Tennessee Citizens FOR Wilderness Planning
Taking Care of Wild Places

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TCWP Newsletter



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Honoring Jean Bangham: A Legacy of Conservation and Commitment





Tennessee Citizens for Wilderness Planning (TCWP) mourns the passing of Jean Bangham, one of our founding members, who passed away on February 15th. Jean was not only a cornerstone of TCWP's formation but remained an active and dedicated volunteer throughout her life. Her unwavering commitment to protecting Tennessee's wild places serves as an enduring inspiration to us all.

Jean's journey with TCWP began in 1966, when she played a pivotal role in two of Tennessee's earliest and most significant conservation battles—the successful efforts to stop both the North Shore Road through the Great Smoky Mountains and a dam on the Obed River. At TCWP's first meeting, Jean became its first Treasurer, immediately instilling a sense of purpose by collecting $1.00 from each attendee to make them charter members. That small but determined group of 30 people went on to hike 17 miles through the Smokies in protest of the proposed road, and Jean stood alongside them in Washington, D.C., passionately arguing that cutting a road through the park would be like carving up the Mona Lisa. When the road was never built, Jean retraced those same 17 miles 20 years later in celebration—a testament to her dedication and perseverance.

Jean's love for nature began early, shaped by summers spent in the field with her biologist father. After studying biology herself, she moved to Tennessee to work at Oak Ridge National Laboratory, where she spent 43 years in the "mouse house." Despite the demands of her career, she never wavered in her commitment to conservation, forming close friendships with fellow activists, Bill and Liane Russell, as they worked together to protect Tennessee's wild places.

Over the decades, Jean remained a steadfast force in TCWP. Whether assembling newsletters, wielding her trusty loppers to remove invasive plants at our stewardship areas, or joining educational hikes, she was always present, always engaged, and always leading by example.



Support TCWP

by donating, joining, or renewing your membership at TCWP.org

TCWP Board Meeting

The Officers and Directors of Tennessee Citizens for Wilderness Planning meet the third Thursday of each month.

Members are welcome to call, email, or attend a board meeting to raise issues that TCWP needs to address. We welcome your input.

She embodied the spirit of grassroots activism, demonstrating that a small group of committed individuals can make a lasting impact—even before environmental laws like the Environmental Protection Act existed.

In recognition of her extraordinary contributions, TCWP proudly named Jean as the first recipient of the **TCWP Founder's Award,** an honor that will be given annually to someone whose dedication reflects the values upon which TCWP was built.

Jean Bangham's life reminds us that conservation is not just about policies and protests—it is about passion, persistence, and the willingness to take action. She showed us the power of a single voice, the strength of a collective effort, and the lasting impact of a life dedicated to protecting the natural world. Thank you, Jean, for your vision, leadership, and unwavering spirit. Your legacy will continue to inspire us for generations to come.

Jean's obituary beautifully honors her remarkable life and can be found here: Jean W. Bangham Obituary - The Oak Ridger

INSIDE TCWP

1. TCWP Welcomes Two New Board Members

We are excited to welcome **Erin Cunningham** and **Jacob King** to the TCWP Board of Directors!

Erin is a geophysicist at Oak Ridge National Laboratory with a passion for protecting natural lands and ensuring access to the outdoors for future generations. She brings experience in community engagement, event planning, and science education.

Jacob is an associate attorney at Young, Williams & Theiss specializing in real estate and natural resource law. He has significant experience in conservation easements and title search work. He has long admired TCWP's work and is committed to preserving Tennessee's natural beauty.

2. Defending Wild Places: Challenges at Every Level

TCWP is tracking critical conservation issues at the **federal, state, and local levels.** Nationally, severe staff reductions in our parks and forests threaten public lands and recreational access. In Tennessee, proposed legislation endangers wetlands and scenic rivers. Locally, Oak Ridge's rapid nuclear energy expansion necessitates public awareness and careful oversight. As these challenges unfold, TCWP is working to inform, engage, and advocate for responsible environmental stewardship.

a. Staff Reductions at National Parks and National Forests – Can you help?

By Mark Bevelhimer

No doubt, everyone is aware of the widespread and indiscriminate reductions in staff at most National Park Service and US Forest Service entities. Estimates from NPR of the number of NPS rangers fired on Feb. 14 were around 1,000. Later it was announced that the NPS will be allowed to hire a near normal number of seasonal workers for the summer tourist season. The US Department of Agriculture confirmed that nearly 2,000 USFS employees were let go, although the union that represents FS workers says the number is closer to 3,400. It has been hard to keep up with actual numbers and program impacts as most departments have not been reporting numbers and it seems that every day there's a new judge's ruling or injunction that gives hope that some federal workers might get their jobs back.

It has been reported that the Smoky Mountain NPS lost 12 rangers (see https://www.outsideonline.com/outdoor-adventure/hiking-and-backpacking/national-park-service-firing-numbers/). A call to park superintendent Niki Nicholas of the Obed Wild & Scenic River, Big South Fork NRRA, and the Manhattan Project National Historical Park revealed that they have lost rangers as well.

When asked if there was anything that TCWP membership could do to help, Superintendent Nicholas said that the parks **always** need volunteers to help at many outdoor activities and in the visitor centers. From the park's website: "Volunteers will be trained to staff the information desk, operate a cash register for the park bookstore, provide information and orientation in the visitor center and historic grounds, rove the trails and various other park locations. Volunteers may also assist with special events. As time allows work may include special interpretive projects, talks or demonstrations, and library work." The commitment includes at least 6 hours of work per week. For info on how to apply go to https://www.nps.gov/obed/getinvolved/volunteer.htm

Of course, writing to or calling your Congressional Representative and Senators is also very important! Directions and tips for contacting your elected representatives can be found at https://tcwp.org/political-guide/

b. Nancy Goes to Nashville: Speaking Up for Tennessee's Wild Places

by Nancy Manning

As part of TCWP's growing advocacy efforts, we've officially registered as lobbyists, strengthening our voice at the state level. This commitment was on full display when I joined 120 passionate conservationists in Nashville for **Conservation Day on the Hill.**

My day began with meetings with my representatives, Senator Becky Massey and Representative David Wright, both of whom were gracious with their time. Senator Massey, a birder herself, understood the importance of protecting wetlands, and Representative Wright was attentive to our concerns. Later, I met with Representative Rick Scarbrough, who asked some thoughtful questions. I also had the chance to join other conservationists in a meeting with Representative Gloria Johnson, who was fully supportive of our efforts and emphasized the importance of direct outreach—encouraging residents near Class II Scenic Rivers to call their legislators.

The day was an inspiring collaboration with incredible partners from Tennessee Environmental Council, Sierra Club, Harpeth Conservancy, and Tennessee Interfaith Power & Light. The organizers provided valuable training, paired us with others so no one had to meet with legislators alone, and even hosted a mini film festival. A catered lunch gave us time to connect, and I walked away with new friends, new strategies, and renewed determination to fight for Tennessee's wild lands and waters.

Learn more and take action at the blog links below.

c. TCWP BLOG URGES ACTION



Protect Tennessee's Wetlands – Take Action Today
Tennessee's wetlands are vital for clean drinking water, flood protection, and wildlife habitat. Yet, proposed legislation (HB0541/SB0670) would strip protections from 300,000–450,000 acres of wetlands, leaving them vulnerable to destruction.

A sample letter is provided to urge legislators to oppose this bill. **Read more and ACT NOW:** https://tcwp.org/28510-2/

Protect Tennessee's Scenic Rivers – Oppose HB0895/SB0725
Tennessee's Scenic Rivers provide clean water, vital wildlife habitat, and outdoor recreation. HB0895/SB0725 threatens these waterways by removing the two-mile buffer between Class II Scenic Rivers and landfills, increasing the risk of pollution and habitat destruction.

A sample letter is provided to urge legislators to oppose this bill. **Read more and ACT NOW:** https://tcwp.org/protect-tennessees-scenic-rivers/

Protect Oak Ridge Wetlands at Carbon Rivers Research & Development Site
A proposed rezoning in Oak Ridge threatens wetlands at the former S-50 site, now owned by Carbon Rivers for green energy research. While the company supports wetland preservation, the site may be rezoned for industrial use. Public opposition has been strong, but action is needed to ensure protection.

Urge city officials to zone for wetland preservation! **Read more and ACT NOW:** https://tcwp.org/concern-for-wetland-protection-at-carbon-rivers-research-development-site-in-oak-ridge/

d. TCWP Joins SELC in Opposing Harmful "Sound Science" Bill

Tennessee Citizens for Wilderness Planning (TCWP) has joined the Southern Environmental Law Center (SELC) and other organizations in signing a letter opposing Tennessee's proposed "Sound Science in Regulations Act" (HB0896/SB0880). While the bill claims to ensure regulatory decisions are based on the "best available science," its restrictions would actually hinder the state's ability to implement critical protections against hazardous substances like PFAS, also known as "forever chemicals." The bill would prevent state agencies from enacting safeguards unless they meet an overly burdensome standard of proof—effectively delaying action until harm has already occurred. Additionally, it would prohibit agencies from using research published in many of the world's most respected scientific journals, undermining the ability of regulators to rely on credible, peer-reviewed studies.

TCWP and its partners are deeply concerned that this legislation would severely weaken Tennessee's ability to respond to environmental and public health threats. By restricting the types of scientific evidence that can be used in decision-making, the bill could leave Tennesseans vulnerable to pollution and hazardous chemicals for years to come. The letter TCWP signed urges lawmakers to reject this dangerous proposal and instead support policies that allow state agencies to act proactively in protecting our communities and natural resources. We will continue to advocate for science-based, common-sense protections that safeguard the health of both people and the environment.

e. Oak Ridge: Nuclear Energy: Can we talk?

In several past issues, and below in this newsletter, we have shared some of the nuclear energy developments occurring in Oak Ridge. Some of these developments sound hopeful for a cleaner, safer form of energy. However, concerns have been raised about zoning, radioactive waste, worker safety and national security. TCWP would like to learn more about the industry and any potential concerns that we should be monitoring.



We are asking for your help. If you have any education and / or experience or interest in nuclear fuel fabrication, radioactive waste, zoning codes such as the North American Code for Inorganic Chemicals, or any education, training, experience in the nuclear industry field, can you help?

We'd like to set up a zoom meeting to establish some steps to take towards learning, then educating, and then monitoring the nuclear energy developments in Oak Ridge.

If you can help, please email nancymanning@tcwp.org.

3. Rails to Trails: Pausing at the Junction

The Rail Trail project has reached a temporary pause as we await approval from the Surface Transportation Board (STB) to continue negotiations for trail use. While STB did not grant an immediate extension, they have allowed us to re-file our request on March 10, giving us another opportunity to demonstrate the extraordinary circumstances that warrant additional time. In the meantime, TCWP has been working diligently to build local support, secure funding options, and transition trail sponsorship to the Trust for Public Land (TPL), who has extensive experience in rail-trail projects. With TPL taking the lead on negotiations and TCWP continuing public outreach, we remain committed to seeing this project through. Stay tuned—our journey is still on track!

4. Ridgeline Expansion Pipeline: An Update to the FERC Process

As reported in our last issue, FERC issued its final EIS for the Ridgeline Expansion gas pipeline. Shortly thereafter, the National Park Service (NPS) submitted its determination under Section 7 of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. While the final NPS determination wasn't ideal, it does include Required Measures that Enbridge must implement to mitigate environmental impacts, particularly concerning tributaries to the Obed Wild and Scenic River. Among these measures are specific erosion control strategies, habitat protections, and limits on water crossings, which are meant to reduce harm to sensitive ecosystems.

We are also encouraged by the inclusion of third-party environmental inspectors to oversee compliance with these measures, ensuring greater accountability during construction. TCWP is exploring ways to collaborate with NPS Superintendent Niki Nicholas to understand how we can stay informed, provide input and conduct our own monitoring efforts. While challenges remain, we are committed to keeping a close watch on this project and advocating for the strongest possible environmental protection if final approval of the other permits are granted. Stay tuned for further updates on how you can be involved, including joining Ridgeline Voices. See below.

5. TCWP joins Ridgeline Voices

Ridgeline Voices is a new community group that has come together to fight Enbridge's proposed methane pipeline, which would cross the headwaters of the Obed River 188 times in Morgan County alone. The proposed pipeline threatens to degrade water quality and harm endangered species across the Obed River system. Ridgeline Voices brings together concerned community members from Morgan County, Roane County, and Knox County together to oppose this pipeline and propose cleaner energy solutions that will employ more people and ultimately save ratepayers money. Currently, the group is proposing a resolution for the Morgan County Commission to oppose the pipeline and is mobilizing concerned residents to speak up about the pipeline across East Tennessee. The group meets monthly on Zoom. If you are interested in getting involved, email the group at RidgelineVoices@gmail.com. – Gabe Schwartzman

NEWS CAPSULES
OAK RIDGE

1. Mock-up Training Benefits High-Priority ORNL Cleanup Project

To safely manage the cleanup of uranium-233 (U-233) at Oak Ridge National Laboratory (ORNL), Isotek, under the Oak Ridge Office of Environmental Management (OREM), has implemented advanced mock-up training for workers handling highly contaminated materials. U-233, originally created for reactor use but deemed unviable, poses significant risks and requires careful processing in shielded hot cells before disposal. To minimize exposure, employees train in a full-scale mock-up hot cell, allowing them to practice tasks in protective gear before entering radiation zones. This preparation has improved efficiency and safety, enabling workers to successfully replace critical equipment inside the hot cells. The initiative supports ongoing cleanup efforts, with Isotek surpassing its 2024 goal by processing over 90 canisters of high-dose material while also extracting medical isotopes for cancer research.

2. East Tennessee leads in U.S. effort to revive Cold War uranium capabilities

East Tennessee is playing a key role in the U.S. government's effort to restart uranium enrichment for national defense, marking the first such initiative since the Cold War. The Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration, in partnership with Oak Ridge National Laboratory, is developing advanced centrifuge technology to enrich "unobligated" uranium for military use. The effort aims to increase low-enriched uranium production for tritium, a key component in nuclear weapons, while also preparing for future highly enriched uranium needs for naval reactors. The Domestic Uranium Enrichment Centrifuge Experiment, launched in 2016, has recently advanced through grants and potential partnerships with private companies like BWXT and Centrus Energy. If formalized, Centrus could enrich uranium for both tritium production and naval reactors, potentially using centrifuges built in Oak Ridge, positioning the region at the forefront of America's nuclear revival.

3. *How Tennessee could be the 'first mover' in a US nuclear revival with $92.6M from Gov. Lee*

Tennessee is positioning itself as a leader in the revival of U.S. nuclear energy, with Governor Bill Lee proposing a $92.6 million investment to support the industry. A significant portion—$50 million—would go toward the Tennessee Valley Authority's (TVA) small modular reactor (SMR) project at the Clinch River Site in Oak Ridge, which could become the first commercially operating SMR in the country.

See blog titled: TVA Briefing on Clinch River Nuclear Site Development By William Chandler https://tcwp.org/tva-briefing-on-clinch-river-nuclear-site-development/

4. Polymer editing can upcycle waste into higher-performance plastics

ORNL researchers have developed a breakthrough polymer editing technique that upcycles plastic waste into higher-performance materials, reducing environmental impact. Instead of traditional melting methods that degrade quality, this process restructures polymer chains at the molecular level using a ruthenium catalyst. By transforming plastics like those in tires and appliances into durable, high-value materials, the method offers a more sustainable, energy-efficient alternative to conventional recycling. This innovation supports a circular economy, where discarded plastics are repurposed rather than landfilled, paving the way for industrial applications that reduce waste and emissions.

5. New research shows plants absorb 31% more carbon dioxide than previously thought

New research published in Nature reveals that plants absorb 31% more carbon dioxide than previously estimated, significantly altering our understanding of the Earth's carbon cycle and climate projections. Led by Cornell University with support from Oak Ridge National Laboratory, the study estimates global plant CO_2 uptake at 157 petagrams annually, a sharp increase from the long-standing 120-petagram figure. Scientists determined this by tracking carbonyl sulfide (OCS), a compound that follows the same path as CO_2 but is easier to measure. The most surprising finding was the greater-than-expected role of tropical rainforests as carbon sinks, emphasizing their importance in mitigating climate change. Researchers believe these refined estimates will improve climate models and reinforce the urgency of forest conservation and restoration efforts.

STATE of TENNESSEE

1. Agreements better protect Tennessee's Duck River from increased water withdrawals

A recent settlement between the Southern Environmental Law Center (SELC), the Tennessee Wildlife Federation, and the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation strengthens water withdrawal permits for utilities drawing from the Duck River, one of the most biodiverse rivers in the world. The agreements impose stricter conservation measures, including limits on water loss and updated drought management plans, in response to concerns over increased withdrawals that could harm the river's health. The settlements follow appeals advocating for stronger protections as regional development drives higher water demand. Governor Bill Lee's recent executive order further supports these efforts by establishing the Duck River Watershed Planning Partnership, which will develop long-term water management strategies. Advocates emphasize that proactive collaboration among stakeholders is essential to preserving the river for future generations.

2. Gov. Lee Announces Appointments to Duck River Watershed Planning Partnership

Governor Bill Lee has appointed members to the Duck River Watershed Planning Partnership, created under Executive Order 108 to balance economic growth, water management, and conservation in Tennessee's most biodiverse river. The partnership will develop watershed management strategies, advise state agencies and legislators, and promote sustainable water use. Among those named to the group are George Nolan, Director of the Tennessee Office of the Southern Environmental Law Center, and Grace Stranch, Executive Director of the Harpeth Conservancy.

3. Defending the Nolichucky

After Hurricane Helene, Tennessee paddlers mobilized to protect the Nolichucky River from environmental damage caused by CSX Transportation's rushed railroad reconstruction. River guide Trey Moore and Professor Dennis Ashford discovered contractors illegally excavating rock from the riverbed, threatening endangered species and water quality. Despite assurances from CSX, violations continued, prompting paddlers to organize as Nolichucky Witness, document damage, and collaborate with national nonprofits to push for enforcement. Legal action led to a temporary halt in construction and violations against CSX, but concerns remain as a North Carolina permit still allows some rock removal. Advocates continue monitoring, pushing for stronger protections, and urging CSX to use quarried rock instead, defending the Nolichucky as both a vital ecosystem and a beloved recreation area.

4. Advocates urge action as samples find PFAS contamination in Tennessee

Advocates are sounding the alarm on PFAS contamination in Tennessee, warning of its health risks and urging stronger regulations. A Sierra Club study found PFAS in 60% of water samples in Northeast Tennessee, with higher levels near industrial sites, wastewater plants, and landfills. Environmental attorney Nick Jackson and Sierra Club's Dan Firth emphasize the need for stricter policies, including banning contaminated sludge, requiring wastewater testing, and holding polluters accountable. While lawsuits against chemical manufacturers have led to major settlements, funding for cleanup remains inadequate. With PFAS regulations under legal and political uncertainty, advocates stress that continued public pressure is essential to ensuring clean water and stronger protections.

5. These salamanders could be Tennessee's newest endangered species. And Helene is to blame

The eastern hellbender salamander, a large freshwater amphibian found in Tennessee and 14 other states, is being considered for Endangered Species Act protections due to a rapidly declining population, with only 12% of its numbers remaining stable. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposed listing the species as endangered in December 2024, citing habitat destruction, pollution, and the devastating impact of Hurricane Helene, which displaced and killed many hellbenders during severe flooding. Once thriving in clean, fast-moving streams, the species is now struggling to survive in its deteriorating habitat. If granted protection under the Endangered Species Act, hellbenders would benefit from conservation efforts and legal safeguards against further harm, joining 131 other endangered species in Tennessee, including bats, birds, fish, and plants.

6. Division of Forestry adds 16th state forest

The Tennessee Department of Agriculture Division of Forestry (TDF) has announced the addition of Wolf River State Forest, a 5,477-acre tract in Fayette County, making it the state's 16th state forest. Set to open in 2025, this land, formerly part of the historic Ames Plantation, contains significant natural, historical, and cultural resources, including some of Tennessee's finest bottomland hardwood forests, wetlands, and more than 30 miles of streams. The area also holds 45 state-registered historical sites, with ongoing research efforts by Rhodes College and the University of Tennessee to document the lives of over 800 enslaved people who lived on the property. The forest will be managed for conservation, research, and passive outdoor recreation such as hunting, hiking, and wildlife viewing. The acquisition was made possible through a partnership with The Conservation Fund and funding from the USDA Forest Legacy Program, ensuring the land remains protected and contributes to environmental and economic benefits for West Tennessee.

7. Gray bats are flourishing in a Tennessee cave thanks to one simple conservation trick

Gray bats, once on the brink of extinction due to habitat destruction and human disturbance, have made a remarkable recovery in Tennessee, particularly at Bellamy Cave near Nashville. Listed as endangered in the 1970s, the species faced declines from cave exploration, dams, and pollution but proved resilient to white-nose syndrome, a fungal disease devastating other bat populations. A key conservation effort, the installation of protective fencing at cave entrances—helped shield bats from human interference, allowing populations to rebound. The Nature Conservancy, which first recorded 4,000 hibernating bats in Bellamy Cave in 1986, purchased the site in 2006 and reinforced protections. Today, the cave hosts over 350,000 bats, marking a rare success story in bat conservation and demonstrating how targeted habitat protection can lead to species recovery.

MULTI STATE - APPALACHIANS

1. Pipeline companies try to plow over Appalachian landowners

Landowners in Appalachia are raising concerns over Enbridge Inc., a Canadian pipeline company pushing forward with gas projects that threaten private property, water quality, and environmental safety. Enbridge has a history of major spills and explosions, including incidents in Tennessee and Kentucky, yet continues to pressure landowners into signing easements for minimal compensation. Scott Denham, impacted by the System Alignment Program, was initially offered under $4,000 but secured $70,000 with legal assistance. Meanwhile, Patricia Smarsh, in the path of the proposed Ridgeline pipeline in Tennessee, has faced persistent pressure despite personal hardships.

While construction on the System Alignment Program has started, it remains under environmental compliance monitoring. The Ridgeline pipeline, however, is still awaiting permits and cannot proceed with eminent domain until securing federal approval. With legal challenges halting another gas pipeline in Tennessee, affected landowners are urging others to resist initial offers, seek legal counsel, and fight for fair compensation and environmental protections. They stress that Enbridge's tactics rely on pressuring individuals into undervaluing their land, and collective resistance could help prevent long-term harm to Appalachian communities.

2. Nature Conservancy Announces 17 New Solar Energy Projects in Appalachia

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is launching a major clean energy initiative, transforming former coal mines in Appalachia into sites for 17 solar and battery storage projects across Tennessee, Virginia, and Kentucky. Partnering with Cumberland Forest Limited Partnership, Sun Tribe Development, and ENGIE, the effort will generate 49 MW of solar power and 320 MW of battery storage, supporting climate goals while boosting local economies. These projects will create jobs, generate tax revenue, and provide renewable energy to rural communities. By repurposing degraded mining lands, TNC is offering a sustainable economic alternative for Appalachia, ensuring clean energy benefits both people and nature.

NATIONAL NEWS CAPSULES

1. PARKS:

a. Great Smoky Mountains National Park embarks on new hellbender study

Great Smoky Mountains National Park is launching a two-year study to track the elusive eastern hellbender, a giant salamander that thrives in cold, fast-moving streams. Led by park biologist Jonathan Cox and JJ Apodaca of the Amphibian and Reptile Conservancy, the research will use environmental RNA (eRNA) techniques to detect larvae in water samples, reducing the need for labor-intensive surveys. Funded by a $140,000 National Park Service grant, the study will assess population health, genetic diversity, and threats from habitat fragmentation and human activity. Researchers hope the findings will aid in protecting this ancient species and preserving the Smokies' rich biodiversity.

b. Great Smoky Mountains: Ramsey Cascades Trail reopens following multiyear rehabilitation

After nearly three years of rehabilitation, the Ramsey Cascades Trail in Great Smoky Mountains National Park has reopened, offering visitors a safer and more accessible route to the park's tallest waterfall. The four-mile trail, known for its challenging terrain and 105-foot cascading waterfall, had suffered from years of heavy foot traffic, erosion, and steep conditions. The restoration, led by the Trails Forever crew—funded by Friends of the Smokies—addressed significant trail deficiencies, making it one of the most extensive rehabilitation projects in the park. Trails Forever, established in 2008, has completed major restorations on several popular trails, with nearly $4 million contributed by Friends of the Smokies, including $1 million for the Ramsey Cascades project. The reopening marks a significant improvement for hikers, ensuring long-term sustainability for one of the park's most beloved trails.

c. Trump's hiring freeze threatens Great Smoky Mountains National Park

The Trump administration's federal hiring freeze has led to the elimination of more than 2,000 National Park Service positions, significantly impacting the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the most visited national park in the country. With fewer rangers and staff, visitors may experience reduced services, fewer educational programs, and unmaintained trails, raising safety and environmental concerns. The freeze also threatens conservation efforts, including monitoring of invasive species and wildlife such as the Eastern Hellbender Salamander. In response, students and local organizations are stepping up through volunteer programs like Adopt-A-Trail and Parkwide Litter Patrol to help maintain the park. While the hiring freeze presents serious challenges, the commitment of the surrounding community and volunteers will be crucial in preserving the park's natural beauty and accessibility.

2. Senate confirms Zeldin to lead Environmental Protection Agency as Trump vows to cut climate rules

The Senate has confirmed Lee Zeldin as the new EPA administrator, aligning with President Trump's broader environmental agenda, which prioritizes deregulation. While Republicans praise his legal expertise, critics worry he will not resist political and industry pressures that could weaken environmental protections. Zeldin has supported conservation efforts like the Great American Outdoors Act but holds a low rating from environmental groups due to his opposition to renewable energy policies. His leadership is expected to emphasize industry collaboration over aggressive climate action. It is anticipated that the narrative will continue to be framed as pitting environmental protection against economic interests, a purposeful tactic to maintain divisiveness.

3. Lawsuit filed to push for federal protection of southern bog turtles

A lawsuit has been filed against the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to advocate for federal protection of the southern bog turtle, the smallest and one of the most threatened turtles in Tennessee. Despite severe population declines due to habitat loss, development, and illegal pet trade, the species remains unprotected under the Endangered Species Act, unlike its northern counterpart. Conservationists argue that only 500 acres of mountain bog habitat remain across its range in Tennessee, Virginia, North Carolina, and Georgia. The lawsuit also seeks protection for the roughhead shiner, a rare fish species in Virginia facing threats from invasive species and climate-related challenges, warning that both species risk extinction without federal intervention.

4. Evolution of Endangered Species Act

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) passed in 1973 with overwhelming bipartisan support, with no senator voting against it. Fifty years later, the ESA has become a source of legal battles and community disputes, as advocates fight to enforce it while opponents seek to weaken its reach.

Originally intended to protect all endangered species, not just charismatic animals like whales and bears, the law soon became a powerful tool for conservationists to halt development projects threatening vulnerable species. One of the first major tests of the ESA came in the 1970s, when environmental lawyers sued the Tennessee Valley Authority to stop the Tellico Dam, citing its threat to the tiny snail darter fish. The case reached the Supreme Court, which ruled in favor of the fish, proving ESA's potential to protect entire ecosystems. However, the victory was short-lived, as the Carter administration ultimately granted an exemption, allowing the dam to proceed. While the snail darter population recovered elsewhere, the last wild stretch of the Little Tennessee River was lost, symbolizing both the power and limitations of the ESA in modern conservation battles.

TCWP EVENTS

TCWP's Guidelines for Activities

- We ask that you stay home when you are sick.
- We ask that you know what you're capable of, and that you communicate that to the group leader.
- We recommend that you bring plenty of water and snacks.
- We ask that you not bring pets.

[NOTE: Times listed for all events are Eastern time unless specified otherwise.]

1. Upcoming Events

Wildflowers on N. Walker Access to North Ridge Trail – Saturday, March 22

This joint outing for TCWP and the Tennessee Native Plant Society (TNPS) will be a visit to an amazing spot for early spring ephemerals. It's covered in trout lilies, with pockets of twinleaf, foamflower, wood poppies, and spring beauties. If we hit the timing right, the Dutchman's Breeches might be blooming.

There is minimal parking at the Trailhead, but there is some street parking along N. Walker Rd and West Outer Dr. There is also ample parking at the nearby Children's Museum of Oak Ridge. The trail is only about .7 miles one way, but it is steep in spots. It also can be muddy, and there is a stream crossing. Bring water, a lunch, and bug spray.

Outing leaders will be Margaret Cumberland and Larry Pounds. If you RSVP, it will help with planning and allow contacting in case of cancellation. Phone/email: 919-339-0072, meshearin@gmail.com.

Hike to Four Mile Creek Waterfall, led by Ricky Ryan (Free for TCWP members. $25 for non-members to join) – Saturday, March 29

Join us on March 29 for an off-trail hike to Four Mile Creek Waterfall, located within the Obed Wild and Scenic River. Four Mile Creek Waterfall is a 60-feet high overhanging waterfall that drops into a rock amphitheater plunge pool. Depending on recent rainfall and temperatures, it can often be a spectacular sight. Since the approach to the waterfall is totally off-trail, the hike will involve uneven terrain, a few short steep side-hill scrambles, and walking through the forest with no established trail. Four Mile Creek continues downstream from the waterfall to join Clear Creek at Norris Ford.

Participants should meet at the Obed Wild and Scenic River Visitor Center at 9:30 a.m. Eastern. The group will then drive together out to the parking area for the hike. Carpooling would be helpful, due to limited parking. Please wear weather-appropriate clothing and bring water and snacks. Sturdy hiking shoes/boots and trekking poles are highly recommended. Participants should expect to spend two hours for the hike.

To sign up for this hike, please email nancymanning@tcwp.org
For non-members, join by March 28th here: Join TCWP - Tennessee Citizens for Wilderness Planning

Garlic Mustard Pull/Wildflower Walk – Saturday, April 5

The Greenway behind Oak Ridge's Rolling Hills Apartments (formerly known as the Garden Apartments) is one of the best wildflower trails in Anderson County, but it is threatened by garlic mustard, a very invasive exotic that crowds out native plants. TCWP and Greenways Oak Ridge have been making headway in recent years in ridding the trail of this harmful plant. Volunteers are needed to help with the effort again this year.

We will meet at 10 a.m. on April 5 at the rear parking lot (near the woods) behind 101-135 West Vanderbilt Drive. Wear sturdy shoes and weather-appropriate clothes and bring water and a digging spike or similar tool if you own one. TCWP board member, Margaret Cumberland, will help with wildflower identification. The event will end with a pizza lunch.

Frozen Head Wildflower Walk – Saturday, April 12

On this joint outing for TCWP and TNPS, we will have an excellent opportunity to see spring wildflowers. We'll meet at the Frozen Head State Park office at 8:30 Eastern Time and will hike from the Panther Branch Trailhead. The first 0.55 mile is ideal for those with rather limited hiking capabilities; the trail is wide and flat. For those continuing, the next 1 mile along Panther Branch is steeper and rougher, but still only moderate. Panther Branch is a place to see dwarf ginseng *(Panax trifolius*). The early start time is in hopes of finding more parking at the trailhead. Bring water, a lunch, and bug spray.

Hike leader will be Larry Pounds. Your RSVP helps with planning and allows contacting in case of cancelation.
Phone/email: 865-705-8516, PoundsL471@aol.com

Exploring the World of Bats, and How You Can Help – Tuesday, April 15

Besides adding diversity and flair to local wildlife, bats consume countless pest insects every night, but more than 50 percent of our native bats are now considered at risk. In a 7 p.m. Zoom program to be cosponsored by TCWP and the UT Arboretum Society on April 15, Erin Cord, Community Engagement Manager for Bat Conservation International, will discuss local bats, the threats they face, and how you can help them from the comfort of your own backyard.

Cord, who joined the Bat Conservation International staff in 2019, holds bachelor's degrees in Wildlife Conservation and Entomology from the University of Delaware and received her MS in Wildlife Ecology from the Cesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute at Texas A&M University-Kingsville. She has more than 10 years of experience working as a wildlife biologist and running environmentally focused volunteer, outreach, and education programs.

The program is free, but you must register to receive the Zoom link and the recording. Register at www.utarboretumsociety.org/programs/ by clicking on the date. Contact Michelle Campanis at mcampani@utk.edu regarding any questions or registration issues.

Oak Ridge Greenway Outing – Saturday, May 3

On this outing sponsored by TCWP and TNPS, we'll see late spring wildflowers and do some tree and shrub identification along the paved greenway. This should work for those with limited walking ability. Wheelchairs are a possibility. We will walk or roll on a flattish paved trail. Total out and back distance is perhaps 1.5 miles. As usual,l attendees can turn back when they want.

We'll meet at the end of **OLD** Edgemoor Rd. in Haw Ridge Park (36.01034-, -84.16753) at 9 a.m. Eastern. Bring water, lunch or a snack, and bug spray.

The outing leader will be Larry Pounds. If you RSVP, it will help with planning and allow contacting if there are changes. Phone/ email: 865-705-8516, PoundsL471@aol.com

Blue Ghost Fireflies Outing – (and marshmallow roast) Saturday, May 10
Free for TCWP members. $25 for non-members to join

This special evening event has been arranged for TCWP by Becky Charles and her son, Ezekiel, on a wooded property located between Oak Ridge and Clinton. Blue ghost fireflies (Phausis reticulata) are a small variety of firefly present only in mature wooded environments. They have a pale green lantern that can be seen when viewed closely; however, when viewed at a distance they can give a light blue impression. They do not flash like most other species and instead have a sustained glow that may last minutes at a time. They appear as dots of light slowly wandering among the trees, 1 to 4 feet off the ground and casting a spotlight downward. They are searching the forest floor for females, who remain in a larval form through adulthood.

Ezekiel will be our firefly trail guide. The viewing trail is relatively smooth and just wide enough to let a vehicle pass. Our walk leaders will use glow sticks at the front and rear of the group to help participants orient; however, it is a forested trail that will be dark. This event may not be suitable for anyone with particularly poor night vision or who is at all unsteady on their feet.

We will meet for carpooling in Oak Ridge at the Gold's Gym/Books-A-Million parking lot (at the end close to S. Illinois Avenue, near Salsarita's). The fireflies become active toward the end of dusk, so participants should be at the parking lot in time to leave at 7:45 p.m. Eastern. Bring a folding chair if you have one; we'll toast marshmallows after the walk!

Participation in this outing will be limited. To register, contact TCWP Executive Director Nancy Manning at nancymanning3@gmail.com.

Norris Grist Mill to Observation Point Outing – Saturday, May 17

This is another joint outing for TCWP and TNPS. The moderate, 2.5-mile loop starts in a valley with spring wildflowers that usually bloom a little later. We will also go by some populations of pink lady's slippers before climbing to a nice view of Norris Dam.

We will meet for carpooling in Oak Ridge at the Gold's Gym/Books-A-Million parking lot (meet at the end close to S. Illinois Avenue, near Salsarita's) in time to leave at 9:15 a.m. Eastern, or you can meet the group in the parking lot at the Norris Grist Mill (Lower Clear Creek Rd, Norris, TN) at 10 a.m. Eastern. Bring water, a lunch, and bug spray.

Hike leader will be Margaret Cumberland. If you RSVP, it will help with planning and allow contacting in case of cancellation. Phone/email: 919-339-0072, meshearin@gmail.com

2. Recent Events

The Importance of Bats in our Ecosystem – Thursday, January 23

In a Zoom presentation co-sponsored by TCWP and the UT Arboretum Society, bat rehabber Susie Kaplar discussed the plight bats are facing and the importance of protecting them. She began working with bats when she lived in Northern California and is now one of just a handful of fully licensed and permitted bat rehabbers in Tennessee.

Kaplan said that for too long, people have thought of bats as "flying mice" or "little Draculas." She discussed and showed photos of the bats of Tennessee, and described the role they play in our food production and in protecting us from mosquitoes. "We are losing so many bats presently, and we need to save as many as we can," she said. "Through rehabilitation and getting the word out through education programs, it's my life goal to ensure the continued existence of our bats."

Cumberland Trail Alley Ford Workday – Saturday, February 8

On February 8 TCWP, the Obed Wild and Scenic River, the Cumberland Trail State Park, and Frozen Head State Park cosponsored a day of trail work and hiking on the Alley Ford segment of the Cumberland Trail and Obed Wild and Scenic River. The weather was good and it was a pretty wonderful day.

We had 21 people in all, including 11 TCWP volunteers, and 10 rangers and other staff from the Obed, Cumberland Trail, and Frozen Head. This year we broke into several groups. One group cleared brush along the trail, the second group worked to clean out water bars, and the third worked to re-grade several sections of the trail.

The state park staff were responsible for chainsaw work, and they broke into two groups. One group cleared downed trees on the trail from Rock Creek Campground to Alley Ford and the other group worked upriver from Alley Ford towards Breakaway Bluff.

This year marked the 27th anniversary of TCWP's adoption of this section of the Cumberland Trail. TCWP adopted the 2.5-mile section of trail to Alley Ford in 1998 as part of our ongoing stewardship efforts. Over the past few years, we have gradually expanded our work area to Breakaway Bluff on the Catoosa Wildlife Management Area. *Jimmy Groton*

Spring Cedar Barrens Cleanup/Weed Wrangle® - Saturday, March 1

Saturday, March 1, was our first Weed Wrangle® of 2025 at the Oak Ridge Cedar Barrens State Natural Area. The weather was pretty much perfect, with plenty of sunshine. Fourteen volunteers, including several new people, helped wrangle weeds at the Barrens. We spent most of the morning in the ellipse area, pulling up privet, bush honeysuckle, autumn olive, and a few other invasives around the perimeter area. Then we moved over to the triangle area along Fairbanks Road, where Margaret Cumberland and Larry Pounds helped us learn about the unique plants growing at the Barrens and fire ant ecology. Afterwards all volunteers were treated to a nice pizza lunch.

We missed the presence of long-time TCWP member Jean Bangham, who passed away two weeks earlier. Jean was one of our best and most dedicated volunteers ever, and a stalwart supporter of TCWP from the very beginning. She was a source of inspiration to all who knew her. We will miss her. *Jimmy Groton*

Calendar

- March 22 – Wildflowers on N. Walker Access to North Ridge Trail
- March 29 – Hike to Four Mile Creek Waterfall
- April 5 – Garlic Mustard Pull/Wildflower Walk
- April 12 – Frozen Head Wildflower Walk
- April 15 – Exploring the World of Bats, and How You Can Help
- May 3 – Oak Ridge Greenway Outing
- May 10 – Blue Ghost Fireflies Outing
- May 17 – Norris Grist Mill to Observation Point Outing

These events are subject to cancellation. Call ahead to verify the event will occur.

Free Camping Gear:
Chuck Coutant is giving away camping gear that he says "isn't the most modern, but it is all working and has served our family well from living and camping in the Pacific Northwest in the1960s and here in TN since 1970.

1	Camp gas stove. Coleman using white gas (gallon cans available at Dick's).
1	Camp lantern. Coleman uses white gas.
1	5-gallon plastic water jug for drinking water when going to remote campsites.
3	Folding camp stools, wooden with canvas seats
1	Folding camp stool, metal frame, canvas seat.
1	canvas backpack, well used
1	Fireplace grill, metal, for over site-built stone fireplace
2	canvass duffel bags
2	tents
1	canvass tarp

First come-first served. Interested persons can call at 865-483-5976 (leave message for callback), or email at

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