiversity, including threatened species, and outstanding recreational opportunities.

Protecting these rivers ensures future generations will continue to have access to their incredible resources. Keep an eye on these bills as they continue through the Legislature.

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Tennes-Sierran

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July Issue of the Chapter E-Newsletter by June 23

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

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The 2023 Tennessee Legislature: A Few Steps Forward, More Steps Back

by Scott Banbury, Tennessee Chapter Conservation Programs Coordinator



The first year of the two-year 113th Tennessee General Assembly has been the busiest session in recent years. The supermajority attacked existing protections for clean water, undermined local government planning, and set back renewable energy and energy efficiency policy statewide. Sadly, almost all votes came down along partisan lines. We are happy with some successes, but also must continue addressing these important issues. Here is a review of Senate bills (SB).

Water

It's clear that the supermajority is excited at the prospect that the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) may roll back the definitions of Waters Of The United States (WOTUS) when they decide on the pending Sackett v EPA case. In particular, this ruling might limit the US Clean Water Act's jurisdiction over isolated wetlands. In anticipation of this, several SCOTUS-WOTUS trigger bills were introduced that would require that Tennessee's laws and rules be no stricter than federal requirements. This would result in many thousands of acres of wetlands losing their current protections in Tennessee. Fortunately, most of these bills have been deferred to next year, but some bad bills did get through:

SB0628 requires that TDEC consider only current land use in regards to land-clearing activities, regardless of impending changes in land use. Basically, this means that the clearing of a forest or grading of cropland could be conducted without a permit (they're exempt) and then the property could be subsequently sold to a developer who would have had to get a Construction General water quality permit to conduct the same clearing or grading activities, a permit that would have required erosion control and stream protection.

SB0261 removed requirements that underground waste water injection permits be renewed every five years. The fallout from this is that TDEC can continue these permits indefinitely without public notice.

On a positive note, SB0713 advanced through committees. This bill would create a statewide network of weather stations for the purpose of collecting and publishing extreme weather and flooding data. It is being seriously considered in spite of an unbudgeted cost associated with it. Look up "MESONET" to learn how these programs have been adopted in other states.

Energy

SB1389 created definitions of clean and renewable energy that preempted local communities from adopting their own. These definitions originally included nuclear as renewable, and natural gas as clean. After much debate we got nuclear reduced to clean, but natural gas stayed clean. Local gov-

ernments will now have to incorporate these state definitions into their local ordinances and resolutions.

SB1377 established the 2018 International Energy Conservation Code (IECC) as the State's energy building code. Unfortunately, while counties are allowed to adopt less stringent codes in many circumstances, local governments are prohibited from adopting any codes that are more stringent than the 2018 IECC. It is unclear when the State IECC would be updated in the future, and communities like Shelby County that have already adopted the 2021 IECC will now have to revert back to the 2018 version.

SB1424 once again threatened to destroy the programs in Knoxville, Memphis, and Nashville that automatically round up utility bills to the nearest dollar and dedicate the additional millions of dollars per year to low-income energy efficiency programs. Customers currently have the ability to opt out of the program if they want to, while SB1424 would require them to opt in to participate. This change would result in a 90 percent or more reduction in revenues. Once again, we stopped this cold-hearted legislation.

SB0273, the Governor's Transportation Modernization Act, raises the registration fee surcharge on electric vehicles from the current \$100 per year to \$200 in 2024 and \$274 in 2026. Starting in 2027, this fee will be indexed to inflation. The Governor's argument is that these fees make up for lost state and federal gas tax revenues, and we argued back that their calculations were inflated. The good thing that did come out of the debate around this bill was growing awareness that a tax based on vehicle miles traveled and vehicle weight is a better way of addressing gas tax revenues that are declining as vehicles become more efficient.

Solid Waste

The looming solid waste crisis in Middle Tennessee, precipitated by the impending closure of the Middle Point Landfill in Rutherford County and the diminishing capacity of construction demolition landfills in the region, has gotten a lot of attention. A flurry of bills has resulted, some good and some not so good. SB 1556 would allow the City of Murfreesboro to create its own Solid Waste Authority to facilitate the diversion of the City's waste from the Middle Point Landfill to a proposed waste-to-energy program, whereby mixed municipal waste would be dried, shredded and pelletized, or converted into "renewable" natural gas, or directly burned as boiler fuel. The Sierra Club is very suspect of the efficacy of the proposed technology, its climate impacts, and toxic pollution that might result.

SB 0573, the Tennessee Waste Reduction and Recycling Act (TWRRA), is an act drafted by the Sierra Club that would create an Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging program in Tennessee. The TWRRA would require companies, in and out of state, to be responsible for reuse, recovery and/or recycling programs for packaging. Producers of packaging waste would pay annual dues based on the amount and type of packaging used. The dues are structured to incentivize companies to reduce unnecessary packaging, implement reuse strategies, and increase use of recycled materials. Dues would cover 100 percent of reasonable costs to provide convenient, effective recycling services statewide. While the bill was not heard in committee this year, the Tennessee Chapter's solid waste committee will be building support for this program over the summer, prior to its consideration in 2024.

New Scenic River Designations and a Proposed Landfill

We enjoyed a massive win regarding solid waste with the passage of SB 0464, which designated portions of the Duck River in Maury County as a Class II scenic river. This prohibits new landfills within two miles of the river which is immensely important in light of the 380+ acres landfill that is currently being proposed on the banks of the river downstream from Columbia. SC has been working closely with residents in Maury County since last summer to stop this project. The vote to approve this Scenic River designation is one of few issues that did enjoy bipartisan support with the Senate voting for it unanimously and the House voting 79-11 in support.

SB 0127 designated as a Class I Natural River Area two sections of North Chickamauga Creek in Hamilton County: the first is from a point approximately at the confluence of Hixson Branch continuing to a point 8.3 miles downstream to the North Chickamauga Creek Gorge visitor access on Montlake Road; the second is the 1.5 mile segment of its tributary Cain Creek from the department of environment and conservation property line to its confluence with North Chickamauga. See Grace Stranch's article on page 2.

Some More Good News

SB 0808 pumps the brakes on the State of Tennessee assuming permitting primacy over Surface Coal Mining. Coal mining is not really happening in Tennessee anymore and the State has finally realized that permitting it will not pay for itself and banks will not bond the future cleanup, currently the responsibility of the Federal Office of Surface Coal Mining. The Tennessee Chapter of Sierra Club has been telling the state that this is the case and we feel vindicated by this legislation.

Contact Scott at scott.banbury@sierraclub.org

Harvey Broome Group Works with Knoxville's Vestal Community on Superfund Site

by John Nolt, Harvey Broome Group

The Harvey Broome Group is working with residents of the South Knoxville community of Vestal to monitor the EPA's remediation of a federal Superfund site there. Vestal, a mixed-race, low-income neighborhood was for decades plagued by nuclear and chemical waste, much of it shipped in from U.S. Atomic Energy Commission (later Department of Energy) facilities. Three properties there, all associated with scrap metal dealer David Witherspoon, Inc., became Tennessee Superfund sites in the 1990s. These have since been remediated.

The current federal cleanup involves chemical contamination at an abandoned aluminum smelter on a 13-acre site nearby. Smoky Mountain Smelters operated there from 1979 to 1994. Before that, the site was occupied by a fertilizer plant.

Much of the contamination consists of aluminum dross and aluminum saltcake, which have varying degrees of toxicity. Many other toxic chemicals have been detected in the surface soils, subsurface waste, or leachate.

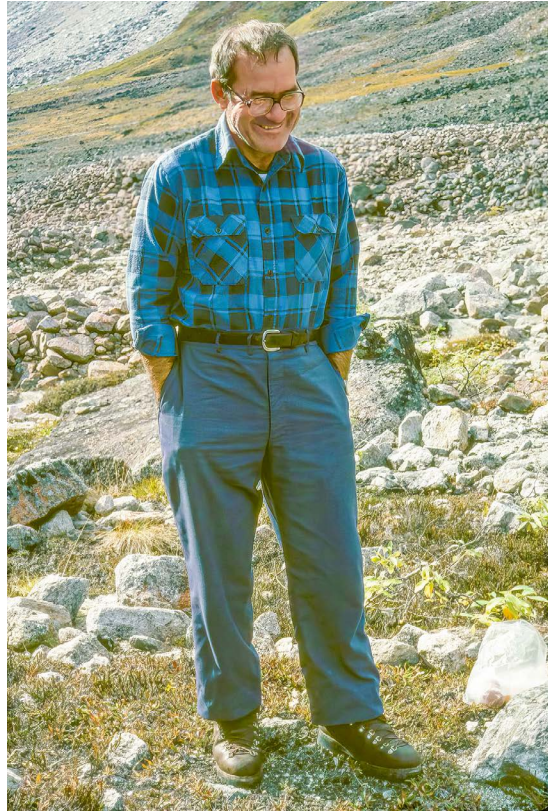
Harvey Broome Group members raised questions at a public meeting in Vestal on February 13, at which the EPA detailed its plan to consolidate and cap these materials and to treat groundwater in the vicinity. On March 7, the group followed up with a letter to EPA Project Manager Peter Johnson detailing various concerns with the EPA plan. Among these were: possible chemical reactions as the waste is consolidated, leachate of toxic materials into unposted waterways; the absence of an impermeable liner beneath the consolidated waste; and the need for long-term monitoring of the site. The group also stressed the importance of environmental justice in an already heavily burdened community such as Vestal. Monitoring of the site and dialog with the EPA and the Vestal Community Organization will continue.

Contact John at nolt@utk.edu

The Passing of an Environmental Champion: Ray Payne

by Will Skelton, Harvey Broome Group

One of the Harvey Broome Group and Tennessee Chapter's most active long-time members died on February 24, 2023, at the age of 92. Ray Payne had a long lifetime of incredible outdoor adventures and, likewise, incredible accomplishments protecting wild lands, especially the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and Cherokee National Forest. Ray grew up in Bradshaw, West Virginia, in the heart of coal country. He attended college and then served in the US Marine Corps as a tank radio operator in the Korean War. After active duty, he returned to college, earning a Mechanical Engineering degree. In 1957 he came to East Tennessee to work at Babcock & Wilcox and later the Oak Ridge National Lab, from which he retired in 1994.



Ray was involved in, and often a leader of, just about every environmental issue involving protection of the Smokies. His advocacy included working to stop two proposed roads: a trans-mountain road with a destination of the Elkmont cabins, and the Northshore Road. He was also active in adoption of the Park's General Management Plan. He also worked to protect the Cherokee National Forest, resulting in a designation of over 11 per cent of the Forest as Wilderness Areas in 1984 and 1986.

After accompanying a friend on his small plane to Wyoming for a backpack in the Wind River Range in the 1970s, Ray pursued a passion for the outdoors, including backpacking and canoeing in wild areas all across the country, from the Southern Appalachians to the western mountains and Alaska and Canada. Ray was always a person everyone appreciated having along because of his courage, outdoor skills, good humor, toughness, steadiness, and reliability. Trips included Boundary Waters Canoe Area, Gates of the Arctic National Park, Noatak River, Wind River Range, Sierra Nevada Mountains, Nahanni River, Mexico Volcanoes, Utah Canyon Country, Okefenokee Swamp, Gila Wilderness, Beartooth Mountains, and Wrangell-St-Elias National Park.

Ray also gave back in many other ways. He provided help to backpackers in the GSMNP's backcountry office for many years, volunteered during elk rut season in the Cataloochee area, and for many years delivered for the Meals on Wheels program.

Ray's wife Genny predeceased him, and he is survived by daughters Elizabeth and Joan and son Alan, plus seven grandchildren, six great-grandchildren and three great-great-grandchildren.

Contact Will at whshome@bellsouth.net

It's Official: Chattanooga has an updated Climate Action Plan (Amidst Controversy)

by David Hoot, Chair, Sierra Club Cherokee Group

Chattanooga now has an approved, updated Climate Action Plan, the first official update since 2009. Mayor Tim Kelly's administration submitted its updated Climate Action Plan (CAP) to Chattanooga City Council at the end of March. On the 21st, it was submitted to the Council as a resolution with a vote scheduled for the 28th. The Resolution of Support passed by a 5-to-2 margin. The full plan can be seen online at: <https://bit.ly/ChattCAP>

The introduction session on the 21st had drawn a large crowd. By start time, the Chamber was standing-room-only and about two dozen individuals were asked to leave due to fire code regulations. Comments were almost evenly split between PRO-plan and ANTI-plan.

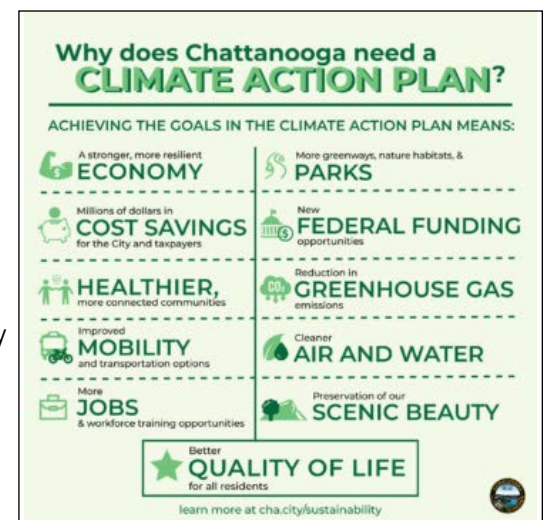
PRO-plan speakers included individuals from organizations such as TVA, green | spaces, Chattanooga's public electric utility Electric Power Board (EPB), several members of Sierra Club Cherokee Group, local businesses and interested citizens. The in-favor comments focused on the environmental, health, and economic promises of the plan. Dissenting opinions included concerns ranging from wind and solar siting issues to speculation that the implementation of a new plan would lead to increased government surveillance. Referring to the plan, the words "concentration camp" and "demonic" were heard.

On the 28th, following the vote to approve, a smaller number of speakers voiced similar concerns and praises. One ANTI-camp individual suggested that the YES voters were motivated by financial kickbacks. He predicted

that the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation (TBI) would one day delve into their personal financial records to prove it. The Council voting record and public comments on YouTube can be accessed through the Chattanooga City Council webpage at: <https://bit.ly/Chatt-City-Council>.

The next step includes implementation of the plan toward city government, businesses, and the public as a whole. A crucial part of its success will lie in the formation of a Climate Sustainability and Resilience (CSR) Committee as outlined in the plan. The administration wants this committee to reflect the full spectrum of Chattanooga's population. It will be a vehicle for interface with the City on environmental issues going forward.

To get involved: <https://m.facebook.com/ClimateChattanooga/> or contact Dave Hoot at hoot.david@gmail.com or 423-503-9482.



Knoxville ICO Program Receives Award from Big Brothers Big Sisters of East Tennessee

by Mac Post, Chair, Knoxville Inspiring Connections Outdoors

Big Brothers and Big Sisters of East Tennessee (BBBS) presented Knoxville Inspiring Connections Outdoors (ICO) with the Vivian A. Gwinn Community Partner Award at their Big Night Out banquet on Friday, March 24. Considering the Sierra Club ICO program is dedicated to getting youth outdoors, regardless of the potential for getting muddy or wet while having fun, we had some struggles with the dress code – semi-formal. The banquet photo catches us in a rare moment – not muddy or wet.

This award recognizes Knoxville ICO for providing educational, fun, and safe outings in the natural world with the youth they serve, done in partnership with BBBS. The first outing together was in June 2014 when ICO introduced around 15 pairs of mentor/youth matches to the famous synchronous fireflies at Elkmont in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Since then, nearly monthly outings have included canoeing, monarch butterfly tagging, pond explorations, whitewater rafting, wildflower and waterfall hikes, bicycling, disc golf, overnight camping, picnics, and more.

For the award presentation, BBBS prepared a video that includes interviews of BBBS participants and ICO volunteers. This video can be viewed at: <https://bit.ly/ICO-BSBB-Award-2023>

We greatly value our partnership with BBBS and their dedication to encouraging their youth matches to go out and actively enjoy nature with us. For more information about the Knoxville ICO see:

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



Knoxville's Inspiring Connections Outdoors receives an award from Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBS) at their Big Night Out banquet. Pictured (left to right) are Allison Leavitt (Match and Family Engagement Manager BBBS), Janet Bigelow, Jerry Thornton, Mac Post, Alice Thornton, David Ostermeier, and Tyler Boldin (CEO BBBS). Photo provided by BBBS.

Contact Mac at mpost3116@gmail.com



ABOVE: The authors of the two articles below, Kent Minault, Political Chair, Harvey Broome Group (far right) and Axel Ringe, Conservation/Political Co-Chair (center) speak with TVA CEO Jeff Lyash at TVA's Bull Run Open House in Claxton, TN, on July 18, 2019.

LEFT: After the February 15 Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) Board Listening Session, TVA CEO Jeff Lyash came over to speak with environmental group members. Some in attendance challenged Lyash's widely-criticized plan to replace the retiring Cumberland and Kingston Coal Plants' energy, not with renewables and storage, but with upstream-methane-leaking, CO₂-spewing natural gas. Representing the Sierra Club are Joe Schiller (far left), JoAnn McIntosh, (second from left) and Dana Moran (far right). Photos by Todd Waterman.

A Call to Action for Clean Energy in the Tennessee Valley

Some Background: The Last TVA Board Meeting

by Kent Minault, Political Chair, Sierra Club Harvey Broome Group

Members of the Sierra Club Energy Committee gave more systematic and detailed public comment than ever before at the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) Board of Directors meeting in Muscle Shoals, Alabama, on February 16, and also expanded its mobilizing strength by bringing folks from different organizations and diverse parts of the TVA service area.

The major issue there was the rolling blackouts across the state due to extreme cold during December's winter storm. Some commenters tried to use the event to push for more coal and gas, charging TVA with inadequate generating capacity. Sierra Club members said that TVA's foot dragging on renewables and its curtailing of energy efficiency money in 2018 were the more likely causes of the shortfall. We also noticed several commenters, apparently farmers, expressing concerns about conversion of prime farmland to solar. Several seemed to be quoting from the same playbook, but one farmer invited the Board to visit him to see how his solar installation had enhanced his farm's operation. We learned about the many reasons solar development is beneficial to farmers. We later learned that a Virginia-based fossil fuel-financed group had begun a disinformation campaign, promoting anti-solar comments around the country. Several solar businesses offered to help chart a strategy for a more sustainable and resilient energy system for both rural and urban areas.

We submitted a strong critique of TVA for cutting back its efficiency programs. A new TVA Board member, Michelle Moore, responded by pressing TVA CEO Jeffrey Lyash to detail the utility's current efficiency efforts. Mr. Lyash acknowledged that efficiency could eliminate the need for a new power plant.

Commenters argued forcefully against TVA's plans to replace coal plants at Cumberland and Kingston with gas, which would both require a 32-mile pipeline through prime Tennessee farmland, and commit the region to at least 30 more years of fossil fuel dependency. Farmers along the route and other pipeline opponents planned to attend the Norris meeting (see article to the right) to urge TVA to use renewables and efficiency and leave their farms alone.

Of course, the major issue for residents of Claxton (near Norris) will be the mountain of coal ash adjacent to the Bull Run Fossil Plant, which is scheduled for decommissioning later this year. People are worried that TVA plans to leave the toxic mess in place and cover it over, even though toxic heavy metals have been leaching into nearby groundwater.

The world is transitioning from fossil energy to clean energy. TVA lags far behind most of the country in renewable energy generation, and we urge *TennesSierran* readers to show up in Norris May 9 and/or 10 to push TVA to make the Tennessee Valley climate resilient with an energy system that fits 21st century needs. The six new Biden-appointed Board members could really help our prospects. Your voice matters!

Contact Kent at kminault@gmail.com

Take Action: The May 9th TVA Board Meeting

by Axel Ringe, Chair, Sierra Club Water Issues Conservation Committee

The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) Board of Directors will hold one of its quarterly meetings on May 10 in Norris, Tennessee. The meeting will be preceded by a session the day before at which the Board will listen to comments by the public. Although TVA won't publish their agenda until shortly before the meeting, a number of important issues are likely to be on the table. Chapter members and allies are strongly encouraged to either personally attend the listening session and Board meeting and/or submit written comments. TVA's decisions and actions affect all Tennesseans, and it is important that the Board hears about the following issues:

- The shutting down of the Cumberland Fossil Plant and TVA's plan to replace it with a methane gas plant fed by a new 32-mile gas pipeline.
- The shutting down of the Kingston Fossil Plant and TVA's plan to replace it with a methane gas plant fed by a new gas pipeline.
- The shutting down of the Bull Run Fossil Plant this year, the clean-up of the coal ash on the site, and the future use of the site.
- TVA's foot-dragging on replacing fossil energy with renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind. TVA needs to aggressively build to increase solar energy generating capacity.
- TVA's push to build small modular nuclear reactors when renewable energy sources are cheaper, more environmentally friendly, and can be brought online more quickly.
- The Sierra Club's Tennessee Chapter urges that TVA's Board take back decision-making authority from CEO Jeff Lyash.
- TVA should mandate effective coal ash worker protection practices with their contractors.
- TVA should increase the amount of locally-produced renewable energy allowed by their contracts with local power companies from five percent to at least 15 percent.

If you are interested in submitting comments or speaking to the Board at the listening session on these or any other TVA-related issues and would like help drafting comments, contact Amy Kelly, Sierra Club's Beyond Coal Campaign Tennessee representative (amy.kelly@sierraclub.org; phone 865-995-8663) or JoAnn McIntosh, Tennessee Chapter Energy Committee Chair (mcijoann@gmail.com; phone (931) 338-2530). TVA requires pre-registration for speaking at the listening session. We will provide information about how to do that when TVA issues their formal announcement.

Contact Axel at onyxfarm@bellsouth.net

Indoors and Outdoors: Disability Access in Digital and Natural Landscapes

by Allie Stafford, Tennessee Chapter E-news Editor

Nature is a human right. That's the slogan on the homepage of Outdoors For All, the Sierra Club program that works to ensure "everyone has access to the healing power of the outdoors." For marginalized communities, especially disabled people, there are too many barriers to entry. Over one billion people in the world have a disability, which is about one in six people (as per the World Health Organization). In Tennessee, that number is one in three adults, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This population is underserved in many ways when it comes to healthcare and access to jobs, education, and recreation. Thoughtful, inclusive design is a major component in optimizing access to nature, public spaces, and parks, and it's also key in making technology usable for everyone.

Twelve years ago, Global Accessibility Awareness Day (GAAD) was launched with a focus on digital inclusion. The goal was to get everyone "talking, thinking and learning about digital access and inclusion, and the more than one billion people with disabilities/impairments" (www.accessibility.day). Held on the third Thursday of May, the 18th this year. Events across the globe in honor of GAAD range from a Hackathon in Chicago, to a conference in Europe, to improving Google Maps usability in Nigeria, to a panel discussion in Albania.

The GAAD Foundation launched in 2021 to mark GAAD's 10th anniversary, and is on a mission to make accessibility a "core requirement" in tech culture. Technology has opened up many avenues for communication and independence in daily activities, but technology is only as accessible as the coders and designers make it. The GAAD Foundation believes that all people deserve "a first-rate digital experience on the Web." That means making accessible design a fundamental component of product development.

That also means ensuring that webpages are designed for users of all abilities. In a 2020 study, WebAIM (Web Accessibility in Mind) analyzed one million home pages for accessibility issues using the WCAG 2.0 (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) and found that 98.1% contained at least one failure, and the average number of failures per homepage was 60.9. A few of the most common causes of accessibility failure were Low Contrast Text (86.3%), Missing Image Alt Text (66%), and Empty Links (59.9%). These important features increase readability, allowing blind users to utilize screen-reader technology and text enlargement/zooming, and deaf or hard-of-hearing users to read clear text and captions. Users with physical or cognitive impairments benefit from these as well, along with touchscreens and adaptive hardware technology.

While GAAD shines a spotlight on digital accessibility, it also brings up a larger conversation about disability rights. Legal protections for disabled individuals were finally passed in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the

Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (renamed in 1990 the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990. These laws prohibit discrimination in employment, transportation, public accommodations, communications and access to government programs and services. Yet disabled people continue to experience discrimination, stigma, and lack of access to resources.

The most basic access points are in the built environment: how streets, walkways, and buildings are designed. Good design caters to pedestrians and public transportation rather than only cars. For example, a curb cut and ramp in a sidewalk with a clearly designated crosswalk allows a wheelchair user to access a sidewalk; it is also beneficial for people pushing baby strollers, or a worker delivering goods to a store on a wheeled dolly. Well-designed walkways are safer for all pedestrians.

This translates to the great outdoors as well. Proper infrastructure is an important way to build accessibility into outdoor destinations. Leffel Roots Apple Orchard, a family-owned farm in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, offers a you-pick apple orchard, with a raised deck built specifically for visitors who have mobility issues. They also prune the Cortland trees along the deck "to allow even those seated in a wheelchair easy access to the fruit." One visitor, Emilee Lund, explained that it was a really special experience, as she had never been able to successfully pick apples before. She reports, "I was also able to explore most of the area in my power wheelchair, like going down by the pumpkins, sunflowers, patio, store — pretty much everywhere, which is amazing!"

Assistive hardware can also allow greater access to nature. All Terrain Georgia is an initiative started by Aimee Copeland, a quadruple amputee who acquired her disability after a zip lining accident over the Little Tallapoosa River. Aimee now holds two masters degrees and is a psychotherapist in addition to Executive Director of the Aimee Copeland Foundation. Through All Terrain Georgia, she has partnered with Georgia State Parks and the Department of Natural Resources to provide all-terrain wheelchairs for free rental at 10 state parks, wheelchairs that can handle bumpy terrain. Melanie Dunn, Aimee Copeland Foundation representative and a wheelchair user herself explained, "This program allows people a chance to play, a chance to experience God's beauty and the universe at its absolute best."

If nature is a human right, then there is a huge need for better access to facilities, from urban to suburban to rural. The GAAD Foundation says that "accessibility removes barriers and unlocks the possible." Inclusive design is the key to unlocking the possible and allowing more people to enjoy and explore the world.

Contact Allie at allie.m.stafford@gmail.com

Sierra Club Military Outdoors Supports No Barriers Team Unbroken



by Lornett Vestal, Senior Campaign Representative, Sierra Club Military Outdoors

I'm happy to announce that the Sierra Club Military Outdoors is supporting our good friends at No Barriers Team Unbroken for their September 21-26 Unbroken Spirit program and backpacking trip in Asheville, North Carolina. Team Unbroken is an adaptive athletic team founded in 2019 by Command Sergeant Major Gretchen Evans (Ret.). I plan to be a part of this event and program. All expenses are paid, equipment is provided to 12 veterans of any era; no

disability is needed, and all veterans are welcome. The one caveat is that all participants live in either North Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, or South Carolina. Folks who are interested can find a link to the application in the link box to the right. Please share with any military or veterans who might benefit from this fantastic adventure. This is an event organized by veterans for veterans. Fellow Army veteran, avid outdoorsman, and cool dude Daniel "Dan" Runyon will be the trip leader. Hopefully, attendees can also say hi to Rusty, the trusty service dog!

My good friend and living legend, Gretchen Evans, and her amazing team at Team Unbroken and Unbroken Spirit are the lead organizers. A bit about Gretchen Evans: she is a fantastic spitfire advocate for Veterans. Retired CSM Gretchen Evans is an Army Women's Foundation 2021 Hall of Fame inductee and recipient of the 2022 Pat Tillman Award at the Excellence in Sports Performance Yearly (ESPY) Awards. Gretchen continues to speak and advocate for Veterans to challenge themselves and lead a life worth living. Gretchen was kind enough to be a guest on my podcast, "Question Culture in 2021." I'm glad to call her a friend.

<https://www.sierraclub.org/military-outdoors>

<https://nobarriersusa.org/team-unbroken/>

<https://bit.ly/Unbroken-Team-App>

This year, members of Team Unbroken will participate in numerous events, including the Bataan Death March, Ironman Mont Tremblant, Ironman Chattanooga, Ironman Portland, 29029 Everesting Stratton, and Patagonian Extreme Triathlon Chile. Gretchen comes up with an idea, and we all say cool!

Outline of this Outing and Program

This will be a life-changing, comprehensive program that consists of three phases: Pre-Deployment, Deployment, and Post-Deployment. This will require a strong commitment from you.

- 1. Pre-Deployment** consists of six instructor-led trainings (zoom calls) where you will learn to live an unbroken spirit life. Our transformative curriculum starts with helping you develop a strong mind, body, and spirit connection. Next, we will help you develop a new personal vision statement and roadmap that will take you on a life-changing adventure. Along the way you will learn the power of a growth mindset, the need for grit (passion and perseverance), and the importance of community. Finally, you will learn the leadership skills required to lead yourself and your family effectively, and how to serve others as a servant leader.
- 2. Deployment** consists of a five-day group-based Wilderness Adventure with Unbroken Spirit in the beautiful mountains of Western North Carolina.
- 3. Post-Deployment** consists of developing an action plan to pay it forward in your community. You will be assigned a mentor/coach to assist you in the execution of your plan.

Contact Lornett at lornett@progressiveworkersunion.org

Tennessee Chapter of the Sierra Club will Retreat!

to beautiful Fall Creek Falls State Park, April 28-30

Join fellow members for wonderful hikes, engaging programs, good food, and sleep
For more information and to register: <https://bit.ly/SCTN-Retreat-SPR2023>

Dear Eartha: Advice from An Eco-Guru

Dear Eartha,

I've been reading your column for over a year now and I know you read a lot. What are some of the titles you read, view, follow, subscribe to, or that just generally inspire you?

—A Fan in Nashville

Dear Fan,

Like you, I do read a bit. There's so much to stay apprised of in this world. Right now I'm reading a piece on the Inflation Reduction Act on *The Atlantic's* Weekly Planet newsletter. I follow Bill McKibben's pieces from *The New Yorker* and anything he prints anywhere. I'm also a member of Third Act Maine, volunteering as a writer on their communications committee, now that I live here in Maine. Ted Talks are delivered to my inbox and I recently listened to (while cooking) a piece on the part the oceans play in decarbonization and what the oceans have to teach us. I also recently listened to some of British author and mythologist Karen Armstrong's new book *Sacred Nature* and wrote down this quote: "We must revive our reverence for the natural world." I recommend anything Armstrong writes.

I'm a big fan of intersectionality and read psychology, literature, science, politics, and art. I recently wrote a piece called "Becoming Thoreau" and so have dipped into Walden's first chapter titled, "Economy." Thoreau has helped me to see again the value of the natural world in the relationship of "reverence" which Armstrong asks her readers to revive. While reading Thoreau in this politically fraught time, when one questions whether being an American is something worth continuing, I turn to Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself," that long, glorious poem of American self-affirmation, delight, and sensuality. Never underestimate the power of poetry.

A friend sent me something from Maria Popova's amazing *The Marginalian*, which led to checking out a podcast by *Emergence Magazine*; one interview, with the forest scientist Suzanne Simard, author of the new book *Finding the Mother Tree: Discovering the Wisdom of the Forest*, inspired me to enjoy anew my two acres of trees in this coastal northern woods.

Here are a few other regular threads I weave into my daily brain:

- Sierra Club's *Daily Ray of Hope*, *Insider*, and *The Green Life*
- Kathleen Sullivan's blog "Code Red and Me: Rethinking Everything"
- *Extinction Rebellion (XR)*'s Global Support newsletter
- *The Hidden Life of Trees: How They Feel, How They Communicate* by Peter Wohlleben
- *The Spell of the Sensuous* by David Abram
- Anything by Bernd Heinrich; currently reading *The Snoring Bird*.

Getting out and listening to lectures or talks on nature is always a delight. Taking a local class will connect you to people like yourself and lead to in-person activism, always a heady dose of inspiration. I've taken up birdwatching, mostly by watching my bird feeder; I took a birding class back in 2015 at Nashville's Warner Park Nature Center. I plan to take another class soon. Nature centers and conservation organizations are great places to connect with others who share curiosity about the world.

I know you asked about what I'm reading but I find hiking, walking, and any protesting about anything that gets your heart pumping and the world changing is helpful. Since isolation is ranked in the US as deleterious as smoking, Shawn Colvin's song, "Get Out of This House" comes to mind. Just get out there! And take a friend with you.

Hope these are helpful/interesting to you, dear Fan. I'd love to hear from any others of my readers about what they are reading, doing, activism in these hot times.

Thanks for the question and no matter what your links are, stay connected. The planet needs you NOW!

All the best,
Eartha

This column was written by Rita Bullinger.
Submit your question for Eartha to: SierraTNNews@gmail.com

WEIGHT

by Barbara Ungar

1. HOMO SAPIENS

We think the world belongs to us but scientists have weighed life on Earth, which turns out to be

mostly trees. Only one hundredth of the living swim the seven seas. One-eighth are buried: bacteria.

Underground bacteria weigh more than a thousand times more than us. Even worms outweigh us, three to one.

So does the lowly virus. Humans comprise a mere hundredth of a hundredth of the living, .01%.

Yet we have paved the earth with chicken-bones. Weep into your soup: under a third of birds fly free—the rest, poultry.

Garden turned feedlot and slaughterhouse—we, *Homo sapiens*, one-third of all mammals, keep

almost two-thirds to eat, mostly cow and pig. Only four percent left for all wild animals, elephant to shrew.

Half Earth's creatures have vanished in the last half century while we've redoubled.

Even half-gone, plants outweigh us seventy-five hundred to one.

2. THE OTHER FOUR PERCENT

I let the cat out—
I felt the cat
hunkered in her fur

eyes bright in the dark
amidst all the wild things
crouched in their night

tygers to mice
the tiny remnant left
each one fighting for its life.

Barbara Ungar's forthcoming collection of poems is *After Naming the Animals*. Her other published collections include *Save Our Ship*; *Immortal Medusa*; *Charlotte Brontë*; *You Ruined My Life*; and *The Origin of the Milky Way*. She is a professor of English at the College of St. Rose in Albany, N.Y.

Author's note: Proportions are based on percentages of biomass, not numbers of creatures. "Weight" first appeared in *Scientific American* and is used with permission from the author. The poem is inspired by "The Biomass Distribution on Earth," Yinon M. Bar-On, Rob Phillips, and Ron Milo, PNAS (*Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States*), June 19, 2018; all statistics are derived from this source.

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Create a legacy that protects and restores the natural world for future generations by naming Sierra Club's Tennessee Chapter in your will or trust. Or, name Sierra Club Foundation as the beneficiary of your retirement plan for the benefit of your local chapter and leave less highly taxed assets to your loved ones.



To learn more about the advantages of making a planned gift and to become a member of the Rachel Carson Society, please contact us.



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- Discounts on Sierra Club calendars, books, and other merchandise.



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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

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RETREAT SCHEDULE		
	LOCATION	DATES
Spring 2023	Fall Creek Falls State Park	April 28-30
Fall 2023	Pickett State Park	October 13-15
Winter 2024	Cedars of Lebanon State Park	January 19-21
Spring 2024	Fall Creek Falls State Park	May 3-5
Fall 2024	Fall Creek Falls State Park	October 18-20

UPCOMING MEETINGS

COVID-19 NOTICE

COVID-19 NOTICE: Sierra Club activities may enforce group size limits, PPE, social distancing requirements to comply with COVID-19 restrictions of the meeting venue, city, and county rules where the activity takes place. Please contact the activity organizer for any updates. Check website for Zoom or in-person meeting status or contact your chair (see page 2).

Group Program Meetings

Group	Date	Time
Cherokee (Chattanooga)	Mon 5/22, 6/26, 7/24	6:00 PM
Chickasaw (Memphis)	Thu 5/18, 6/15, 7/20	6:00 PM
Harvey Broome (Knoxville)	Tue 5/9, 6/13, 7/11	7:00 PM
Middle TN (Nashville)	Thu 5/11, 6/8, 7/13	7:00 PM

Group Business Meetings

Group	Date	Time
Cherokee (Chattanooga)	Mon 5/1, 6/5, 7/3	7:00 PM
Chickasaw (Memphis)	Wed 5/3, 6/7, 7/5	6:30 PM
Harvey Broome (Knoxville)	Tue 5/23, 6/27, 7/25	7:00 PM
Middle TN (Nashville)	Mon 5/15, 6/19, 7/17	6:30 PM

Regional Conservation Committee Business Meetings

Committee	Date	Time
CareNET (Rogersville)	Thu 5/25, 6/22, 7/27	6:00 PM
Clarksville	Tue 5/9, 6/13, 7/11	6:00 PM
Holston Valley	Tue 5/16, 6/20, 7/18	6:00 PM
Watauga (Mountain City)	Sun 5/14, 6/11, 7/9	2:00 PM