

# Tennessee Sierran

SIERRA CLUB  
TENNESSEE CHAPTER

Bimonthly Newsletter of the Tennessee Chapter of the Sierra Club

Volume 56, Number 4—July / August 2023

## The National Sierra Club Board Meets in Tennessee

Read Cris Corley's column on page 2 and Charlie High's report on page 5



Sierra Club officials at a rare retreat in Joelton, Tennessee, on May 19. The Sierra Club's New Board President Allison Chin is front and center in light blue, with State Chair Cris Corley just behind her, and national Director Ben Jealous just behind him. Also pictured is board member and Tennessean Rita Harris (fourth from left). Photo courtesy of Cris Corley.



## TVA Board Holds a Listening Session Page 5

Masthead Photo: Sassafras, by Todd Waterman  
TVA Photos by Todd Waterman. Captions on Page 5

Explore, Enjoy, and Protect

# From Tennessee Chair Cris Corley

## Early Morning Thoughts: Dawn Comes Way Too Soon, But Clear Waters Ahead!



Nautical Dawn begins when the geometric center of the sun is 12 degrees below the horizon. The first sailors of the seas were always on deck way before sunrise, looking for any land mass that might be on a collision course. By definition, nautical dawn is when a distant object on the horizon is discernible. This morning, nautical dawn was 4:22 am, but I slept for an extra eight minutes. For some odd reason, I wake up every day at this time. The last time I set an alarm was during my college years.

The last month or so has been action-packed. The Sierra Club has maxed out my cerebral cortex. In early May, I received an early morning text from our then-president Ramón Cruz. We had become closer friends during his earlier visit to our fair state in January. He asked if I could assist staff in finding a quiet, slightly remote location convenient to Nashville, for a rapidly approaching Sierra Club national board meeting and retreat. During the January visit to the Gore farm, I'd briefly suggested to Ramón and our newly appointed executive director Ben Jealous that Middle Tennessee would be an ideal location for Sierra Club activities. Little did I know that my suggestion would be acted on so quickly.

Some of our readers may be aware of our new captain Ben's change in course. The crew has been hitting the deck early, studying the horizon for possible obstacles hazardous to our journey. Over the last few years of our voyage to "save the planet," rations were being consumed faster than our resupply efforts. Many factors have contributed to our short supplies, including a decline in major contributors and a tightening of the belt by others. Our crew has steadily increased in numbers, in some cases resulting in redundancy of duties.

The national board and executive director decided a rapid course correction was essential in steering through the straits. The forecast of a several-million-dollar budget deficit in the coming year resulted in an anxiety-producing order: the offloading of some of the familiar crew members — not an easy task, but necessary to keep the ship afloat and continuing on course without a change in objective.

After the board's decision to make budget cuts, an organizational restructuring review was in order. A quiet onshore encampment, with few outside distractions, was essential for planning for the future. Thus came Ramón's text. The landing of a national board meeting east of the Mississippi River was a rare occurrence. Even rarer was the inclusion of the retreat component, last held prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. So, off to the races with inquiries, phone calls, texts, and emails. With such short notice, options were limited; but the challenge was doable, and would bring attention to our Tennessee Chapter.

Of course my SOS beacon was illuminated, and directed first toward our Conservation Chair Bill Moll and Conservation Program Coordinator Scott Banbury. Secondary illumination flares were fired resulting in numerous members of the Tennessee Chapter appearing on the horizon to render aid. We were successful in finding acceptable lodging and transportation, while showcasing one of our finer traits, Tennessee hospitality. Executive Director Jealous arrived a couple of days early to spend time canoeing on his favorite Tennessee river with our favorite hometown climate protector and former politician. Ben seems to be growing fond of our travels into the scenic wonders of the Middle Tennessee Highlands. After I picked him up at the airport, we had lunch in Lebanon with the esteemed Nashville music, TV, and major event producer John Walker. I found Ben and John's vast knowledge of music and its history remarkable.

Our planned conversation on a possible multi-year national Sierra Fest in Tennessee would have to wait — when in Music City, all conversations must begin with, "What is your favorite music genre and artist?" (Ben would invite us to present a detailed, one-hour-plus proposal on Sierra Fest to the board later in the week, which the board received with enthusiasm — one commented privately, "Everybody loves Tennessee.")

Ben seemed to be more relaxed upon my return to pick him up after his few days on the river. We sat on the porch, talking about world affairs and watching the river flow — by far one of Tennesseans' favorite pastimes. With four more days of meetings and events to come, our week had just begun. A Tennessee Chapter meeting was scheduled at 1 pm, for only one hour, at the Wilson County Tennessee State Fairgrounds in Lebanon, but Ben became fully engaged and answered every member's question. After a two-hour-plus meeting, we explored the fairgrounds for another good hour. We finally got back to Nashville right before rush hour.

I knew the next few days would be difficult for all parties involved. Making executive decisions affecting someone's employment is never easy. I know the process is still ongoing, but I feel the Tennessee Chapter and associated staff will weather the doldrums favorably. To give your support please donate here: <https://www.sierraclub.org/>

Contact Cris at [chapter.chair@tennessee.sierraclub.org](mailto:chapter.chair@tennessee.sierraclub.org).



Allison Chin, President of the Board of the Sierra Club



Cris Corley with Ben Jealous, Executive Director of the Sierra Club, in Nashville

## Tennes-Sierran

The bimonthly newsletter of the  
Tennessee Chapter of the Sierra Club  
Volume 56, Number 4 — July / August 2023  
Digital Edition

### Change of Address

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Online: [MyAccount.SierraClub.org](http://MyAccount.SierraClub.org)

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### Submissions

August issue of the Chapter E-Newsletter by July 21

September Issue of the Chapter E-Newsletter by August 25

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

### Chapter News Team

Communications Coordinator: Gary Bowers [sierra@totheforest.net](mailto:sierra@totheforest.net)

Tennes-Sierran Editor: Emily Ellis [tnsierran.editor@gmail.com](mailto:tnsierran.editor@gmail.com)

Assistant Editor: Todd Waterman [jtoddw@gmail.com](mailto:jtoddw@gmail.com)

E-Newsletter Editor: Allie Stafford [enews.sierratn@gmail.com](mailto:enews.sierratn@gmail.com)

Poetry Editor: Alan May <https://alan-may.com/>

### TENNESSEE CHAPTER

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

### Officers

Chair: Cris Corley

[chapter.chair@tennessee.sierraclub.org](mailto:chapter.chair@tennessee.sierraclub.org)

Vice Chair: Nancy Bell 423-272-6342

[nancywithbell@gmail.com](mailto:nancywithbell@gmail.com)

Secretary: open

Treasurer: Craig Brandt 865-924-0597

[brandtcctn@gmail.com](mailto:brandtcctn@gmail.com)

Conservation Chair: Bill Moll 404-401-7899

[whmoll@aol.com](mailto:whmoll@aol.com)

Outings Chair: Ron Shrieves 865-924-8973

[ronshrieves@gmail.com](mailto:ronshrieves@gmail.com)

Political Chair: Joanne Logan 865-310-1171

[loganjojolo@gmail.com](mailto:loganjojolo@gmail.com)

### Conservation Program Coordinator

Scott Banbury 901-619-8567 [scott.banbury@sierraclub.org](mailto:scott.banbury@sierraclub.org)

### Beyond Coal Campaign Staff

Bonnie Swinford, Senior Organizing Representative

[bonnie.swinford@sierraclub.org](mailto:bonnie.swinford@sierraclub.org)

Amy Kelly, Campaign Representative

[amy.kelly@sierraclub.org](mailto:amy.kelly@sierraclub.org)

Emily Sherwood, Campaign Organizer

[emily.sherwood@sierraclub.org](mailto:emily.sherwood@sierraclub.org)

### GROUPS

Cherokee Group—Chattanooga

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

Chair: David Hoot 423-503-9482

[hoot.david@gmail.com](mailto:hoot.david@gmail.com)

Harvey Broome Group—Knoxville

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

Chair: Jerry Thornton 865-719-9742

[gatwildcat@aol.com](mailto:gatwildcat@aol.com)

Chickasaw Group—Memphis

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

Chair: Carl Richards 218-409-5150

[crich555@gmail.com](mailto:crich555@gmail.com)

Middle Tennessee Group—Nashville

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

Chair: Antoinette Olesen 615-498-2778

[middle.tn.group.chair@tennessee.sierraclub.org](mailto:middle.tn.group.chair@tennessee.sierraclub.org)

### REGIONAL CONSERVATION COMMITTEES

Clarksville-Montgomery County Regional Conservation Committee

Chair: JoAnn McIntosh 931-338-2530 [mcjoann@gmail.com](mailto:mcjoann@gmail.com)

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

Chair: Bill Kornrich 423-300-8764 [bkornrich@gmail.com](mailto:bkornrich@gmail.com)

Holston Valley Regional Conservation Committee

Chair: Dan Firth 423-390-0882 [dan.firth.sierraclub@gmail.com](mailto:dan.firth.sierraclub@gmail.com)

Watauga Regional Conservation Committee (Johnson and Carter Counties)

Chair: Gloria Griffith 423-727-4798 [gl4797@embarqmail.com](mailto:gl4797@embarqmail.com)

# Opposition to Land Application of Sewage Sludge Mounts Across Tennessee

by Scott Banbury, Conservation Program Coordinator

Increasingly, rural communities across the state are questioning the practice of disposing of sewage sludge — also known as “biosolids” — as fertilizer on agricultural land adjacent to their homes and farms. Residents are concerned about nuisances, including odors and pests, pollution of streams and groundwater, and ultimately their well water.

The Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) permits more than seventy wastewater treatment plants to dispose of, on farmland, the sludge that their treatment process produces. While some of these treatment plants take the additional step of super heating the sludge to kill all pathogens resulting in Class A or Exceptional Quality biosolids, many skip this step and produce Class B biosolids which can still harbor some live pathogens. Both classes of biosolids must also be tested periodically for arsenic, cadmium, copper, lead, mercury, molybdenum, nickel, selenium and zinc.

What’s more concerning to many residents is what the biosolids are NOT tested for. In 2018, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Office of Inspector General produced a report that identified 352 pollutants in biosolids, including “61 chemicals designated as acutely hazardous, hazardous or

priority pollutants in other programs.” Unfortunately, they determined that further regulation was not possible due to a lack of either data or risk assessment tools (<https://bit.ly/EPA-2018-Biosolids-Report>). Of growing concern is the potential high concentrations of PFAS (both per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances) in these biosolids. PFAS are a class of widely used industrial chemicals, many toxic to people, that persist for decades in the environment. In most places, industries are currently allowed to flush PFAS containing waste into wastewater drains that flow to treatment plants. The chemicals are not removed during sewage treatment, and instead settle in biosolids that are separated out from liquids in the treatment process.

Many states are adopting policies to regulate PFAS in wastewater and some are moving to ban land application of biosolids until the issue of PFAS and other pollutants is addressed. Here in Tennessee we know it is a problem with PFAS documented to be present in quantities exceeding the EPA’s advisory limits in Nashville’s biosolids in 2022.

Concerned citizens are actively working to restrict the land application of biosolids in Polk, Warren and Van Buren counties. For more information, or to get involved in your community, please contact me at 901-619-8567 or [scott.banbury@sierraclub.org](mailto:scott.banbury@sierraclub.org).

## Memphis Switch to LED Streetlights Is a Win-Win

by Dennis Lynch, Chickasaw Group

Phase A1 of the \$42 million LED streetlight conversion project is underway in Memphis. At dusk on the evening of Monday, March 20, Memphis Light, Gas and Water (MLGW) and the City of Memphis “turned on the new lights” in front of Memphis Fire Station #37 at 3950 Weaver Rd. Speeches and Q&A ensued. Numerous streets in the area already had their new lights installed.

MLGW’s President Doug McGowen described the overall program which will convert 77,000 old high-pressure sodium streetlights by the end of the year. The new lights are brighter and increase safety at a lower cost, using one fourth the energy of the old bulbs and reducing by one fourth pollution and climate impacts. Also, the cost savings of the new bulbs will cover the costs of the entire conversion project in only two years. After two years, the savings continue.

Contact Dennis at [dmlynch1@gmail.com](mailto:dmlynch1@gmail.com)

## Chattanooga Seeks to become a “National Park City”

by Dave Hoot, Chair, Cherokee Group

A nascent effort is underway to have Chattanooga designated as a National Park City (NPC). Being established as an NPC is granted after meeting requirements set up by the National Park City Foundation. The designation is from a fairly recent movement which sprung out of the World Urban Parks (WUP) Foundation, a new international organization representing the vibrant urban parks, open space and recreation sector. This effort is also in cooperation with the Salzburg Global Seminar, an independent nonprofit organization founded in 1947 with a mission to challenge current and future leaders to shape a better world.

With the 40-year projection seeing urban population doubling from 3.5 billion to 7 billion, the WUP stresses the need to be intentional about urban growth. The core concept is to drive growth in a direction that makes a city “greener, healthier, and wilder.” Cities must navigate through an involved assessment process and adhere to the NPC Charter. The many components include demonstration of significant and diverse public support and confirming an established progressive conservation policy.

Scott Martin, Chattanooga’s Administrator of Parks and Outdoors, presented at the Cherokee Group program meeting in May on the NPC effort, as well as on the City’s overall park plan. He stressed that pursuit of NPC status is a grassroots effort rather than governmental; organizers are interacting with all facets of society: government, business, industry, and nonprofits.

Currently, London, UK, and Adelaide, Australia, are the only official National Park Cities. Dozens of cities across the world, however, have begun the process of becoming an NPC. Just a few examples are Liuzhou, China; Calgary, Canada; Buenos Aires, Argentina; Mysore, India; and Kumasi, Ghana. It is exciting that every continent is represented.

Brian Smith, Communications and Marketing Director with Chattanooga Parks and Outdoors, said that being granted NPC status will have advantages beyond the wellness of Chattanooga’s population and environment. For example, cities will receive support from the NPC family — where information, practices, and support are shared — and will have increased credibility when seeking health and environmental funding.

This effort, being in such an early stage of development, calls out for public involvement. Learn more and stay up-to-date here:

<https://chattanooganationalparkcity.org/>

Contact Dave at [hoot.david@gmail.com](mailto:hoot.david@gmail.com)

## Chapter Fall Retreat Will Be FUN (and Informative)

October 13-15 at Pickett State Park

The State Chapter Fall Retreat October 13-15 at Pickett State Park will be the perfect time to see old friends and make new friends from across the state while experiencing nature in one of Tennessee’s most diverse state parks.

With a new moon on October 12, Dark Sky viewing of galaxies, planets and stars will be prime. And the Park has a swimming area lined with sandstone bluffs, hiking for the energetic, and forest bathing for the contemplative.

Whether on an easy half-mile hike with beautiful vistas, or the moderately challenging Hazard Cave and Natural Bridge Trail, enjoy cliffs, sandstone bluffs, natural bridges, waterfalls, and breathtaking beauty everywhere you turn. Explore on your own or go with State Naturalist Randy Hedgepath on one of his guided, educational hikes.

Return to the lodge for dinner, good stuff at the ever-popular One Thin Dollar Silent Auction, and s’mores at the campfire in the amphitheater.

Early Bird registration (\$60) will get you dorm style lodging, breakfast both mornings, and Saturday dinner. Check the next issue of this paper for details or go to the Tennessee Chapter website:

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

Contact Antoinette at [time4nashville@gmail.com](mailto:time4nashville@gmail.com)

## Restoring Western Tennessee Rivers

by Carl Richards, Chair, Chickasaw Group

Almost all rivers in Western Tennessee suffer from excessive amounts of sediment which clog waterways and nutrients that cause ecosystem disruption.

Since western Tennessee rivers flow into the Mississippi River, elevated nutrient levels flow downstream and are contributing to the Gulf of Mexico hypoxic (low-oxygen) zone. Poor agricultural practices are one of the most extensive causes of problems leading to excess sediment and nutrients. To address these water quality concerns and agricultural sources of nutrients and sediment, the US Department of Agriculture, through the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), has announced a program working with farmers and conservation partners to implement conservation practices proven to improve the overall health of degraded watersheds of the Mississippi River. The overall goals of the Mississippi River program are to improve water quality, restore wetlands, and enhance wildlife habitat while ensuring economic viability of agricultural lands. The funds increase the adoption of critical water quality conservation practices, such as cover crops, no-tillage, residue management, grassed waterways and nutrient management. Fortunately, this program could significantly help restore some of our Western Tennessee rivers.

The NRCS program is providing approximately \$1 million in 2023 across 22 watersheds to assist landowners with implementing conservation practices. Most of these targeted areas are within the Obion River watershed of northwest Tennessee, the Forked Deer River watershed of central western Tennessee, and the Loosahatchie River watershed just north of Memphis. All of these rivers flow directly to the Mississippi River. Private landowners in these watersheds can apply to receive funds to implement approved projects. Successful implementation of the program depends on participation of regional communities and landowners.

Contact Carl at [crich555@gmail.com](mailto:crich555@gmail.com)

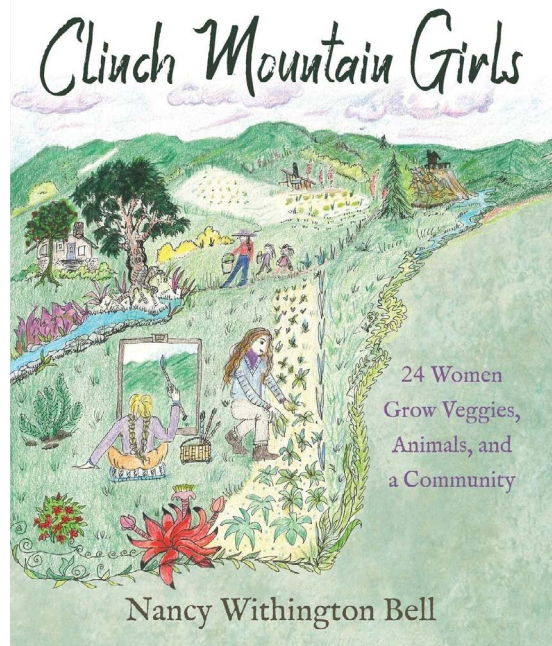
## Book Review

# Clinch Mountain Girls: 24 Women Grow Veggies, Animals and a Community

By Nancy Withington Bell

by Rita Bullinger, Volunteer Writer

*Clinch Mountain Girls: 24 Women Grow Veggies, Animals and a Community* is an inspirational book about homesteading women in the southern Appalachians' Clinch Mountain in east Tennessee. Author Nancy Withington Bell brings back a time of hope, hard work, and an aspiration to live off the land that many of us remember who came of age in the 1970s and '80s. Through personal interviews starting in 2014, the author recorded the stories of 23 women's lives as they journeyed from all over the US and



Europe to settle, farm, build homes, raise animals (of all kinds) and children — or not — while enduring extreme poverty without complaint. One homesteader, alone one night without enough firewood and sick with flu says her three big dogs got onto the bed and kept her warm. Exclaiming that the water in the jug by the bed froze, she says, "I was lucky I had those dogs with me! It was a 'three dog night'!" The language of the transcribed interviews is original and natural, that is, in the women's own words.

The book is organized in chapters that resemble articles from *Mother Earth News*: "Back to the Land";

"Growing Our Gardens, Growing Ourselves"; "Sheep and Lambs and Goats and Kids"; "Feeling the Spirit." In each chapter, first person narratives from the "girls" fill up the pages with very short, sometimes one sentence, narratives linking one woman's tale to that of another storyteller. The reader is struck by the sheer guts and bravery of these women to create a life with

very little or no money, and by the actual look and feel of homesteading in Tennessee's Clinch Mountain. Felling trees with only a horse to haul the timber out to the log cabin site. Living in an old, abandoned shack until better housing was found. Driving a car without a gas pedal. Raising chickens and children, making cheese, killing hawks to protect your hens, and spinning wool out of the angora of your rabbits. Many of the women had to work away from the valley and some created art to sell or give away while most worked their land, schooled their kids, raised their own food; and, yes, it was "arduous" and "backbreaking" work.

It's hard to read the book for long periods of time because there's just so much information from so many different voices. But I'd pick up the book when I couldn't hear one more news account of political and judicial treachery, dishonesty, and the refusal of men in power to act in a just and moral way. I was taken back to the hope of living on the land and neighbor helping neighbor and a simpler, though sometimes fraught and painful, time. I could see the mountain vistas, and the land, the forests, the hills, the creeks, farms, and towns — and the beauty of the people bonding and helping, not for pay or thanks but because that's what human beings do for one another — in Tennessee and throughout the world. *Clinch Mountain Girls* is an uplifting book for troubled times. The resourcefulness and artistry of these 24 women, including, of course, the author, as they created community in these "hollers" and mountain valleys and peaks provides a joyous backdrop to our present dismal national polarity. More and how to get your very own copy: [clinchmountaingirls.com](http://clinchmountaingirls.com)



Tennessee Chapter Vice Chair Nancy Withington Bell is author of the new book *Clinch Mountain Girls: 24 Women Grow Veggies, Animals and a Community*.

Contact Rita at [ritabullinger@gmail.com](mailto:ritabullinger@gmail.com)

## Nashville Native's Childhood Passion for Nature Continues in his Work

by Karen McIntyre, Retired Metro Nashville School Librarian

I taught Noah Charney's *Noah and the Arc*, a children's book about Charney's conservation vision for Nashville, written in collaboration with his mother and based on his experiences in the natural world when he was a child. The book introduces children to the animals and geography of Nashville, and the importance of providing a corridor for animal migration. Charney's passion for the natural world has continued in his work as Assistant Professor of Conservation Biology at the University of Maine. He coauthored the award-winning *Tracks and Sign of Insects and Other Invertebrates: A Guide to North American Species*.

His new book *These Trees Tell a Story; The Art of Reading Landscapes*

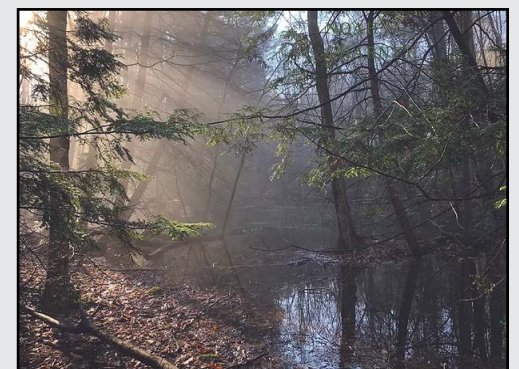
unfolds as a series of natural history vignettes interwoven through time which merge to convey the principles of conservation and environmental science and the sacred in nature. "The book follows the trail of a course I used to teach with photographs from the field," Charney said. "Each chapter begins with an ecological mystery that we set out to solve and each solution becomes a piece of a larger puzzle as we unravel the story of one watershed from marsh to mountaintop."

More here: <https://www.treestellastory.com/>

Contact Karen at [kjmcinty@comcast.net](mailto:kjmcinty@comcast.net)



Noah Charney, Nashville native and currently **Assistant Professor of Conservation Biology at the University of Maine**, is author of two books written for the public: *Noah and the Arc*, co-authored with his mother for children, and a new book, *These Trees Tell a Story; The Art of Reading Landscapes*.



THESE TREES  
TELL A STORY

THE ART OF READING LANDSCAPES

NOAH CHARNEY

## TVA Board Listens in Norris, Tennessee

by Joe Schiller, Vice Chair, Energy Conservation Committee  
with contributions from Amy Kelly, Beyond Coal Campaign Representative

On May 9, approximately 60 people came together from across Tennessee to tell the largest government-owned utility, the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), that they were opposed to the second-largest planned gas buildout in the country, and to demand a clean energy transition that would also safely clean up coal ash. At this “Listening Session” offered by TVA, various issues, centered on TVA’s continued reliance on fossil fuels, brought environmentalists together in a united front. While the usual contingent of local power provider representatives, farmers, and various industrial interests were in attendance, the overwhelming majority of speakers were members of environmental and social justice organizations that together make up the Clean UP TVA Coalition. Also present were representatives of frontline community groups, including spouses and widows of 2008 Kingston coal ash spill cleanup workers, Bull Run Neighbors, Southern Alliance for Clean Energy (SACE), and Cumberland Preservation Group, all affected by TVA’s past and projected policy actions.

Sierra Club provided attendants tshirts with “Clean Up TVA” logos on the front and “Tennessee Valley Communities United” on the back, with those present standing in unison as demands were read to the Board.

So many people wished to address the board members that some did not get a chance. Speakers expressed objections to TVA’s flawed logic in pursuing so much new gas-burning power plant buildout while continuing to lag in energy efficiency and renewable energy development. They pointed out that a gas buildout is contrary to the scientific consensus that no new fossil fuel infrastructure development should be made to have any hope of addressing global warming. Other speakers reminded those present that it was the fossil fuel infrastructure that failed, leading to the rolling blackouts during winter storm Elliot this past Christmas. Efficiency, they said, can play a critical role in mitigating these risks and saving ratepayers money.

A consistent theme voiced was: “TVA, stop making our lives more difficult by swapping one fossil fuel, coal, for another, natural gas.” The frontline community groups do not want the air and water pollution legacy that has resulted from decades of coal-burning at TVA’s now retired coal plants. The community groups in the path of the major pipelines required to replace these coal plants with natural gas turbines do not want to sacrifice their land and safety to this foolish strategy. Environmental organizations have researched the energy industry thoroughly for decades and know well that energy efficiency, renewable energy and storage are not only essential to addressing climate change, but also safer, more reliable, and more affordable than the natural gas alternative TVA is pursuing.

The next day saw the board boldly reclaim decision-making authority previously delegated to CEO Jeff Lyash for the Kingston coal plant retirement and gas buildout decision following the legally required National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process.

Tennessee Sierra Club members that addressed the board included Kent Minault, Richard Shaffer, Dana Moran, and Joe Schiller. “The Chapter is very proud of the effort, teamwork and organization that brought so many members and supporters to these Norris meetings,” JoAnn McIntosh said. “Sierra Club shows up — and with new faces at every TVA event, illustrating the breadth of concern over TVA’s continuing gas buildout in the face of devastating climate change.”

Not only did all this generate an important step toward victory, but the movement gathering following the event allowed people from the different local grassroots groups to come together and forge a tighter bond for future actions. The buildup to this one moment included over a year of coordinated work between Sierra Club federal campaigns, the Beyond Coal Campaign, and the Chapters in TVA’s service area as we helped expedite Senate approval for six new Biden appointees to the nine-member TVA Board of Directors.

The turnout was a powerful testament to a joint campaign effort of Beyond Coal and Beyond Dirty Fuels and the Chapter in opposition to the planned miles of pipelines. Local and national press coverage and TVA announcements suggest we made an impression, but changing TVA’s policy trajectory will require unrelenting pressure and persuasion. Our work continues.

Contact Joe at [joeschiller8@gmail.com](mailto:joeschiller8@gmail.com)

Addendum: This gas buildout includes plants at the Cumberland site (announced days after gas failures contributed to December blackouts), the Kingston site (announced days after the Listening Session), a brand-new site and pipeline in Cheatham County, and new gas at Johnsonville, Paradise KY, and Colbert AL.

To get involved in organized efforts, contact JoAnn McIntosh:  
[joann.mcintosh@tennessee.sierraclub.org](mailto:joann.mcintosh@tennessee.sierraclub.org)

### Cover Photos of TVA meetings

Bottom left: After a May 10th TVA Board Meeting, Tennessee Chapter Environmental Justice Chair Marquita Bradshaw talks with TVA CEO Jeff Lyash. Bottom right: commenters at the May 9th TVA Board Listening Session: Chapter Transportation Chair Kent Minault; J T Neal with Clean Up TVA; and Jean Cheely with Statewide Organizing for Community eMpowerment. Photos by Todd Waterman.

## National Sierra Club Board Listens and Meets in Middle Tennessee

by Charlie High, Chapter Executive Committee Member



On May 20, Chapter Chair Cris Corley and I were privileged to attend the Sierra Club Board of Directors meeting in Nashville. At the Council of Club Leaders meeting in 2022, Corley had invited Ramón Cruz, then Board President, to visit. Cruz and the newly appointed Sierra Club Executive Director, Ben Jealous, did so as part of a listening tour of several state chapters. Following the visit, the Board of Directors decided to visit Tennessee for a retreat with new board members, followed by a meeting of the Board.

Jealous met with members of the Chapter’s Middle Tennessee Group and other members in Lebanon that was also Zoomed to others. On

May 19, the Board had a buffet dinner with leaders of the Tennessee Chapter at the Opryland Hotel. The Tennessee Chapter honored the Sierra Club Board with a resolution by the Metropolitan Nashville’s City Council welcoming them and inviting them to return as often as possible. It was comfortable to meet and dine with the Board members in a relaxed setting.

The Board met initially in a closed session. Corley and I attended the public portion of the meeting that afternoon. Cruz chaired the meeting, the last in his three-year tenure as Board President. He had steered the club through the difficulties of an international pandemic — outings and meetings had to be reimagined and controlled for the health of the members. Nevertheless, the Sierra Club continued to excel as the nation’s strongest protector of the environment. Tributes were given by members of the Board to Cruz for his leadership as president.

A report of the election of new board members was made. Shruti Bhatnagar, David Holtz and Dave Scott were elected as new members; Rita Harris and Patrick Murphy were reelected. Allison Chin was elected as board president for a one-year term. Chin, having served three terms previously as president and on the executive committee as treasurer and fifth officer, is well known in the Sierra Club.

“I am honored to take on this role and continue the great work of the Sierra Club. We are facing critical challenges in protecting our planet, and I am confident that we will rise to the challenge,” she said.

New members were elected to the Executive Committee including Ross Macfarlane as Vice-President of Conservation; Patrick Murphy as Vice-President of Chapters, Groups and Volunteers; Cheyenne Skye Branscum as Treasurer; and Meghan Sahli-Wells as Secretary.

Cruz said, “I want to congratulate Allison and the new Executive Committee. I am glad to see that we continue to have a group of experienced leaders to steer the Sierra Club in a moment that is crucial for the fight against climate change while centering on justice.”

The Board of Directors is studying the implementation of the Inflation Reduction Act as well as an endorsement process for the U.S. presidential race. At the retreat there was study and discussion about the best ways to expand and improve communications with the volunteer community, stated to be the heartbeat of the organization.

The relatively small Tennessee Chapter seized on this opportunity to meet and discuss with the Sierra Club leadership issues and priorities of interest to us. Rita Harris, a member of the Chapter’s Chickasaw group, attended and we celebrated her reelection to the national Sierra Club Board of Directors.

Contact Charlie at [cahigh1722@aol.com](mailto:cahigh1722@aol.com).

## Spring Chapter Retreat Successful

by Jerry Thornton, Chair, Harvey Broome Group

The 40 people who attended the spring retreat at Fall Creek Falls State Park, hosted by the Harvey Broome Group (HBG), had a great time exploring the park with State Naturalist Randy Hedgepath, eating good food prepared by HBG volunteers, hearing a science presentation, and enjoying live music.

The weather gods smiled down on us after a week threatening rain, and the dry weather allowed us to have a blazing fire pit both Friday and Saturday nights. Friday night, we talked around the fire, enjoyed ‘smores and sang a few songs, mainly thanks to Randy Hedgepath’s and Gary Bowers’ encyclopedic knowledge of John Prine’s lyrics.

Saturday morning began with a delicious breakfast created by HBG’s Angelica Harris, Virginia Dale, Haley Ratliff, and Julie Elfin, followed by a hike to the bottom of Fall Creek Falls — a short but difficult trail described by Randy as 0.4 miles down and 4.5 miles back up! Feeling the spray from the falls and seeing the complexity of the rock walls, hemlock trees, and other vegetation makes it worth the effort.

During the lunch break on Saturday, David Bordenkircher and Grace Stranch explained what the state legislature did this year on environmental issues. The bottom line is that we were able to stop most of the worst bills, but the legislature did the environment no big favors. In the next session, look for more attempts to weaken the comprehensive (continued on page 7)

# What Can We Learn from a Fourth Grader?

## Part Four: How to Teach Civics and Sustainability against Overwhelming Odds

by Karen McIntyre, Retired Metro Nashville Public School Librarian

The sounds of Spring fill me with hope as I sit sipping my morning coffee, enjoying what is left of nature in present-day Nashville. In the 20 years I have lived here, the tree canopy has declined, the numbers and varieties of birds at my feeders have plummeted, and the ever-present sounds of insects are no longer the bass to a beautiful morning symphony.

This last article in the series, “What You Can Learn from a 4th Grader,” was to be a celebration as Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) hired a sustainability officer, but the only thing I am celebrating now is the dedication of my partners in the Sustainability Stewardship Advisory Committee (SSAC) who continue to press for sustainability in our schools. In March, for the third year, the district left sustainability in the aspirational budget. It was that failure a year ago that inspired a group of subject area experts, volunteers, and educators with deep connections to many environmental groups to organize the SSAC.

We had spent four months presenting the school board with:

- data gathered from the community about what they viewed as critical;
- data and research about the value of outdoor/nature education and sustainability to improve health, well-being, and standardized test scores;
- data supporting the need to move to a sustainable practice that will meet the deadlines looming in 2030 for carbon footprint and zero-waste.

After this latest blow, we gathered online to examine our options. We planned to continue working in schools where we might impact children and staff. Ongoing work has included support for these actions at Nashville public schools:

- for Percy Priest Elementary, SSAC members contributed money to buy a refrigerator used for redirecting food and composting;
- for Glendale Elementary, parents and administration covered the cost of composting food waste;
- for Crieve Hall Elementary, SSAC provided plants, tools, gloves, and other needed items as the school revives its raised-bed gardens built 10 years ago, but not used in seven — this project was also parent-driven;
- for school gardeners, SSAC connected them with supportive groups and funds;
- for Meigs Middle School, SSAC cheer-led parents and staff who applied for and received a grant to fund a magnificent outdoor classroom. Now plans could be laid for installing native plants, beds and trees to replace tree cover lost to tornadoes;
- for Community Gardens and pollinator gardens, SSAC founding member Ann Cover has provided guidance, establishing a large vegetable garden to support two MNPS schools and working to build church/school partnerships in areas of high numbers of immigrants and poverty pockets;
- for all, ReWild Nashville (RN) educates members about native plants and straight species necessary for regenerating biodiversity (RN is an organization that encourages the use of lawns and gardens to create naturally safe living space not only for families, but also for native plants, animals and insects.);
- for Jefferson Street Missionary Baptist Church (JSMBC), SSAC supports its work to increase the tree canopy in the inner city by connecting JSMBC to Root Nashville, a campaign to plant 500,000 trees across Davidson County by 2050. (JSMBC is also designing a tutoring program which will include outdoor education, raised-bed vegetable gardens and pollinator gardens.)

Many collaborations continue — some that parents are initiating on their own, but a sustainability officer would have encouraged and coordinated these efforts. Awareness is moving in the right direction, but can it move quickly enough? 2030 is just seven years away.

Analysis of multiple studies shows two important determinants of success: (1) a CEO who understands and is committed to sustainability — those companies and school districts successfully grew their sustainability profiles; and (2) the presence of a trained sustainability officer who reported directly to the CEO. In successful districts, sustainability became a core belief.

We cannot make the transformational change necessary to halt rising temperatures without understanding sustainability as a PRACTICE (a way of living). The SSAC’s best efforts fell short of communicating the urgency of the rapidly-closing window of opportunity to secure a livable future for our children. While not opposed to sustainability, MNPS viewed it as just ONE issue among many — a program, a curriculum, added field trips, some outdoor/nature education and conserving some things. They do not view it as a necessary cultural shift that requires buy-in for behavior change.

Westmeade Elementary was not a sustainability model because it was doing everything sustainably. It was a model because it was moving toward sustainability. A contest provides a great example of how the decade-long transition functioned, driven by the students and educators who grew and learned together. Students read *One Plastic Bag* by Miranda Paul, a district-mandated book, and then collected 1500 lbs. of plastic film and bags for a competition with seven other schools. Thrilled about keeping plastic out of the ocean, students were about to learn a difficult civics lesson.

None of the local storefronts that took plastic bags for recycling wanted 1500 pounds of the stuff.

It turned out that the cost to sort, clean, and reprocess old plastic film is 100 times higher than creating new plastic. Students were excited when they learned that Nashville’s City Council had already acted to stop single-use plastic, and they were angry when the Tennessee State Legislature put a stop to that. Students will retain these lessons because they were active participants in the real world of economics and politics.

The challenge of resilience and regeneration is that student problem solvers must not only learn about political and environmental issues, but they must be involved in solutions. Students learned civics on this journey. Instead of feeling helpless, they were empowered. Most recently, I saw evidence of that empowerment in young generations at marches on the State Capitol to end gun violence.

Sustainability offers young people a vision of a livable future in which they are engaged. We cannot accept business-as-usual, clinging to the cheap-and-easy bottom line that pays off in the moment, and then hands our children an overdrawn environmental bank account and an unlivable and unstable future.

Does your school district have a sustainability program?

Contact Karen at [kjmcinty@comcast.net](mailto:kjmcinty@comcast.net)



Eight year old Max pitching autumn leaves into the compost bin at school. Photo by Karen McIntyre.

### Our Land

by Langston Hughes

We should have a land of sun,  
Of gorgeous sun,  
And a land of fragrant water  
Where the twilight is a soft bandanna handkerchief  
Of rose and gold,  
And not this land  
Where life is cold.

We should have a land of trees,  
Of tall thick trees,  
Bowed down with chattering parrots  
Brilliant as the day,  
And not this land where birds are gray.

Ah, we should have a land of joy,  
Of love and joy and wine and song,  
And not this land where joy is wrong.

*This poem is in the public domain.*

## Dear Eartha: Advice from An Eco-Guru

Dear Eartha,

Nancy Bell, the Tennessee Sierra Club's Vice Chair, asked these questions in her article in the May/June issue of *The Tennes-Sierran* — "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?" These questions affected me profoundly. As we celebrate Juneteenth and as the Earth's temperatures reach the boiling over point, do you think there is any hope for us and our beautiful blue planet?

— Hopeless in Hohenwald

Dear Hopeless,

I, too, read Bell's piece and was captivated by her prose and her questions. Seems to me, our role is to get saddled down into the "we" aspect of that challenge. Policy changes, as far as I can tell, are the safest and surest way to "keep the living web from unraveling." Bringing our canvas or recycled plastic grocery bags to the Kroger ain't enough. We have to join forces, donate money, show up for rallies and protests, read to be informed, and stay informed. We must walk the talk, and share the facts, not the vague whatevers. How we get to the policy change point is a tangled trail each individual creatively forges.

But, as Bell's article also recommended, we have to stay hopeful and experience the natural world we want to protect. Burnout and fear threaten to shut many of us down. I know I can only take so much until I can't breathe — there is so much toxic news. So we must protect ourselves and get out into nature and be with the critters and the breezes and the beauty as much as possible. We have to make choices that sustain our sense of hopefulness and joy, for that is what will get us back onto the streets, into the board rooms, in front of the laptop, doing what we can as ordinary, thoughtful citizens of a shattered democracy to — how did Bell put it? — "contribute to the work of existence."

Reading the Earth Charter ([earthcharter.org](http://earthcharter.org)), I felt amazed and gratified. Written in 1992, so much of what the Sierra Club embraces now was proposed in that document then. As we celebrate Juneteenth and press for racial, reproductive, and environmental justice while shaking our heads in astonishment that we still have to fight for these rights, I'm uplifted by the notions of equality and fairness and dignity expressed by the writers of the Earth Charter.

In mid-coast Maine, where I live, the abundance of artists, craftspeople, lobstermen, and small farmers embody a philosophy that every person is an artist in some form or other and has something to offer society based upon their particular artistic bent. What I'm focusing on is using that artistic pocket of our creative natures to contribute what we can to keep that living web alive. As Bell recommended in her article, become involved, however you can. This will help not only the Earth's resilience, but aid in eliminating what Vivek Murthy, US Surgeon General, called an "epidemic of loneliness and isolation" in America. As any child will tell you, if asked, we get energy and enthusiasm from energetic and enthusiastic peers.

So, Hopeless, you have every right to feel hopeless, but it's a feeling and it will pass. When it does, make room for hope and then get into action. Celebrate Juneteenth and spread the message of environmental justice through concerted, connected action. That's what I'll be doing.

We're in this together, and always,  
Eartha

*This column was written by Rita Bullinger.*

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

### Spring Retreat (continued from page 5)

growth plan law for cities and towns. Also look for bills to require the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) to publish data on landslides and floods, a bill to establish an office of outdoor recreation, a billboard regulations bill, and another bill to protect people from trotlines in our rivers and streams.

For the afternoon hike, rather than having lecture presentations in the darkness of the group lodge, we took the presentations into the woods on Randy's second hike along the PawPaw Trail. Dr. Melanie Mayes explained the geology of the region at a spectacular overlook of Cane Creek Gorge. Jerry Thornton explained how the watershed of the park was saved from coal mining pollution through a provision of the Surface Mining Act of 1977. Dr. Virginia Dale explained the complexity of ecological systems and the impacts of invasive, exotic species.

Saturday night University of Tennessee Graduate Student Maddy Johnson gave an informative presentation on the Community Riparian Restoration

## Social Media Leader

Seeking a volunteer to manage social media for the Tennessee Chapter's conservation committees

Conservation committees each focus on one issue and work on it year round. A social media leader can significantly increase member engagement in conservation issues using Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube.

*Make a difference and build your resume.*

Contact Conservation Chair Bill Moll

404-401-7899 [whmoll@aol.com](mailto:whmoll@aol.com)

### Come Swim with the Fishes in Citico Creek!

On Saturday, September 2, the Harvey Broome Group will host a snorkeling adventure in Citico Creek, one of the cleanest and most biodiverse streams in Tennessee. Sometimes called "the hillbilly coral reef," Citico Creek drains the Citico Creek Wilderness and is known for its wide diversity of native fishes, freshwater clams, and myriad aquatic insects, led by Patrick Rakes (M.S., Zoology), co-founder of Conservation Fisheries, Inc., and Jerry Thornton (M.S., Aquatic Ecology). Please bring your own mask & snorkel and sneakers, sandals or booties for crawling upstream. A wet suit is helpful, but a hot day will balance the cold water. Limit 12. Must be able to swim. Contact Jerry for information and to sign up: [gatwildcat@aol.com](mailto:gatwildcat@aol.com) or 865-719-9742.

### Support Your Local Sierra Club Group: Three Easy Fundraising Hacks

The Tennessee Chapter has four Groups. All do amazing work in their area and need funds to be an effective voice for Tennessee's environment.

Your Group benefits more if you donate or join through its website:

#### GO TO YOUR GROUP'S WEBSITE:

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

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

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

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

#### Then Donate

On your Group's Website, click the green Donate button.

#### Or Join

On your Group's website, click the red Join button. It's only \$15 for new members and the Group gets a commission of \$15 back as a new member reward! So encourage people to join through their Group's webpage (rather than using the National Sierra Club website, by calling, or through the mail).

#### GIVE A GIFT MEMBERSHIP

Know someone that would enjoy being a Sierra Club member? Give a gift membership here:

<https://www.sierraclub.org/tennessee/give#membership>

Please help your Group by using these convenient methods of donating. Donations through the above links are not tax deductible as they support our effective, citizen-based advocacy and lobbying efforts.

Contact Fundraising Chair Mac Post at [mpost3116@gmail.com](mailto:mpost3116@gmail.com)

Program for Tennessee, which aims to identify stream segments that are highly susceptible to poor stream quality, where the benefits of riparian restoration efforts will be greatest. The silent auction then netted \$270 for the Chapter treasury. After local singer Jay Clark did a set of his own tunes inside the lodge, the group enjoyed a campfire where Jay led a sing-along of John Prine and Woodie Guthrie songs late into the night.

On Sunday, Randy led a hike along the Wheeler Farm Trail featuring two natural arches and a nice array of spring wildflowers. Hats off to the HBG planning committee for putting on a great retreat!

The next retreat will be in October at Pickett State Park, hosted by the Middle Tennessee Group. Y'all come!

Contact Jerry at [gatwildcat@aol.com](mailto:gatwildcat@aol.com)

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## RETREAT SCHEDULE

	LOCATION	DATES
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

### Group Program Meetings

Group	Date	Time
Cherokee (Chattanooga)	Mon 7/24, 8/28, 9/25	6:00 PM
Chickasaw (Memphis)	Thu 7/20, 8/17, 9/21	6:00 PM
Harvey Broome (Knoxville)	Tue 7/11, 8/8, 9/12	7:00 PM
Middle TN (Nashville)	Thu 7/13, 8/10, 9/14	7:00 PM

### Group Business Meetings

Group	Date	Time
Cherokee (Chattanooga)	Mon 7/3, 8/7, 9/11	7:00 PM
Chickasaw (Memphis)	Wed 7/5, 8/2, 9/6	6:30 PM
Harvey Broome (Knoxville)	Tue 7/25, 8/22, 9/26	7:00 PM
Middle TN (Nashville)	Mon 7/17, 8/21, 9/18	6:30 PM

### Regional Conservation Committee Business Meetings

Committee	Date	Time
CareNET (Rogersville)	Thu 7/27, 8/24, 9/28	6:00 PM
Clarksville	Tue 7/11, 8/8, 9/12	6:00 PM
Holston Valley	Tue 7/18, 8/15, 9/19	6:00 PM
Watauga (Mountain City)	Tue 7/11 8/8, 9/12	6:30 PM

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