Concerned Citizens Demand EPA Protect Communities from Hazardous Coal Ash

By Webb Griffith

The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) held a hearing in Knoxville on Wednesday, Oct. 27 to help decide whether to regulate coal ash as a hazardous substance. Hundreds of speakers expressed their concerns directly to EPA officials. TN Chapter Vice Conservation Chair Axel Ringe, along with members Mary Mastin, Brian Paddock and Linda Smithyman commented before the EPA panel.

Concerned citizens, activists, health and disaster experts, faith leaders and water experts held a press conference and a film screening of “Perry County,” a documentary about the town where millions of tons of ash from the Kingston spill is being dumped. The screening was followed by a “Coal Ash is Scary” rally to call on EPA to adopt strong federal protections for coal ash waste for all communities.

TVA’s Kingston Coal Ash Disaster was one of the largest industrial accidents in U.S. history. The lack of federally enforceable safeguards tragically led to a spill of more than 5.4 million cubic yards of over 1 billion gallons of toxic coal ash slurry from a pond near Knoxville in 2008. This spill destroyed 300 acres, dozens of homes, and killed fish and other wildlife while poisoning the Emory and Clinch rivers.

Lack of Regulation

There are 600 coal ash sites in 35 states across the U.S. that contain billions of gallons of fly ash and other byproducts of burning coal. None of them are federally monitored or regulated. The ash containment areas have toxic levels of arsenic, lead, mercury, and selenium leaching into the surrounding drinking water and into rivers. Currently there are no rules about lining them, securing them, or containing the toxins.

“Communities near coal ash storage sites are in sacrifice zones,” said Gloria Griffith, representing TN Sierra Water Sentinels.

She concluded her comments by stating, “Coal ash is a poison-laced concoction. I urge EPA to do the right thing by protecting people, not coal industry profits.”

Over 6,000 postcards, petitions and citizen comments advocating for the strictest regulations were hand-delivered during the hearing by Sierra Club staff and volunteers.

Appalachian Voices, Watauga Riverkeepers Donna Lisenby and Eric Chance plus TN Chapter members Dean Whitworth, Catherine Murray and Rick Foster attended the Knoxville hearing, urging EPA to protect families from toxic coal ash. Asheville-based French Broad Riverkeeper, Hartwell Carson, and Tennessee Riverkeepers Mark Martin and David Whitesides also demanded the adoption of the strictest proposed regulation.

“Before the Kingston disaster, coal ash was a sleeping, toxic giant. This epic event was the catalyst for much needed refocusing on just how dangerous this coal waste is,” said Dr. Stephen Smith, executive director of the Southern Alliance for Clean Energy. “It is unacceptable for any state, Tennessee in particular, to operate without proactive and enforceable coal ash laws – it is high time that EPA act in the best interest of protecting citizens and our natural resources.”

The Sierra Club Tennessee Chapter supports Subpart C of the proposed regulations because it names coal ash waste for what it is: hazardous.
ARTICLE SUBMISSION GUIDELINES:

Submission DEADLINE is the 1st of the month preceding the new month’s issue.

1. Email and email attached files are preferred. Send to lbaker@usw.org or via embedded text messages, or email attached files in PC-based formats. Attached files are preferred. Mac users should embed text in body of an email message.

2. Photographs should be scanned in a .jpg or .tif file format then either attached to email or mailed via US Postal Service (USPS) on a 3 ½ diskette or CD Rom. Please include a stamped, self-addressed envelope if you would like your submission returned.

3. Hard-copy handwritten or typewritten articles may be accepted; however, pre-approval from the Editor is required.

4. Any materials submitted via USPS mail cannot be returned unless a stamped, self-addressed envelope is provided.

The opinions expressed in the Tennes-Sierran are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the official views or policies of the Tennessee Chapter, or the Sierra Club.

Deadline to Submit Articles, Meeting Notices, Outings Listings: No Later Than Feb. 1, 2011

With your help, we can clean up our water.

Dear Tennes-Sierran Reader,

For the last 40 years, we’ve made great progress cleaning up our rivers, but you may have noticed a trend—rivers can be cleaner, but not clean. This past year, we’ve worked with more than 200 RiverKeeper groups to identify policies that will help us continue to clean and protect our rivers. These groups work with state and local officials, environmental organizations, and businesses to address pollution and enforce regulations. Our work includes keeping rivers clean and protecting them from pollutants in both urban and rural communities.

We’ve partnered with the EPA to help the nation’s rivers meet the Clean Water Act’s mandate to be fishable, swimmable, and drinkable. We’ve also worked to ensure that people have access to clean drinking water.

The Tennes-Sierran is the bi-monthly newsletter of the Tennessee Chapter of the Sierra Club.

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Chair: Gloria Griffin (423) 727-4797
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Secretary: Peggy Evans
Conservation: Easton Evans
Outings: Vacant

National Sierra Staff in Tennessee:
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Environmental Justice Program (901) 324-7757
rita.harris@sierraclub.org
Bill McCabe, Central Appalachian EJ Organizer
Office: 423-943-3220 x 423-943-3220 (call first)

Please notify the Editor when changes are needed

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The Tennes-Sierran
Teenagers Discover Wildlife at Inner City Outing to Long Hunter State Park

By Craig Jervis, Inner City Outings Nashville

7/28/10 Inner City Outing (ICO) to Long Hunter State Park
Couchville Lake Trail, 2 miles paved trail Duration—about 2 1/4 hrs
ICO Leaders- Joy Mayfield, Craig Jervis
ICO Assistant Leader- Suzanne Petrey

We enjoyed a very successful outing thanks to the organization by Joy and Suzanne, the competence and leadership of Delennio Bond and Tim from The Boys and Girls Club, and the enthusiastic participation of fourteen 13-14 year olds.

Dividing into two groups, Joy quickly briefing me on information gleaned from the park ranger, we set off in opposite directions around the lake. We had been told to look for a White-Tailed deer with three fawns and it wasn’t long before we came upon this family group.

Quite accustomed to the relative safety of life in a state park, the deer continued to graze calmly as we observed from a few feet away. Several more deer were spotted before our rendezvous with the other group, who reported sightings of ten deer, a Green Heron and a Great Blue Heron among their observations.

We found evidence along the way that more than deer inhabited these woods. The Karst topography of the area includes many small depressions and sinkholes where water pools in small “ponds.” Many fish were seen living in these pools, and muddy shorelines displayed tracks of deer and raccoon.

Isolated calls of Bullfrogs, Green frogs, and Cricket frogs alerted us to their presence, even though we evaded our attempts to locate them. Remains of an Eastern Box Turtle in addition to crabfish claws, caterpillar nests, deer tracks, iridescent beetles and giant, bright red solitary ants were all discoveries made by my group of intrepid explorers. But the highlights for me were the lizards.

The best set of eyes in our group belonged to Quintavius. Early in the walk, he spotted a Five-lined Skink (Eumeces laticeps) with a bright blue tail. We were able to coax it into a spot on a tree trunk where we could all see it, and we talked about its shed-a-tail escape tactic. We were determined, he and I, to find another lizard. (My favorite memories as a 13-year-old involve hunting for snakes, lizards and frogs.) As each likely looking location proved “lizard-less,” our disappointment grew. Finally our efforts were rewarded by a Fence Lizard (Sceloporus undulatus). Its escape tactic of always staying on the opposite side of the tree required the able assistance of Quintavius to restrain the lizard briefly for the group to see. I had never before been able to capture a Fence Lizard by hand. I believe it was only his determination that allowed success.

I look forward to many more outings with the Boys and Girls Club. Their preparation and management of the group allowed us all to enjoy being in the woods.

Sierra Club Joins Campaign to Save Cummins Falls

By Mary Mastin

The Sierra Club Tennessee Chapter Executive Committee at the October Chapter meeting accepted the challenge to work with the Tennessee Parks and Greenways Foundation (TPGF) in its campaign to Save Cummins Falls. Cummins Falls is the largest privately owned waterfall in Tennessee. At 75-feet-high, this waterfall is the eighth largest waterfall in Tennessee in magnitude. It is located in Jackson County close to the Putnam County line. Its formation on the Eastern Highland Rim creates unique, dramatic topography and rare ecosystems where wildlife thrives in this wet, lush, forested gorge.

Cummins Falls is the most significant geological and scenic feature located on the Blackburn Fork State Scenic River. The Tennessee Rivers Assessment Project designated Blackburn Fork with its highest rating of “1” for natural and scenic qualities. Cummins Falls is designated by the National Park Service as outstanding for scenic, recreational, geological and wildlife values.

The northeast side of Blackburn Fork River includes Cummins Falls and encompasses 186 acres that was sold at public auction in May. At the urging of the TPGF board of directors and volunteers, a Cookeville resident, Dr. Glenn Hall, purchased the property and generously agreed to give the TPGF a one (1) year option to purchase in order to raise one million dollars needed to buy the land. The option expires June 16, 2011.

The Chapter Ex-Com voted to match dollar-for-dollar donations by Sierra members across the state until we arrive at the amount to fund one acre at the cost of $5,686. The Ex-Com also voted to approve application to the Sierra Club Foundation to open a special project account to help in the campaign to save Cummins Falls.

The goals for the campaign over the next three years are to acquire the 186 acres on the north side of the Falls by raising the one million dollars on the TNGF option, then to acquire the acres on the south side of the Falls and to acquire state park or state natural area designation by the governor and his Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) Commissioner.

We are circulating a petition asking the governor’s support and also are soliciting individual letters of support to the governor from citizens across the state.

As a part of the campaign, we will seek the support of local government officials and business leaders in the three-county area closest to Cummins Falls (Jackson, Putnam and Overton Counties). The TPGF has produced a PowerPoint presentation featuring the many outstanding natural areas and recreational and historic sites in the three counties. We will promote sustainable tourism as an economy builder which makes more sense for the Upper Cumberland area than further development, industrialization and extraction of resources.

The TPGF is also sponsoring outings at Cummins Falls each first Saturday of the month and will work with other groups to arrange similar outings. This would be a great way for Sierra outings leaders to engage members in outings and in the larger conservation goals of the Save Cummins Falls campaign.

We will be asking Tennessee Sierra Group program chairs to schedule a program on the Cummins Falls project, emphasizing the importance of the ecology and recreational opportunities of the Upper Cumberland area and promoting sustainable tourism.

To make a tax-deductible donation to the Cummins Falls campaign—which will be matched by the Tennessee Chapter—send a check made out to the Sierra Club Foundation with a note in the memo line “TN Chapter Save Cummins Falls Campaign” to:

Scott Kramer
TN Chapter Sierra Club Treasurer
Attn: Save Cummins Falls Campaign
5612 Alabama Ave., Chattanooga, TN 37409

Kramer will mail the check to the Sierra Club Foundation, 85 Second Street, Ste. 750, San Francisco, CA 94105
FAIR, Rolling Stone, Wired, New York, In Style, Men’s Journal or The Washington Post. She is the recipient of the June Bagley Leham Award for excellence in environmental journalism and has published interviews with public figures ranging from Barack Obama and Al Gore to John McCain and Rupert Murdoch. Little has appeared on MSNBC, Fox News, National Public Radio, and has delivered keynote speeches and keynotes for wide-ranging audiences. Little’s most recent book is Power Trip, in which she maps out the history and future of America’s energy system, in a big-picture, solutions-oriented adventure story. She went on a cross-country “power trip” to understand America’s energy crisis and to describe the most extreme and exciting frontiers of our energy landscape. Energy is everything while our energy addiction poses political and environmental dangers to the U.S. and to the world. She also explores the clean-energy solutions that can solve these problems.

Little will offer a book signing following the program. Don’t miss the special opportunity to hear this dynamic speaker and author. Free and open to the public.

STRATEGY MEETING: January 17 and February 21, 6:30 p.m. at the United Steelworkers Union Building, 3340 Perimeter Hill Drive, Nashville, Tennessee 37211. This is the annual meeting to discuss and set the agenda for the coming year. All members are invited to attend and participate in this conservation and administrative meeting to get the news on what’s happening in our Middle Tennessee Group. This meeting is open to the public. For more information or to place items on the agenda, contact Elizabeth Gazaway-Tallman at 423-619-0379.

January 26, 7:00 pm, at GreenSpaces, 63 E. Main Street, which is a nondescript office building, just the one on the left in the first block off Market Street. It is kiddy-corner from the Fire Department. Look for the Sierra Club banner!

CHICKASAW GROUP (Memphis)

(Sign up for our monthly email events list on the calendar page http://www.tennessee.sierragroup.org/chickasaw/)

Thursday, January 6, 5:30 pm to 7:00 pm Sierra Club Chickasaw Group Monthly First Thursday Gathering

Otherside, 641 S. Cooper, Memphis, TN

Sierra Club members, activists and friends meet in a casual setting to talk about issues and interests. For more information, contact Emily Schwimmer at eschwimm@gmail.com or Deborah Mays at (901) 722-4111.

Monday, January 10, 6:30 pm Sierra Club Chickasaw Group Strategy Meeting Panera Bread, 4530 Poplar Avenue, Suite 101, Memphis, TN

The Executive Committee meets every month. This is a business meeting but members are welcome to attend. For more information or to place an item on the agenda, contact Nancy Brannon at nthechair@gmail.com or (901) 829-4360. Agenda items must be submitted at least 3 days before the meeting. Please note that this meeting is for Chickasaw Group members only.

February 28, 7 pm, at GreenSpaces, 63 E. Main Street, which is a nondescript storefront building, the last one on the left in the first block off Market Street. It is kiddy-corner from the Fire Department. Look for the Sierra Club banner!
All participants in Sierra Club outings are required to sign a standard liability waiver. If you would like to read a copy of the waiver before you participate, please refer to: http://www.sierraclub.org/tnc/chapter/forms/SignlnWaiverPDF, or call 415-977-5630 for a printed version. Transportation to the outing, including carpooling, ride-sharing or anything similar, is strictly a private arrangement among the participants. Participants assume the risk associated with this travel.

**MEETINGS (continued from page 4)**

**HARVEY BROOME GROUP (Knoxville)**

Jan 1, 2011 (Sat). Day hike, University of Tennessee Arboretum in Oak Ridge. New Year’s Day very easy-paced hike less than 4 miles. This is a natural area well-marked with names of trees and variety of holly and dogwood and other vegetation so the trek will be highly educational. We will meet at 10 AM so you can start your hike to enjoy lunch at 12 Noon. Drive 2-3 miles each way. Please register with Linda Smithyman at lsmithymanhb@ymail.com or call at 335-3559.

Jan 15, 2011 (Sat). Day hike, Ramsay Cascade in GSMNP. If we’re lucky, there will be some ice formations around the Falls, making for great viewing and photo opportunities. Hikers should be well prepared for cold weather. If the Greenbrier access road is closed due to ice, we’ll consider Rainbow Falls as a backup. Distance, 4 miles. Drive: 65 miles each way. Register with Ron Shrieves at 922-3518 or ronaldshrьеvs@comcast.net (email preferred).

Jan 29-30, 2011 (Sat-Sun). Winter Breakout, Gabes Mountain Trail, GSMNP. We’ll start our hike from the Cosby entrance area, take the Gabes Mountain trail to campsite 34, stopping to view Hernwallow Falls along the way. On Sunday, we’ll take the Gabes Mountain trail to its junction with the Maddron Bald trailhead, drop our packs for a side trip to the Albright Cove loop, then back down the Maddron Bald trail to pick up our packs for the exit at the Maddron Bald trailhead. A short car shuttle is required for this trip. Distance is about 4.8 miles for the first day and 7.2 on the second day. This trip provides an opportunity to learn more about doing hikes with packs. Participants are responsible for the hike leader. Please speak with the hike leader if you have not previously backpacked in the winter. Rated moderate to difficult due to possibleity of adverse weather. Drive: 65 miles each way. Pre-register with Ron Shrieves at 922-3518 or ronaldshrьеvs@comcast.net (email preferred).

**MIDDLE TENNESSEE GROUP (Nashville)**

No outings were given to the Tennes-Sierran. **CHEROKEE GROUP**

Jeremy Tallman-Gazaway, outings chair for the Cherokee Sierra Group (Chattanooga), leads outings and hikes at least once or two weekends per month, and serves as point-man for outings information for our Group. Our activities are always open to the public and to members of the Club from across the state! We explore interesting and unique parts of Tennessee and gain an appreciation of how wonderful (and sometimes threatened) our wonderful area is, while learning the skills of a premier wilderness and near-wilderness experience. It is important to realize that while all trips are guided by a leader, it is ultimately the responsibility of the individual to operate in a safe manner. To this end, the following is a list of essential items that should be considered according to the particular type of outing:

1. Adequate map
2. Compass
3. Rain gear
4. Flashlight
5. Extra food, water
6. Tent
7. Heavy clothing (it is a good idea to always have a wool hat)
8. Matches
9. Skewer
10. The tenth essential: You decide what is the most important thing to bring!

**MEETINGS (continued from page 4)**

Speakers Mary Elizabeth Phillips and Judith Rutschman will discuss the environmental agenda, contact the group chair (to be determined in January). Agenda items must be submitted at least 3 days (preferably 5) before the meeting.

"Nature of Conservation" Sierra Club Chickasaw Group Cable TV Show on WYPL-TV 18 (Comcast):

Days and times vary – see http://www.memphis communitytv.org/ or call 901-327-3527 for the on-screen guide) for the latest scheduled topic. Topic changes every month. For more information, or if anyone has an idea for a future program, contact Judith Rutschman at jrutschman@gmail.com or (901) 767-5916.

Sierra Club Chickasaw Group is now on Facebook: http://www.facebook.com/SierraClubChickasawGroup/ This is a forum for public discussion, so please feel free to post comments, raise issues, and express environmental concerns.

**WATAUGA GROUP (Northeastern TN)**

**PROGRAM MEETINGS:** Every second Tuesday at 7 p.m. Please contact Gloria Griffith at gla4797@emailink.net or 423-727-4797 for more information.

**Sierra Club outnings offer a variety of public adventures and near-wilderness experiences. It is important to realize that while all trips are guided by a leader, it is ultimately the responsibility of the individual to operate in a safe manner. To this end, the following is a list of essential items that should be considered according to the particular type of outing:**

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**Sierra Club from across the state! We explore interesting and unique parts of Tennessee and gain an appreciation of how wonderful (and sometimes threatened) our wonderful area is, while learning the skills of a premier wilderness and near-wilderness experience.**

Sierra Club Chickasaw Group Monthly First Thursday Gathering Otherlands, 641 S. Cooper, Memphis, TN

Sierra Club members, activists and friends meet in a casual setting to talk about issues and interests. For more information, contact Emily Schwimmer at eschwimmerm@gmail.com or Donald Mays at (901) 722-4111.

Monday, February 14, 6:30 pm

Sierra Club Chickasaw Group Strategy Meeting Pennington Braid, 4530 Poplar Avenue, Suite 101, Memphis, TN

The Executive Committee meets on the second Monday of every month. This is a business meeting but members are welcome to attend. For more information or to place items on the agenda, contact the group chair (to be determined in January). Agenda items must be submitted at least 3 days (preferably 5) before the meeting.

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Ten Essentials for Hiking

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Overton Park Legacy
Memphis Historic “Old Forest” Needs Permanent Protection

By Naomi Van Tol

Nearly 40 years ago, the original Citizens to Preserve Overton Park (CPOP) won a U.S. Supreme Court ruling that blocked the extension of Interstate 40 through Overton Park and a large swath of Midtown. Our community owes a great debt to this small group of citizens who fought so doggedly to protect our park and our neighborhoods. But are we honoring their legacy?

It’s easy to assume that Overton Park is safe from harm. There are even a few laws to protect our city parks, like Section 12-84-2 of the Memphis Code of Ordinances: “It is unlawful for any person to cut, break or in any way injure or deface any tree, plant, or grass, or pick any flowers, leaves or nuts, wild or cultivated,” in the park.

And yet, the Memphis Zoo clear-cut four acres of Overton Park’s old-growth forest in early 2008 because our city’s Park Services division quietly approved it. When were citizens told about this plan to destroy publicly owned parkland? We had to figure it out for ourselves, early one Saturday morning, when chain saws and bulldozers arrived to churn a priceless ecosystem into mud.

Last year, a city-funded botanical study found a rich array of more than 330 plant species in Overton Park and defined the forest as “an extremely rare virgin or old-growth forest” that almost certainly began growing when the last ice age retreated 10,000 to 12,000 years ago.

That study concluded: “Overton Park’s forest is a unique resource which cannot be replaced. It is invaluable to the city and to the region as an outstanding example of old-growth forest. Because it is within an urban setting, it is even more exceptional. Everything possible should be done to assure that it is protected in perpetuity.”

Despite this strong recommendation, our exceptional forest still lacks any legal protection. Memphians know this forest as the “Old Forest” because it has always been there for us — a beautiful remnant of the big woods that once covered the fourth Chickasaw Bluff — and it’s time we stepped up to protect it.

Zoo expansion is just one threat to Overton Park’s forest and other public spaces. Too often, our civic leaders treat parkland as if it’s disposable. Memphis lags far behind our peer cities in park spending per capita and park acreage per capita, according to the Trust for Public Land. As recently as 2007, Mayor Willie Herenton and several city council members proposed selling off more than 20 city-owned parks.

In the past two years, the city’s engineering staff has proposed two different ways to repurpose Overton Park’s Greensward for stormwater detention. Last year, Mayor A C Wharton and several city council members proposed closing our city’s oldest golf course because it’s not a money-maker. The Memphis Zoo turns half of the Greensward into a private parking lot about 20 times a year.

Right now, the city is reviewing plans to convert part of the southeastern corner of Overton Park into an overflow parking lot for the Memphis Zoo. This space is occupied by city facilities — greenhouses, machine shops, storage buildings, offices, and a fuel station — that would need to be torn down and rebuilt elsewhere at great expense.

Maybe it’s a good idea to relocate these facilities and redeem the area as free public parkland. But does it make sense to spend our tax dollars to convert this land to a parking lot? Will citizens have any part in this decision?

Going by the city’s track record, we’re likely to find out when the bulldozers arrive.

This woeful track record is why we are asking the city of Memphis to endorse the legislative designation of the Old Forest State Natural Area, which would protect Overton Park’s 150-acre forest for citizens to enjoy forever. We also support a strong conservation easement to protect the cultural and historical integrity of all 342 acres of Overton Park. And we want all of this to happen with plenty of public input, communication, and transparency.

We are joined in this effort by Clean Memphis, Greater Memphis Greenline, Livable Memphis, Memphis Heritage, Mid-South Peace & Justice Center, Project Green Fork, Sierra Club, Skatelife Memphis, and many individual citizens.

We hope you’ll join us, too.

Naomi Van Tol is president of Citizens to Preserve Overton Park. For more information, visit overtonparkforever.org.

Fourth Annual Sustainable Tennessee Conference Held

By John McFadden and Gretchen Hagle

The fourth annual Summit for a Sustainable Tennessee presented by Tennessee Environmental Council took place November 5-6 at the Cumberland University in Lebanon. Citizens, conservation leaders, elected officials, businesses and students came together to establish and implement the 2011 Sustainable Tennessee policy and agenda.

“Tennessee’s natural resources form the backbone of our economy, quality of life and our Tennessee heritage,” said Sustainable Tennessee Executive Director John McFadden. “Sustainability means utilizing today’s natural resources in a manner that allows current and future generations to enjoy the same quality of life many of us currently enjoy.”

The top five priorities included:

1. Help TN develop a new energy economy promoting green jobs and economic development.
2. Create new jobs by capturing, marketing and re-manufacturing the raw materials associated with TN’s solid waste stream.
3. Work to engage and empower youth (ages 18-30) around economic and environmental actions.
4. Promote urban land use planning that conserves and restores green space and promotes the inherent benefits of urban forest canopy.
5. Continue work begun in the early stages of Sustainable TN to stop Tennessee from becoming the nuclear and radioactive waste dumping grounds of the U.S.

Additionally, we utilized the day to build relationships with our representatives and senators in an ongoing effort to educate them on the many issues we face including adequate clean drinking water supplies, protecting ridge tops, waste reduction, recycling, a bottle bill, and a host of other issues that affect the very heart of Tennessee’s economy, communities and quality of life.

Plans were made for the 2011 legislative year including a January press conference to release Tennessee’s 2011 Sustainability Agenda and a Conservation Education Day (CED) on the Hill tentatively scheduled for February 22, where many people from across the state will take the day to educate our state legislators. All Tennesseans are invited to read the agenda and sign on to show their support at www.sustainabletn.org. They may also attend Sustainable Tennessee events throughout the year and join the Sustainable TN email list to receive action alerts and other important updates: www.tectn.org.

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Some of the Tennessee chapter members who attended the Summit with TEC Bd. Chair Don Safer in center. Left to right: Marge Davis, Cliff Cockerham, Mr. Organic, Don Richardson, David Bordenkircher, Steve Sandheim, TEC Ex. Dir. John McFadden, Keven Roulton, Gary Bowers, Jim Johnson and Bill Reynolds. Photo by: Gretchen Hagle.
The 2010 midterm elections resulted in something of a seismic shift in Tennessee politics. Knoxville mayor, Republican Bill Haslam, was elected governor by a wide margin. He will be working with an overwhelmingly Republican General Assembly. The last time Tennessee had a majority Republican House and Senate was 1869!

While the governor’s race was the most widely publicized, the biggest surprise and shift in power occurred in the State House of Representatives, where House Republicans won 14 previously Democratic seats. No Democrat won a seat previously held by a Republican. This unprecedented increase will result in a margin of 64 Republicans, 34 Democrats and one Independent when the General Assembly returns January 11.

Democratic House seats from this past session that will be filled by Republicans include seats formerly held by retiring members John Litz and Ben West. Incumbent Democrats who lost include: Judy Barker, Stratton Bone, Butch Borchert, Ty Cobb, Kent Coleman, Jim Hacks, Dennis Ferguson, Henry Fincher, George Fraley, Mark Maddox, Les Winningham and Eddie Yokley. Environmental causes lost include: Judy Barker, Stratton Bone, Butch Litz and Ben West. Incumbent Democrats who lost include: Judy Barker, Stratton Bone, Butch Litz and Ben West. Incumbent Democrats who lost include: Judy Barker, Stratton Bone, Butch Litz and Ben West. Incumbent Democrats who lost include: Judy Barker, Stratton Bone, Butch Litz and Ben West. Incumbent Democrats who lost include: Judy Barker, Stratton Bone, Butch Litz and Ben West. Incumbent Democrats who lost include: Judy Barker, Stratton Bone, Butch Litz and Ben West.

The Republican margin in the State Senate will be 20-13 after Democratic incumbent Doug Jackson’s surprising loss to Republican Jim Summerville. Jackson’s defeat is a blow to the environmental community. He has consistently advocated for environmental protection, including many years of work on such issues as the bottle bill and mountaintop removal mining. The make-up and tenor of the Senate – both in regard to its leadership and the Senate Environment Committee’s stance on environmental issues – should reflect the anti-regulatory protection approach we saw in the recent past.

In the House, there will be a new Speaker, almost certainly longtime Nashville legislator Beth Harwell, who has a reasonably good record on environment and conservation issues. The House Conservation & Environment Committee will be significantly different. Former House Environment Chair Joe McCord did not run for re-election; Mike Bell was elected to the Senate and two members, Butch Borchert and George Fraley, did not win re-election.

Committee appointments are made by the House Speaker based on member requests and the Speaker’s desires. There will be 23 new House members and only one of them will be a Democrat. While the Speaker’s assignments to the Conservation committee may determine much of what will happen with environmental legislation, there were recurring themes in many campaigns that give a hint of what’s to come. The predominant refrain was that state government needs to stay out of the way and with the clear understanding that:

“We also have a duty to protect our environment for our generation and for the generations to come.”

The incoming governor and legislators present opportunities to form new relationships and develop new environmental champions. We look forward to working with the expanding community of environmental advocates in the coming session to accomplish the hard but vital task of educating legislators on the importance of sound environmental policies and adequate safeguards of land, water and air, as well as progress on sustainability generally.

Fourth Annual Sustainable Tennessee Conference Held

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Several successes were reported including working with Forever Green Tennessee in their effort to restore the real estate transfer fund in the 2010 state budget. This victory restored more than $16 million for land conservation including, State Parks Fund: $3.1 million; Local Parks Fund: $3.7 million; Wetlands Fund: $6.5 million; and Agricultural Fund: $3.2 million.

Amanda Little, author of the book Power Trip, was among the featured speakers at this year’s summit. She talked about her book in which she maps out the history and future of America’s energy addiction in a big-picture, solutions-oriented adventure story.

Dr. Cliff Ricketts, professor of agricultural education at MTSU, was also a featured speaker. Ricketts is a renowned alternative fuels specialist, and he holds the land speed record for hydrogen powered and soy powered vehicles at the Bonneville Salt Flats race.

Stephanie Cox, of Ecototality & the EV Project, discussed “The New Paradigm of Electric Vehicle Charging in Tennessee.” Reggie Miller, TN campus coordinator for Southern Alliance for Clean Energy, led a special session to engage students and youth professionals. Marvin Butler, Mr. Organic, entertained the crowd with engaging and inspiring songs about sustainability.

Your Tennessee Sierra Chapter actively participated. Among those who contributed were Steven Sondheim, Don Richardson, Keven Routon and Jim Johnson of Memphis; Gary Bowers, David Bordenkircher, and Cliff Cockerham of Nashville; and Brian Paddock and Mary Mastin of Cookeville.

The summit also welcomed students and teachers from Whites Creek High School, University of Tennessee at Martin, and Tennessee Tech University. A copy of the 2011 Sustainable Tennessee Agenda is online at www.SustainableTN.org along with information about summit speakers, registration, sponsorship, and green exhibitors.

The summit is a project of Tennessee Environmental Council which educates and advocates for the conservation and improvement of Tennessee’s environment, communities and public health. To get involved or for more information contact Gretchen Hagle or John McFadden at www.tectn.org

Deadline to Submit Articles, Meeting Notices, Outings Listings:

No Later Than Feb. 1, 2011

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A highlight of the summit was attendance of Sierra member Cliff Cockerham’s Whites Creek high school students pictured here with some of the Sierra Club and other attendees at the Saturday morning session. Photo by Gretchen Hagle.
Scholarships Available for Tennessee Chapter Sierra Club Meetings

In order to make our statewide Chapter meetings accessible for all, especially families, the Chapter has made several changes during the last year to our Chapter Meeting fees.

The basic fee for 2 nights lodging in a Group Lodge, breakfast and dinner Saturday and Sunday is $40. However, children 15 years and younger are free. Also, first time attendees are 1/2 off - only $20!

To apply for a scholarship, make your need known by contacting our Chapter Treasurer, Scott Krumen, at 423-598-9516 or e-mail him at chicapsclubres@gmail.com – up to 5 scholarships are available for each Chapter meeting.

Our quarterly meetings are a great way to get to know folks across the state with the same perspective, to learn the latest on conservation issues in Tennessee, and to explore and enjoy different sections of our state’s parks and forests.

Hosted in turn by our local Groups, and generally held in or near great parks, forests or natural areas, our meetings include hikes and informative speakers. For example, we were treated to an up-close-and-personal visit with the Smokies superintendent last spring and star gazing on top of a bald at the summer meeting!

Put these dates on your calendar, and resolve to add new adventures, fun and new friends to 2011:

Winter: January 28-30, 2011 Cedars of Lebanon State Park
Spring: April 15-17, 2011 Natchez Trace State Park
Summer: July 8-10, 2011 Sterchi Lodge, Max Patch (Cherokee Nat. Forest)
Fall: October 21-23, 2011 Pickett State Park

For more information on the winter meeting, contact Watauga Group Chair Gloria Griffith at gl4797@embarqmail.com.