

# Tennessee Sierran

SIERRA  
CLUB  
TENNESSEE CHAPTER

Bimonthly Newsletter of the Tennessee Chapter of the Sierra Club

Volume 58, Number 1 — January /February 2025

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Cover: Bald River Falls in the Cherokee National Forest © Ron Shrieves  
Masthead: Charlie's Bunion photo © Ron Shrieves, design by Todd Waterman

**Explore, Enjoy, and Protect**

## From Tennessee Chair Cris Corley Early Morning Thoughts: See You Later!



After hitting the sack very early last night and falling into deep REM sleep, I was awakened twice by back-to-back texts from two of Sierra Club's past and present leaders. Of course, it is always delightful to hear from dear friends, but being days past my deadline for this column would require a good night's sleep and an early cup of coffee in the morning. After returning to sleep, my dreams were filled by an exhausting hike to the bottom of the Grand Canyon followed by a terrifying whitewater rafting trip down the red waters of the Colorado led by Charlie High. Waking up in the predawn darkness, I feel exhausted, confused, and saddened knowing this will be my last column as Chapter Chair. It is now time to say farewell.

Reflecting back on this unplanned journey in my life as Chapter Chair, I can say it truly has been life changing. The old adage of "time flies when you're having fun" is so true. It seems like only yesterday when I attended my first Chapter retreat at Cedars of Lebanon State Park. A municipal gasification plant had recently opened in town and my concerns had fallen on deaf ears at the City Council meeting. With a past successful experience in dealing with Nashville and the defeat of a proposed super regional landfill, I had learned it helps to have friends when fighting to protect the environment — and I found them in the Sierra Club. The Cedars group lodge, where the Chapter ExCom joined me in my fight, was no doubt the trailhead of my hike to Explore, Enjoy, and Protect.

Conservation Director Scott Banbury immediately welcomed me into the fold and quickly set me on the path to taking an active role within Chapter leadership. I rose in the ranks to serve as Vice Chair under Mac Post, truly an honor. Our trips to Sierra Club's national headquarters in Oakland and our walks there with the giant redwoods at Muir Woods were life changing for me. After my elevation to Chair with Charlie serving as Vice Chair, the hike continued until a fast-moving storm slowed our progress. The effects of Covid-19 on our Chapter seemed like a bad dream. The virus caused numerous and frustrating changes in how members could gather and interact.

National and the Chapter have gradually regained strength. We began again to stick our noses out our doors for a breath of fresh air. Again, I was able to return to Muir Woods with Charlie in tow, and pass on the secrets learned as the understudy of Mac while attending the Council of Club Leaders.

With multiple trips to Washington for the advancement of conservation efforts contained in pending legislation, and to California and Chicago to promote the Tennessee Chapter as the ideal host for an exciting National Assembly and SierraFest near Cedars of Lebanon (stay tuned!), the journey continues. Even though the trail's end is in sight, the sound of a roaring river only continues to get louder the closer I get!

So many expressions of gratitude (too numerous to count) are in order to all of the Sierra Club members that have assisted me in Exploring, Enjoying, and Protecting this planet. It appears the time has come for me to sit down and strap on my life preserver. The real adventure awaits as we paddle full speed ahead for the whitewater, Captain Charlie steering the rapids, and I begin the next adventure and chapter in the ride of my life.

*Happy Trails!*

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

## Thank you, Cris Corley!

by Charles High, Tennessee Chapter Vice Chair

Dr. Cris Corley of Lebanon, Tennessee, will complete his second two-year term as Chapter Chair after election of his successor at the Chapter Executive Committee meeting in January. Chairperson Corley became active in Sierra Club governance after attending a Chapter Retreat at Cedars of Lebanon State Park. Cris arranged a tour at the Lebanon Gasification Plant, which made electricity from gasification of waste materials like tires and pallets. Cris was concerned that the process was not environmentally sound. The Lebanon Gasification Plant generated hazardous waste and was replaced by solar panels for cleaner energy. He was also interested in building a hiking trail to connect Cedars of Lebanon Park to Long Hunter State Park and he met likeminded people in the Sierra Club.

Dr. Corley can be simply described as a mover and a shaker. He has big ideas, and he knows how to make them happen. He loves politics and develops personal relationships with his representatives. Cris interned with then Congressman Albert Gore, Jr. after completing high school and stayed in touch with him. Through the Council of Club Leaders, he became close with Sierra Club President Ramon Cruz and later, with Sierra Club Executive Director Ben Jealous. Both men had worked with Vice President Gore in the past and Cris invited them to visit with Gore at his farm in Carthage, Tennessee. Cruz and Jealous loved their visits to Tennessee and continued to return when possible.

The Tennessee Chapter was suddenly nationally significant. The Sierra Club Board of Directors came to Nashville for a Board Retreat Meeting. Cris proposed that the Sierra Club have a festival in Lebanon, Tennessee, with environmental meetings and a live music festival. There are plans now for the festival, SierraFest, to occur for a three-year run.

Cris has other accomplishments as chairperson. He persuaded Governor Bill Lee to give hundreds of acres of State Forest to the Cedars of Lebanon State Park, greatly increasing the size. The land is on the route of the proposed hiking trail connecting to Long Hunter Park. He negotiated to hire a Chapter Director for the first time in Tennessee.

Dr. Corley has moved the Tennessee Chapter from a small state chapter to a leader in the National Sierra Club. Undoubtedly, Cris is not finished with the Sierra Club, but he is due our gratitude for his tireless service as Chapter Chair.

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## The Tennes-Sierran

The bimonthly newsletter of the  
Tennessee Chapter of the Sierra Club  
Volume 58, Number 1 — January/February 2025  
Digital Edition

Online with clickable links at: <https://bit.ly/TENNSRN>

### Change of Address

Email: [Address.Changes@SierraClub.org](mailto:Address.Changes@SierraClub.org)

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

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

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February issue of the Chapter E-Newsletter by January 24

March Issue of the Chapter E-Newsletter by February 21

March/April Issue of The Tennes-Sierran by January 31

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# Sierra Club Statement: We Will Be A Force Of Nature Defending Our Communities and The Planet From Trump

by Gabby Kientzle, Sierra Club Director of Federal Communications

During Trump's first term, the Sierra Club played a critical role in defending against his administration's attacks on climate progress and clean air and water. The Sierra Club legal team filed more than 300 lawsuits against his administration, holding off the worst of his attempts to gut bedrock environmental protections, as well as watch-dogging Trump's political appointees and bringing to light their ties to polluting industries through FOIA requests and litigation. The Sierra Club's Beyond Coal Campaign also continued to be successful in driving the transition from coal to clean energy in spite of Trump, retiring coal plants at an even faster pace than under the Obama administration.

Sierra Club Executive Director Ben Jealous released the following statement:

"Donald Trump was a disaster for climate progress during his first term, and everything he's said and done since suggests he's eager to do even more damage this time. Trump has put profits over people time and again, prioritizing the bottom line of the Big Oil CEOs who bought and paid for his campaign. Communities face the threat of pollution and the devastating impacts of the climate crisis, while Big Oil seek to keep us hooked on fossil fuels rather than investing in a clean energy economy.

"During Trump's first term, we fought relentlessly to defend against his administration's attacks on climate progress and clean air and water, and we are ready to fight again. We will challenge Trump's dangerous proposals in court, keep the pressure on banks and big corporations to clean up their act, and mobilize our 64 chapters and millions of members and volunteers nationwide to continue to make progress at the state and local levels.

"This is a dark day, but despite this election result, momentum is on our side. The transition away from dirty fossil fuels to affordable clean energy is already underway. Trump can't change the reality that an overwhelming majority of Americans want more clean energy, not more fossil fuels. Through investments in the Inflation Reduction Act we are creating millions of new clean energy jobs. Clean energy is already cheaper in most cases than dirty fossil fuels, and wind and solar now generate more power in the US than coal.

"When we come together, we are stronger than Donald Trump, and we will not let one climate denier in the White House erase all the progress we have made. Our movement is bigger, bolder, and more diverse than it's ever been. We will be a force of nature and use every tool at our disposal to defend our democracy and critical environmental protections, and continue to build toward the clean energy economy and future we need."

Contact Gabby at [gabby.kientzle@sierraclub.org](mailto:gabby.kientzle@sierraclub.org)

## Memphian Receives the Distinguished Lois DeBerry Service Award

by Rita Harris, Chair, Chickasaw Group



Yolonda Spinks received the prestigious Lois DeBerry Service & Community Engagement Award presented at the LeMoyne-Owen College Alumni Luncheon held in October 2024.

Chickasaw Group members were happy to show support for Yolonda Spinks when she was honored with the Lois DeBerry Service & Community Engagement Award during the LeMoyne-Owen College Alumni Luncheon held in October.

The Honorable Lois DeBerry, a graduate of LeMoyne-Owen College, Memphis' only historic Black college, was a respected and effective African American member of the Tennessee General Assembly for four decades, serving as Speaker Pro Tempore for 22 of those years. She was a lifelong Memphian and fully engaged in the civil rights movement.

"I'm deeply honored to receive the Lois DeBerry Service and Community Engagement Award from my alma mater, LeMoyne-Owen College," Spinks said. "Ms. DeBerry, a proud South

Memphian native, set a remarkable example of integrity and service to our community. Inspired by her legacy, I'm committed to continuing the fight for clean air, water, and soil, especially for communities of color that have been severely impacted by environmental injustice for far too long."

Spinks is truly following in DeBerry's footsteps. She worked closely with State Rep. Justin J. Pearson during the historic and successful fight against the Byhalia Pipeline in southwest Memphis -- the long and stressful struggle to stop construction of a massive pipeline in the Boxtown neighborhood and areas beyond, serving as Director of Communications for MCAP (Memphis Community Against the Pipeline, now called Memphis Community Against Pollution). Spinks more recently led the fight against a Memphis plant that was polluting the air with ethylene oxide (EtO), a highly toxic chemical substance. In addition, her advocacy and leadership resulted in Memphis Light Gas & Water Board of Commissioners voting against a lifetime contract (valued at \$1 billion yearly) with the Tennessee Valley Authority. This kind of activism is truly awe-inspiring and critically important to changing the way power is generated in Memphis and across the Tennessee Valley. As older activists fade from the scene, it is imperative that we have a younger generation of activists like Yolonda Spinks willing and able to take the reins.

Chickasaw Group members present to cheer Yolonda on at the Alumni Luncheon included: Rita Harris, Chickasaw Chair; Paul Klein, Chickasaw Vice Chair; Cynthia Klein, Scott Banbury, Sierra Club Tennessee Chapter Conservation Director; Dennis Lynch; Duffy-Marie Arnoult, and Carl Richards.

Contact Rita at [rita2600@gmail.com](mailto:rita2600@gmail.com)



## Your Input Needed! Shape the Future of Sierra Club Tennessee

Throughout 2025, we're thrilled to kick off an incredible adventure — crafting a strategic plan that will guide our Chapter for years to come. Your voice matters! What's your vision for the future of our Chapter? What challenges should we tackle, and which initiatives should take center stage?

Take a moment to share your thoughts and help us shape the path forward. You can play a key role in shaping our direction, driving meaningful progress, and safeguarding Tennessee's natural beauty for generations to come.

We'd love to hear from you! Please make sure to send in your responses no later than January 31 and, if possible, submit them by January 16 so that we can review them during the Chapter Retreat. To find the survey, scan the QR Code or type the link into your browser.

Pat Cupples, Chapter Director, [pat.cupples@sierraclub.org](mailto:pat.cupples@sierraclub.org)



[sc.org/survey25](https://sc.org/survey25)

# A Report from Sierra Club's Tennessee Valley Energy Team

by Bonnie Swinford, Senior Organizing Representative

**What a Year!** Sierra Club's Tennessee Valley Energy Team has been hard at work this year continuing to build a safe, affordable and clean energy future for us all. Our campaign has a lot to be proud of in 2024. Let's look at what our team accomplished in 2024, and what 2025 holds in store.

## Historic Investments in Clean Energy

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), which went into effect in 2022, has resulted in more than \$8.7 billion of federal investments in Tennessee, with more than \$1.7 billion is related to energy production, efficiency and distribution resilience. The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), passed in 2022, has resulted in more than \$1 billion dollars of federal funding being allocated to Tennessee, with almost \$700 million of that being for clean energy. Other states within the TVA service area received similar funding.

The design and implementation of the clean energy programs and projects that the BIL and IRA fund are largely up to state and local governments, local power companies (LPCs) and private clean energy providers to carry out. The role of the Sierra Club and our partners is to help those agencies understand what opportunities are available and to drive public support for those programs and projects that truly meet our common climate and social justice goals.

We are fortunate to have a public power model in Tennessee, from its generation to its distribution. We must remain vigilant and engaged to ensure that it serves the public need and welfare in a just, clean and equitable way.

## Taking control of our economic and energy future

The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), the nation's largest public power company, plays a crucial role in our region's energy future. Although TVA's energy plan currently leans on new fossil fuel investments, our campaign has worked tirelessly to shift its focus toward cleaner, community-driven energy solutions. With 10 million customers across seven states, TVA has the opportunity to lead the charge for sustainable energy in the region. In 2024, we successfully pushed back against TVA's dangerous plans for new methane gas plants by organizing public hearings, submitting permit comments, and building community support.

## TVA's Long-Range Energy Plan and the People's Hearing with Clean Up TVA

In January 2024, we hosted a People's Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) Hearing with the Clean Up TVA coalition. TVA's IRP outlines how the utility plans to generate power for decades to come, and our hearing showcased how TVA could engage the community in planning our energy future. Hundreds of participants joined us to hear from local leaders and experts, emphasizing the need for public involvement in decisions about our energy future. In the last months of 2024, Sierra Club organized 100s of comments on TVA's IRP and supported dozens of community members in attending 12 TVA open houses across seven states. These events allowed attendees to learn about TVA's energy plans, ask questions, and advocate for clean energy priorities.

## Court Stops Cumberland Pipeline

In October, we secured a significant victory when the U.S. Court of Appeals halted the construction of the Cumberland Gas Pipeline just days before it was set to begin. After several years of dedicated work by Sierra Club and partners, the court suspended two water permits due to environmental concerns, a win that provided impacted landowners, advocates, and communities reason to be inspired and relieved.

## Cheatham County Methane Plant Opposition

In February, nearly 400 Cheatham County residents packed a public meeting in opposition to TVA's proposed methane plant and pipeline. The community raised concerns about property values, pollution, and climate change. The success of this event was driven by Preserve Cheatham County, with support from Sierra Club leaders and volunteers.

## Rally for the Valley

In September, the Rally for the Valley drew over 150 people in person and nearly 1000 more joining in online. This event united various organizations and communities to demand that TVA stop its costly and exploitative gas expansion and focus on a just transition to renewable energy. The rally brought together local leaders who highlighted the environmental and economic harms of outdated energy sources.

## Looking Ahead to 2025

As we move into 2025, we remain committed to building momentum. The movement to protect our communities and the environment is growing fast. Dangerous pipelines and climate-driven disasters continue to threaten our region, and extremist attacks on environmental protections are likely to escalate under future administrations. Despite these challenges, we've seen progress, and we won't back down.

## Priorities for 2025 include:

- Building a clean energy future: We will continue to advocate for the protection of federal clean energy funding and push for transmission reforms to integrate more renewable energy into our region.
- Defending environmental laws: We are committed to defending bedrock environmental regulations that safeguard our communities and natural resources.
- Stopping the methane gas buildout: We will continue to oppose the largest expansion of methane gas infrastructure in a century.
- Strengthening our community: We will work to grow the movement for a just, clean, and safe energy future that benefits everyone.

With the partnership of our dedicated members and allies, we're poised to make even greater strides in 2025. Join us as we continue building a brighter, cleaner future. Together, we won't back down.

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

## Foothills Parkway: EIS Needed

by Jerry Thornton, Chair Harvey Broome Group

The National Park Service, on behalf of Great Smoky Mountain National Park, has proposed to extend the Foothills Parkway by completing Section 8D for nine miles from Wears Valley to the "Spur" between Pigeon Forge and Gatlinburg. GSMNP is shortcutting the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) with an Environmental Assessment (EA) for a project that clearly has major environmental and social impacts and should, therefore, be analyzed in a full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Specifically, the road would cut through unstable rock formations that are prone to rockslides; karst (cave and sinkhole) systems where a roadway will endanger groundwater quality and most residents near the road corridor use well water; and acid-releasing rock formations. The NPS relies on a 1992 Draft EIS that lacks all modern technological assessments of these risks and did not consider the effects of climate change at all. They also did not consider the alternative of keeping the right-of-way acquired decades ago by the United States as forest with hiking and biking trails. The Sierra Club, together with six other environmental groups, filed comments opposing the EA and demanding that a full EIS be written that fully evaluates the proposed roadway and its alternatives. We are now waiting to see how NPS responds to these comments. If NPS bulldozes ahead without doing a full EIS, the environmental groups may file a lawsuit under the NEPA.

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

## Establishing Access to Urban Greenspace in East Chattanooga

by Dave Hoot, Chair, Cherokee Group

"We didn't even know that was up there!" declared a visitor to the Cherokee Group's information booth at a recent block party in East Chattanooga. From the booth's location on Glass Street, a large elevated, tree-covered hill sat prominently in the distance. On top is a nearly 50-acre National Park Service reservation, the Sherman Reservation.

The hill was a good visual reference to the park map at the booth. Approximately, 80 percent of the seventy-five or so booth visitors, like the young lady mentioned above, did not know there was a park up there. The problem is access. The elevated park is cut off from the main neighborhood by two busy, and fairly dangerous streets. On top of that, there is virtually no parking nearby — only a pull-off across from the main trailhead that accommodates three vehicles at best.

Eight years ago, Cherokee Group members teamed up with several organizations to establish a connector trail from the neighborhood to the Reservation. It begins at the smaller Pennsylvania Reservation that is accessible on foot from the neighborhood. The new trail snaked through the woods, alongside one of the dangerous streets, then crossed over close to the trailhead at a zebra-line crosswalk. Unfortunately, in the time since, the new connector trail has become overgrown, due to lack of use and maintenance.

(continued on page 7)

# Protecting the Cherokee National Forest

## Hiking Guide Continues the Important Work with a New Edition

by Emily Ellis, Tennes-Sierran Editor

The third edition of the *Cherokee National Forest Hiking Guide*, published in July 2024 by the University of Tennessee Press, is the product of many years of work by many individuals. Will Skelton and others conceived of the Guide in the 1990s as a way to help protect the Cherokee National Forest (CNF). Skelton is its editor and a member of the Harvey Broome Group (HBG).

“One purpose of the Guide is to encourage people to spend time there, in the hopes that a constituency would form to support the protection of the CNF’s wild areas,” Skelton said. Toward that end, more than 100 people have made contributions to its three editions, including photographs and descriptions of its trails, geology, vegetation, wildlife, the area’s political and human history, and much more. The CNF is located north and south of its more famous neighbor, the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, and along the North Carolina state line. It is like the Smokies in many ways — similar elevations, flora and fauna, scenery, and streams.

The HBG’s interest in protecting the CNF dates back to the mid-1970s, shortly after the Group was formed. “At that time, we had begun working on obtaining wilderness designation for many areas in the Cherokee National Forest,” Skelton said, “but it would be almost a decade before Congress passed Wilderness bills in 1984 and 1986 that included many of the especially scenic areas of the CNF. However, some great areas like the Upper Bald River watershed were not included in those 1980s bills, and it would take 32 more years to get those areas protected by a 2018 bill. The guidebook has supported all those efforts.”

In the 1970s, no detailed topographical maps or guides of the trails in the CNF existed. “Indeed, when I personally started exploring the CNF in the early 1970s, the best map I had of the Citico Creek area was a hand-drawn map I found on a rough trail while wandering and exploring there,” Skelton said.

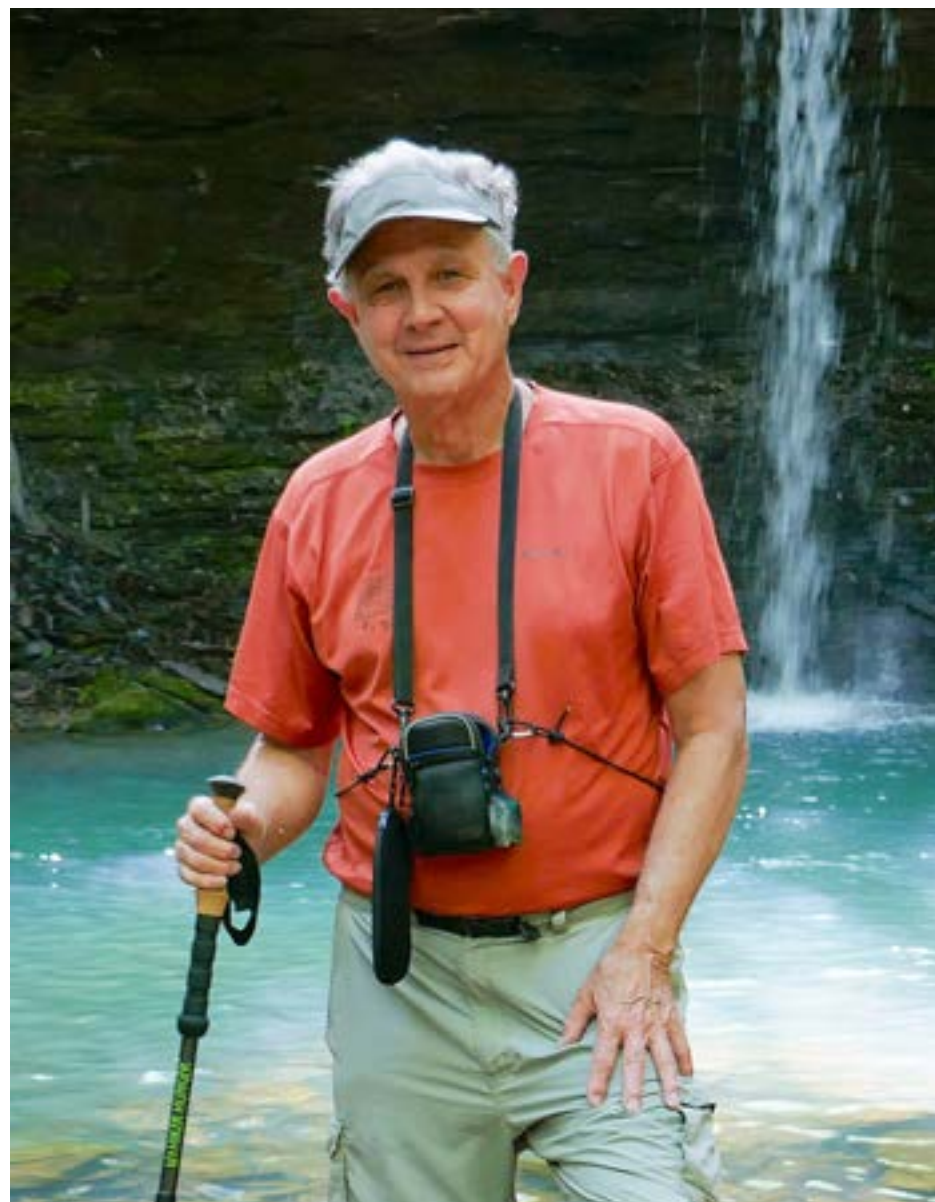
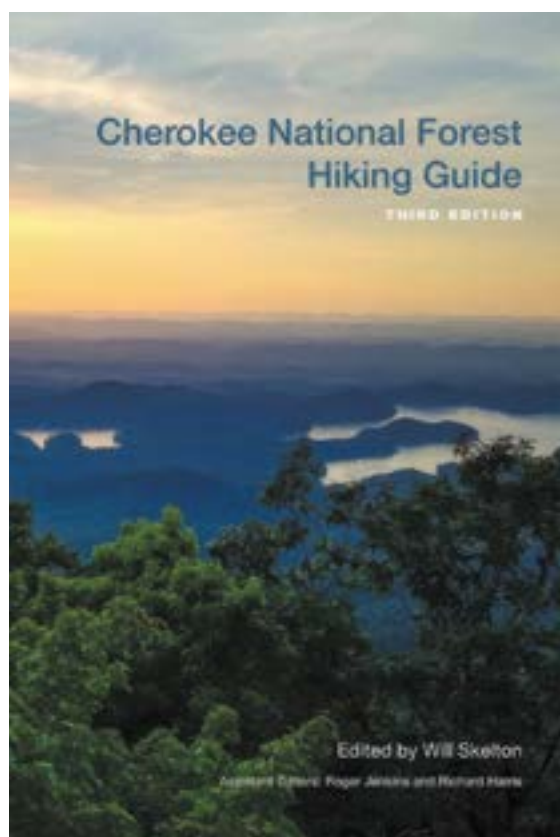
Accordingly, in addition to pushing for a Wilderness Protection designation of the most scenic areas of the CNF, HBG made maps and guides. The first effort was by former HBG member Roger Jenkins who, with help from others, produced in 1984 a map with trails and descriptions in black and white on a large folding sheet of paper. They then proceeded to do a real guidebook, the first ever for the entire CNF.

### We Were Total Amateurs.

“All of us were total amateurs as none of us had done a guidebook before,” Skelton said. “I was the editor, and a huge group of people from all over east Tennessee helped me. We had little technology back then and measured the trails by walking every mile with a measuring wheel. We bought a dozen or so wheels and passed them out to the people hiking the trails. The hikers then walked all the trails, noting the mileage and details to be mentioned in a guide, and typing up draft descriptions. The CNF trails are not always well maintained or signed and often the hiking and route finding were quite difficult.”

Janice McMillian, Will’s law firm secretary, finalized the reports from the hikers on an IBM Selectric typewriter. University of Tennessee geography professor Will Fontanez produced the maps for all three editions. Numerous people sent photographs of the trails which Jenkins edited and organized.

Finally, Governor Lamar Alexander agreed to do the foreword for the first edition, and for the following two editions during his tenure as a United States Senator. Alexander supported the 1980s Wilderness bills. When he introduced the Tennessee Wilderness Act of 2010 on the floor of the U.S. Senate, he recognized Will Skelton as being “instrumental in conservation for decades in Tennessee.” The bill designated 19,556 acres as wilderness in the Cherokee National Forest. “As Senator, Alexander was the most important person in getting the Tennessee Wilderness Act passed by Congress in 2018,” Skelton said.



Harvey Broome Group member Will Skelton is the editor of the *Cherokee National Forest Hiking Guide*, now in its third edition.

The scope of the book also changed over the years. “In the first edition, we covered only the trails in designated or proposed Wilderness or Scenic areas,” Skelton said. “However, in the following editions, we attempted to cover every trail in the CNF. As a result, the book increased in size, from 323 pages in the first edition to 566 in the second edition, and in this new one, 575 pages. Richard Harris of Tellico Plains and Roger Jenkins, now living in Bozeman, Montana, served as assistant editors for the third edition.”

### Technology Made It Easier.

For the 1996 and 2024 editions, the technology had changed. Word processing was much easier, and Skelton could assemble the trail reports the hikers submitted. For the second, the 1996 edition, they again used a measuring wheel for mileage; but for this new edition, they switched to GPS devices. Communicating with all the people working on the guide was much easier with email, instead of the hand delivery and U.S. mail used in the 1992 edition. The new edition provides detailed descriptions of 840 miles of trails and 225 trails in the 555,598 acres of the Cherokee National Forest (more than the trails, miles, and acreage in the Smokies). Shorter descriptions are also provided for the sections of the Appalachian Trail and Benton MacKaye Trail located within the CNF. The book is divided into 33 geographic sections with maps and photographs (some in color) for each section, together with a short history of the section, and detailed trail descriptions. The trail descriptions themselves include relevant information like trail length, difficulty, elevation change, and allowed uses, plus a detailed mile-by-mile description. Also included are warnings and advice for hikers, use of maps and GPS, trail maintenance, and listings of CNF offices, outings and issues groups, waterfalls, and grassy balds.

The book is available on Amazon as well as in many bookstores and outdoor stores. Skelton says of the book: “Hopefully the *Guide* will keep people hiking, backpacking and enjoying the Cherokee National Forest AND supporting its protected areas far into the future.”

Contact Emily at [tnsierran.editor@gmail.com](mailto:tnsierran.editor@gmail.com)

# The Wolf River, the 4-H Club and a Pipeline in West Tennessee

by Roger (Ray) Graham, Land Management Conservation Committee



Roger (Ray) Graham

My original purpose for becoming involved with the Sierra Club was to organize resistance against the Memphis megasite toxic-waste pipeline (aka the Poopline). Through the Sierra Club, I organized a conservation committee in Tipton County with the main purpose of stopping the toxic pipeline. At one point it appeared that the megasite and its pipeline would never be built, but then Ford acquired the site to build a facility that would produce electric pick-up trucks. Many of the former pipeline detractors now changed their stance. Ford was seen as beneficial because one large polluter would likely be easier to monitor and control than several unknown, medium-sized polluters. Aside from the pipeline, the committee also

addressed several issues, including buffer zones between crop land and residential neighborhoods, and litter along Tipton waterways. Sierra Club-Tipton also staffed a booth at the annual Tipton-Rosemark Country Fair which gave me a chance to speak with the public about issues such as the Ford plant, solar farms, a proposed gravel pit, landscaping choices, and protecting local natural areas.

Before I became involved with the Sierra Club, I was active in the conservation of the Wolf River. This is a river that I have known since my youth. I have spent much of my life trying to convince locals that the Wolf is a beautiful natural habitat that should be preserved. As a young adult, I began kayaking and later joined the Wolf River Conservancy (WRC) as a river guide in Fayette County. The guides host monthly kayak trips on different sections of the Wolf. During this time, I also served as an intern for the WRC. My primary purpose was to paddle

and video-document every section of the Wolf River. I blogged frequently and created over a hundred short videos (<https://www.youtube.com/user/wolfriver100>). I became not only one of the first people to paddle every section of the Wolf, but also the first to document the journey. The task was not easy with most of the headwater sections being inhospitable due to heavy undergrowth and lack of a clear navigable channel. As difficult as it was, my group did discover a headwaters section that was mostly navigable and scenic enough to return to every spring. I'm still a member of the WRC, but no longer volunteer with their guide group. However, I still guide small groups and started a Facebook page called Wolf River Nashoba with over 3,000 followers.

I am a high school teacher in Shelby County with my conservation work being a hobby. I have reached a point in my career where I can combine the hobby and work. I have collaborated with other professionals to restore the 4-H Club at Bartlett High School. I volunteered to sponsor the club then wrote grants totaling approximately \$3000 to fund a school garden. I then purchased metal garden beds that the club members assembled. The club also received assistance from school staff and the UT-TSU Extension Office. The club has approximately 20 members from grades 9-12 who attend regularly to build and plan the next phase of the garden. In addition to the volunteer work, I teach a subject called Leadworthy which calls on students to participate in community service projects. Each Leadworthy section will soon have a garden bed to plan and work. Leadworthy students also perform service acts such as campus and park litter removal.

Currently, I serve as vice chair on the Tennessee Sierra Club Land Use Committee. This committee works to determine best practices for landscaping including selecting native plants over exotic cultivars. This group has been a good source of information when I have had questions about my school's 4-H garden or wanted advice concerning local environmental issues. Serving as the vice chair has given me a chance to represent West Tennessee while learning more about statewide issues.

Contact Ray at [rgraham@bartlettschools.org](mailto:rgraham@bartlettschools.org)

## What the Tennessee Titan Can Teach Us: Trees, Humans & Community

### Protecting Nashville's Highland Rim Forest: Part 3

by Karen McIntyre, Middle Tennessee Group

When the tallest tree in Tennessee, the Tennessee Titan, was 175 feet tall, 40 feet in girth, and over 1300 years old, it was saved from logging. Unfortunately, because the forest surrounding it was logged, the singular tree, a bald cypress, stood out against the sky like a lightning rod until 1976, when lightning struck it. The Tennessee smoldered for months before its obituary was finalized. In its rescue and death, the old tree provides a metaphor for our ignorance of how natural systems function. In trying to preserve one ancient tree, we guaranteed its demise by not recognizing the importance of its community.

As the old tree slowly died, a growing body of evidence supporting the value of nature and our connection to it was emerging. Fifteen years ago, Radnor2River was the first group to refer to the forest skirting Nashville as the "Nashville Highland Rim Forest." Their goal was to preserve a corridor that contains state-listed rare species and mature forest displaying old-growth characteristics from Radnor Lake to the Cumberland River for the purpose of facilitating animal migration. At a time when most of us had no idea that animal migration was even a problem, this group of foresightful neighbors formed the Westmeade Conservancy to put private lands in that corridor into trust.

#### A Clear Lesson from the Titan

Many hard-fought small steps and compromises kept just enough momentum going over the past decade to help the wider community awaken to the forest's deep connections to the health of Nashville and our planet. The Titan's lesson was clear: If we are to slow or reverse the amplifying impacts of climate change, we must protect existing biodiversity and habitat and restore it wherever possible.

In 2016, E.O. Wilson, a renowned ecologist, published his *Half-Earth Project: Our Planet's Fight for Life*. His concept was simple. If life on Earth was to continue as we know it, we would need to preserve half the planet for nature. Unfortunately, development already covered more than half the planet. Even so, Douglas Tallamy was inspired to launch the Homegrown National Park movement, and today over a thousand Nashvillians participate in Re-Wild Nashville, Second Sunday Gardeners, The Wild Ones, Weed Wrangle, and other loosely formed networks to do the work of restoration. While these ideas arrived too late to save the Titan, perhaps they are not too late to save what remains of Nashville's Highland Rim Forest.

At the same time, thanks to the visionary leadership of Mayor Carl Dean, Nashville's government recognized the value of behaving sus-

tainably and created policies to increase the tree canopy, along with publishing a decade-long study, 'Nashville Next' which focused on many sustainability issues. The convergence of that report and several other studies strengthened the case for the forest. That case was being picked up by a new, more diverse group, the Alliance to Conserve Nashville's Highland Rim Forest.

After launching the effort to save the forest at the Metro Council Meeting in June of 2023, the Alliance continued to pressure the city to acknowledge that the forest fit into existing plans. The Alliance's year-long, behind-the-scenes campaign included branding the forest, creating connections with public and private partners, and developing instruments that people could use to understand the forest's critical importance.

Because designing a comprehensive plan is complex work, the group broke it down into four identifiable stages for success: raising public awareness of the need to act; securing funding to cover costs of putting land in trust; shoring up political will; and fostering action by private citizens and nonprofits to work together to: (1) acquire additional public lands, especially adjacent to existing parks, and/or create new parks; (2) create conservation easements on private lands; and (3) zone to protect existing forest with conservation overlays. The "Davidson County Conservation Ecology Study," slated to begin this year, should provide a framework for these three tasks.

#### Benefits of Saving the Forest

The Alliance has begun to gather data and maps to help people understand the issues and the solutions. A "storymap" helps understand the forest's critical importance to the health and well-being of its residents. The forest comprises 127,000 acres, most of which is dense canopy and is possibly the world's largest urban forest. With this informative work, the Alliance thus illuminates the ways this important forest benefits all of us. Using a series of maps they persuasively demonstrated the major benefits of saving the forest as (1) sequestering carbon, (2) absorbing rainfall and slowing water flow (thus reducing flood and landslide risks), (3) serving as the "lungs of the land" — cleaning the air and providing relief from urban heat island effects in summer, (4) purifying water (virtually all the clean water in Davidson is in forest streams), and (5) supporting biodiversity.

It is, of course, the forest that must be saved and not only the one extraordinary tree.

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

# Nuclear Energy Is Not Clean Energy

Don Safer, Co-Chair of the SC Grassroots Network Nuclear Free Team



Don Safer, Co-Chair of the SC Grassroots Network Nuclear Free Team

You've no doubt seen many articles and stories about how nuclear power is not so bad after all and that we must use it to lower carbon emissions. These are part of a concerted effort from the nuclear industry and the U.S. Department of Energy to re-brand and reframe nuclear power as clean energy: a climate solution and boon to the environment.

The false narrative is that nuclear power is clean, green, safe, and zero carbon and that radioactive waste is not a problem. Further, nuclear power is an important part of the climate solution because renewables can't provide the power we need.

**Nuclear energy is dirty, dangerous and expensive.** Nuclear power is not safe or

carbon free. Electricity from uranium is a complicated, energy intensive, polluting fuel chain that creates environmental and public health challenges like those in Oak Ridge, Erwin, and Paducah. It begins with the mining which leaves toxic tailings or contaminates groundwater. The higher quality ore is milled into yellowcake concentrate, converted to uranium hexafluoride, and then U-235 levels are enriched to enable fission. Then fuel fabrication makes the reactor-ready fuel. Producing fuel has a significant carbon footprint. Managing the waste for thousands of years requires more carbon use and expense, while imposing a heavy burden on future generations.

**Nuclear waste is still a huge, unresolved, difficult challenge.** In the reactor core, many different radioactive isotopes are created. In light-water reactors, nuclear fission releases heat to generate electricity and a large amount of radioactive material which is millions of times more radioactive than new fuel. Production of nuclear power creates highly radioactive used fuel, lower-level contaminated materials, and depleted uranium to name a few. Radioactive disintegration produces biological damage, damage to DNA and ultimately the human genome. As isotopes in waste decay, they must be safely isolated. Some, like strontium, cesium, and iodine, are biologically available, that is, they are taken into living tissue. They can concentrate in the food chain in living organisms including humans.

Used fuel, called "spent fuel" by the industry, is especially problematic and challenging. It is lethal and must be isolated for well over one hundred thousand years. Today's used fuel assemblies will burn if exposed to the air, so they are kept in water for a number of years and then placed in inert-gas-filled, one-half-inch-thick, stainless-steel canisters with vented concrete overpacks for temporary storage.

Today, after 70 years of commercial nuclear power plant operations in the US, we are storing all our used fuel onsite at reactors because there is no safe long-term alternative. There are serious flaws in the current storage of this material and 2000 metric tons of waste per year continues to be manufactured. The U.S. stores over 90,000 metric tons, including that at TVA's reactors. Schemes claiming to "reprocess" the used fuel to use it again come with a heavy negative environmental and health impact.

**Nuclear power perpetuates & exacerbates environmental injustice.** Nuclear facilities are most often located in economically disadvantaged communities. Uranium mining is often on or near native lands. Radioactive waste storage and processing facilities are almost always placed in politically vulnerable areas where organized opposition is less likely.

**Nuclear power is a nuclear weapons proliferation enabler.** Reprocessing extracts plutonium, creating bomb-making material, from used fuel. Many proposed new reactors would use HALEU fuel, which is enriched much closer to weapons grade than today's fuel.

**Wide deployment of nuclear reactors is unwise in a climate destabilized world.** A tsunami triggered the meltdown and containment failure of three reactors at Fukushima, adding a manmade disaster to a natural one. If a nuclear reactor had been in the path of any of the recently flooded rivers in our mountains, we could have seen a repeat of that awful scenario.

**Nuclear power is not a climate solution.** Construction of new reactors would be too slow and too costly. Federal dollars should go to deploying renewables; developing cost effective, scalable, energy storage; grid improvements; and mitigating existing nuclear waste and pollution.

Further, existing nuclear reactors should be retired as soon as feasible. Current reactors are more likely to fail and more costly to maintain as they continue to age.

Contact Don at [dsafer@comcast.net](mailto:dsafer@comcast.net)

## The Snow Man

by Wallace Stevens

One must have a mind of winter  
To regard the frost and the boughs  
Of the pine-trees crusted with snow;

And have been cold a long time  
To behold the junipers shagged with ice,  
The spruces rough in the distant glitter

Of the January sun; and not to think  
Of any misery in the sound of the wind,  
In the sound of a few leaves,

Which is the sound of the land  
Full of the same wind  
That is blowing in the same bare place

For the listener, who listens in the snow,  
And, nothing himself, beholds  
Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.

*Wallace Stevens was born Oct. 2, 1879, in Reading, Pennsylvania. He attended Harvard University, and graduated from the New York Law School. For most of his career, he worked at Hartford Accident and Indemnity Co., where he eventually became vice president in 1934. His final book, Collected Poems, won the Pulitzer Prize in 1954, just a year before his death.*

## Establishing Access (continued from page 4)

Plans are underway to clear the trail, establish a maintenance program, and even get a couple parking areas established alongside the Sherman Reservation. A successful re-establishment of the trail and new parking spaces will involve several key players: the City of Chattanooga Parks Department, the National Park Service, Trust for Public Land, and the area neighborhood associations — as well as the Cherokee Group orchestrating the project. So far, contact with the other agencies has produced positive feedback.

We are hoping to build on the enthusiasm from the block party and get folks to this pocket of natural beauty. East Chattanooga is an historically Black neighborhood that suffered a period of decline, but has bounced back during recent years. It has a glaring lack of easily accessible green space for such a fair-sized population. The connector trail and parking will be vital to providing access. The whole project falls in line with the recently adopted City Parks Plan, which strives to establish nearby nature recreation for every area of Chattanooga. Keep an ear open for upcoming progress reports!

Contact Dave at [sierra.tn.cherokee@gmail.com](mailto:sierra.tn.cherokee@gmail.com)

## Want to Have More Impact? Join a Committee!

Conservation Committees each focus on one issue and work on it year round. To learn more about what these committees do or to join one, please contact the chair listed.

Land Management: Virginia Dale [virginia.dale4@gmail.com](mailto:virginia.dale4@gmail.com)

Solid Waste and Mining: Dan Firth [dwfirth@gmail.com](mailto:dwfirth@gmail.com)

Energy: Tim Weeks [timweekstn@gmail.com](mailto:timweekstn@gmail.com)

Water: Axel Ringe [onyxfarm@bellsouth.net](mailto:onyxfarm@bellsouth.net)

Transportation: Kent Minault [kminault@gmail.com](mailto:kminault@gmail.com)

Forests and Public Lands: Davis Mounger [wdmounger@yahoo.com](mailto:wdmounger@yahoo.com)

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“A Stream in Appalachia.” by Russell Strobe, a Cherokee High School student, was the 2024 first place winner in Care NET Conservation Committee’s photo contest.

# CARE NET Inspires Students to Photograph the Natural World

by Bill Kornrich, Chair, Care Net Conservation Committee

In October, Sierra Club’s Care NET Conservation Committee organized a photo contest and exhibit for Hawkins County high school students. The exhibit theme, “Our River, Our Lives,” focused on the Holston River and its importance in our lives. Students entered photos they had taken that had some connection to the watershed. Care NET members met and worked with high school teachers to promote the project. Most students have cell phones, so the ability to take photos would not be difficult.

Care NET developed the digital photos and framed them for display during Hawkins County Heritage Days, October 11-13, Hawkins County’s largest annual event. A panel of three judges, all of whom share a knowledge of and interest in photography, chose the top four winners.

First place went to Russell Strobe from Cherokee High School; second place winner was Chloe Justice from Clinch School; and Charlie Steiff and Blake Seals, both from Clinch School, were third place winners.

Over the years, Care NET has held semi-annual trash pickups along the river, invited speakers to address river quality, and created a traveling exhibit on the river displayed at community events, libraries, and museums. In these efforts, Care NET has partnered with the Hawkins County Solid Waste Department, Keep the Tennessee River Beautiful, and community groups.

Care NET plans to make this an annual event. Photography may be a portal to more engagement about the Holston River and the environment in general. Working with schools enables outreach to and education for a younger set of community members.

Contact Bill at [bkornrich@gmail.com](mailto:bkornrich@gmail.com)



## Tennessee Chapter Winter Retreat

Join fellow members for the Chapter Winter Retreat January 17-19 at Cedars of Lebanon State Park, just south of Lebanon.

### Accommodations

We will meet and sleep in the Group Lodge which features bunkhouse lodging (women’s & men’s dorms). Bring a sleeping bag or linens/blankets, towels and personal items. Camping spaces and cabins may be available to rent (with a 10% Tennessee resident discount). Hotels are 10 miles north of the Park. Venue information and directions: <https://goo.gl/LCKLM3>.

### Meals

Hot meals will be prepared at the lodge for Sat/Sun Breakfast and Sat dinner. Please bring your lunch for Saturday. Friday evening, prepare your own meal in the lodge kitchen. OR meet at the Group Lodge and carpool with friends for dinner in Lebanon 15 minutes north of the park, OR join those eating at Demos’ Restaurant in Lebanon (leaving the Group Lodge around 6:30 PM for Demos’). Please call Demos’ at (615) 443-4600 to make reservation for 7 PM. Let them know that you are part of the Sierra Club.)

### Hikes

Hikes on Saturday and Sunday led by a park ranger. Be sure to prepare for muddy trail conditions (or frozen) and winter weather likely in late January.

### Other Activities

Solar demonstration, updates on conservation activities and legislation, silent auction, bonfire with S’mores, ExCom meeting

### Cost

Registration includes: lodging, a full breakfast Saturday & Sunday, & Saturday dinner  
 Adults Registering by January 9th — \$60 Register; by January 10th or later — \$70  
 Students - \$30 Children under 16 — No Charge; Is this your first Chapter retreat? Pay only \$40

More info and register here: <https://bit.ly/SCTN-Winter2025Retreat>

Questions? Ask Tim Weeks [timweekstn@gmail.com](mailto:timweekstn@gmail.com) or (615) 293-8178



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