



A Virtuous Circle

## Fellow Tennesseans:

David W. Salyers, P.E.

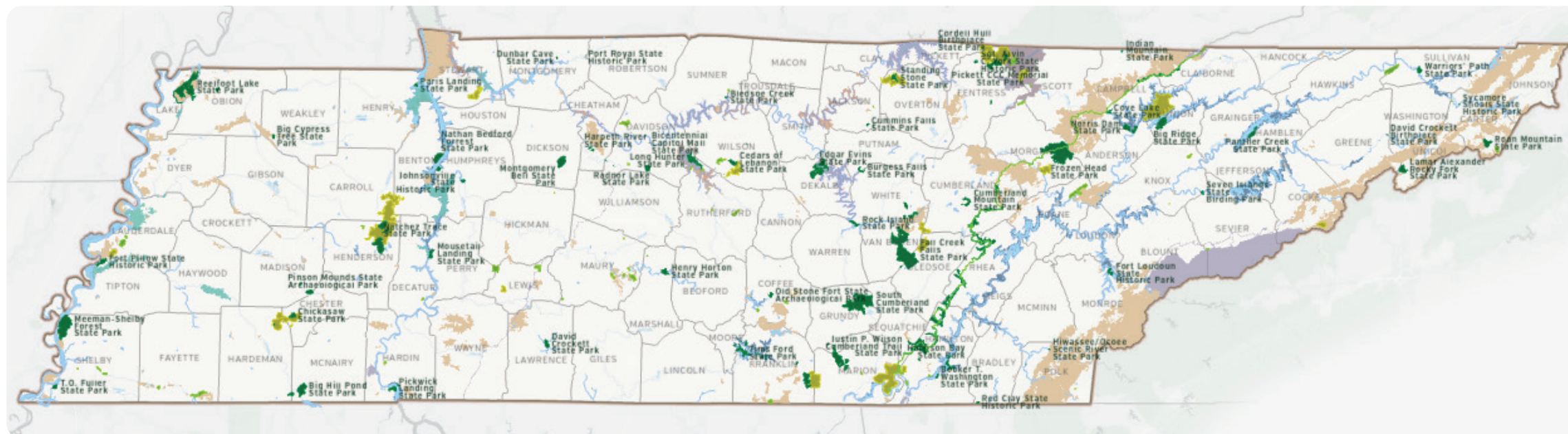


I'm pleased to share this 2023 Annual Report covering department highlights from the past year. It's truly been a historic period of achievement resulting from thoughtful planning, deliberate investments, and meaningful partnerships. A prominent example of this progress is the Lee administration's collaboration with the General Assembly to develop a conservation strategy for Tennessee that balances our state's economic growth with a plan to protect our environment.

Our current state budget allocated nearly \$400 million to improve and expand three additional state natural areas, build two new park lodges, complete four more outdoor trails and create four new state parks. Last August, the administration convened the first annual Tennessee Conservation Summit, bringing together state officials, business and community leaders and conservation stakeholders from across the state to help develop strategic initiatives stewarding Tennessee's natural heritage for generations to come. The investments we're making today will ensure that our state's natural beauty and rich natural heritage - the authentic Tennessee that brings visitors, families, and companies here from across will nation - will be around for future generations to enjoy.

I'm proud that Tennessee is a model state demonstrating how it is possible to be clean and growing - proving that a clean environment and robust economy must go hand in hand. TDEC's Green Star Partnership recognizes companies with strong commitment to pollution prevention and support for environmental protection that produces a healthy economy that grows and protects jobs. Our state is fortunate to have so many companies who understand a cleaner, safer environment goes is essential for economic prosperity and increased quality of life in Tennessee.

## Team TDEC, One Tennessee



Indeed, that is part of the virtuous circle that Justin Wilson identified and has promoted through his leadership over the past 40 years. Justin helped us all understand Tennessee was going to be more prosperous because we had cleaner air, abundant clean water, fruitful land, and greater access to diverse outdoor recreational resources. Justin steered our state toward a cleaner environment and meaningful conservation that has truly enabled Tennessee to thrive.

Over the past year Gov. Lee has encouraged leaders across the state to look ahead and lay kind of foundation where Tennesseans a quarter century from now will say, "I'm glad they took those actions 25-30 years ago." I'm inspired by this call to take the long view, to think about the Tennessee we'll be leaving behind to our children and grandchildren. Whether it's Justin Wilson's lifetime of conservation contributions or encouraging your children to appreciate nature and outdoor adventures in state parks like the Lamberth Family, we are all creating a legacy. Thank you for partnering with TDEC today as we continue to build this vital legacy for Tennessee tomorrow.

*David*



Jennifer Pfeiffer, Chief of Staff Comptroller's Office; Blair Beaty, TDEC Legislative Director, Karen Simo, TDEC Deputy Commissioner/COO; TDEC Commissioner David Salyers; and Jason Mumpower, Tennessee Comptroller, recognize Comptroller Emeritus Justin P. Wilson (sitting) as recipient of the 2023 Robert Sparks Walker Lifetime Conservation Achievement Award at the Tennessee State Capitol.



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## A Conservation Strategy for Tennessee: Historic Investments in the Great Outdoors

In his 2023 State of the State address, Governor Lee shared, “From Mountain City to Memphis, our state is blessed with natural beauty and rich resources. Through the years, Tennessee has maintained responsible stewardship of our natural resources, but it’s time to develop a conservation strategy that balances our state’s economic growth with a plan to protect our environment.” TDEC is primed to put historic new investments to work in conservation, balancing the state’s economic growth with protecting the environment.

Gov. Bill Lee and the Tennessee General Assembly have paved the way for several exciting projects with a \$400 million conservation strategy. The strategy includes plans for **four new state parks on existing state-owned land, enhancements to three State Natural Areas, investments in four outdoor trails, and reconstruction of lodges at Henry Horton State Park and Natchez Trace State Park.**

The four new parks – Scott’s Gulf State Wilderness State Park in White County, Middle Fork Bottoms State Park in Madison County, Devil’s Backbone State Park in Lewis County, and North Chickamauga Creek State Park in Hamilton and Sequatchie counties – will bring the total of state parks to 61 and will be economic drivers, especially in rural communities.

The enhancement of State Natural Areas also balances economic growth with environmental protection. These steps increase outdoor recreation options, and new investments will help provide ranger capacity to manage visitation, improve the user experience, and protect natural resources.

The advances also support the department’s existing Access 2030 plan, where the goal is to make Tennessee’s state parks the most accessible in the nation by 2030. The department will aim to eliminate barriers for mobility-impaired visitors by increasing and enhancing personnel, equipment, and informational resources.

These extraordinary steps in conservation will protect the environment, improve health, and enhance quality of life. The state has an investment plan dedicated to the state’s natural wonders and to the people who love them.



Members of the Tennessee General Assembly join TDEC leadership for its annual Legislative Field Trip.



### Governor Lee’s Conservation Tour

Governor Lee traveled the state on a Conservation Tour in September with visits to **Seven Islands State Birding Park** for bird banding in Kodak, at **Booker T. Washington State Park** for a hike alongside an all-terrain wheelchair in Chattanooga, at the future **Middle Fork Bottoms State Park** for a wetlands tour in Three Way, at **Mousetail Landing State Park** for a Tennessee Serves volunteer event in Linden, and at the future **North Chickamauga Creek Gorge State Park** for bouldering and a splash in the streams of Signal Mountain.

### Conservation Strategy Highlights



Commissioner Salyers, former U.S. Senator and Nature Conservancy Global Chairman Bill Frist, M.D., and Deputy Commissioner Greer Tidwell at the Tennessee Conservation Summit on August 3.



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## Something to BRAG About: Cleaning Up Contaminated Sites Across Tennessee

**G**ov. Bill Lee and the Tennessee General Assembly this year gave TDEC the tools to dramatically address blighted sites that can be turned into economic assets. The new Rural Brownfield Redevelopment Act will drive investment in smaller rural communities – a priority of the Governor – by empowering local governments and development boards with resources and incentives they need to identify, investigate, and remediate brownfields. Public investment in the cleanup and redevelopment of brownfields is proven to create jobs, reduce health risks, increase property values and tax revenue, and drives additional investment.

The legislation creates the Brownfield Redevelopment Area Grant (BRAG), which was awarded \$5.3 million for future grants. **Benefits of BRAG include positive environmental outcomes, reducing risk to human health, returning properties to marketable use, and providing direct funding to communities.** BRAG creates flexibility, financial resources, and technical expertise to be a catalyst for redevelopment in urban, rural, and suburban communities across the state.

Two notable examples of brownfield projects addressed before the BRAG legislation are found in the American Nuclear Corporation (ANC) site in Anderson County and the Smokey Mountain Smelters site in Knoxville. At the ANC site, TDEC has worked with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which conducted a survey assessing conditions of a building on-site. The EPA has allocated \$13.5 million for cleanup, with \$4.8 million available immediately. At the Smokey Mountain Smelters site in Knoxville, the business operated an aluminum smelter from 1979-1994, melting scrap aluminum and casting it into aluminum metal bars. The site was put on the National Priorities List in 2010 and cleanup began in early 2023.

These steps mean TDEC can work with communities to erase blighted sites and improve them at the same time. The department sees this as an excellent opportunity and is devoted to making the most of it.

### Brownfield Redevelopment Spotlight: Citizens Gas and Light in Jackson



The former Citizens Gas and Light property in Jackson was a manufactured gas plant that operated from 1871-1931. This property is located near downtown Jackson, between the farmers market and an underserved community.



The completed brownfield site cleanup turned the property into an urban pocket park and outdoor amphitheater that complements the vision of downtown Jackson's revitalization, and a new 20-acre development, the Jackson Walk community, grew around the former Citizens Gas and Light Property.



Governor Lee signs a ceremonial bill for the Rural Brownfield Reinvestment Act in Bolivar. He is joined by TDEC Commissioner David Salyers, Bolivar Mayor Julian McTizic, Hardeman County Mayor Todd Pulse, State Rep. Johnny Shaw, Savannah City Manager Blake Walley, TDEC Division of Remediation Director Steve Sanders, and TDEC Director of Legislative Affairs Blair Beaty.



Governor Lee celebrates the Rural Brownfield Reinvestment Act with TDEC Environmental Consultant Paula Middlebrooks, TDEC Division of Remediation Director Steve Sanders, and Bolivar Mayor Julian McTizic.



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## Bringing Resources to the Table: Grant Dollars Awarded Across the State

TDEC delivered once-in-a-lifetime investments through its granting programs this year. It was a banner year for the Recreation Resources Division, which awarded **\$26.5 million** to 32 communities across Tennessee for local parks and recreation projects. The Division of Solid Waste Management's Materials Management Grants returned, providing more than **\$2 million** to support county-run convenience centers, used oil collection, solid waste planning, household hazardous waste facilities, and recycling efforts. The Office of Sustainable Practices' Tire Environmental Act Program awarded **\$2.3 million** for projects that support beneficial uses for waste tires.

Last year, the state's Financial Stimulus Accountability Group dedicated \$1.35 billion American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds to TDEC to administer drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure grants. This year, TDEC allocated **\$1 billion** via ARP non-competitive formula-based grants to counties and eligible cities to address systems' critical needs, and **\$200 million** via an ARP competitive grant program supporting regionalization, water reuse, and resource protection.

In addition to its granting programs, TDEC's State Revolving Loan Fund Program provides low-interest-rate loans to meet important needs in water infrastructure, often with significant principal forgiveness. During fiscal year 2023, the State Revolving Loan Fund Program awarded **\$47 million** in low-interest drinking water loans and **\$64 million** in low-interest clean water loans.

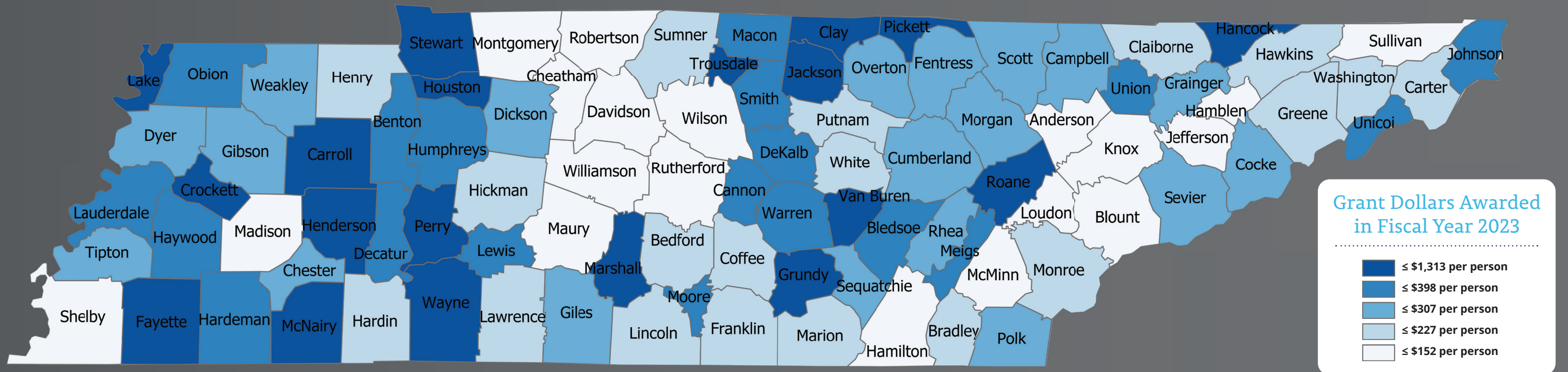


The City of Ardmore has been awarded \$2,269,128.96 to address critical needs and develop an Asset Management Plan to determine the life of aging water and wastewater infrastructure.

The City of Bolivar has been awarded a \$602,000 Local Parks and Recreation Fund grant to improve Sand Beach Park. "I am very excited that my district was awarded these funds to enhance five beloved community amenities, including parks, event centers and recreation facilities," said State Sen. Page Walley, R-Savannah. "The grants will provide recreational opportunities for the entire community and region. I look forward to seeing the great improvements these funds bring to our area."



The City of South Pittsburg has been awarded \$1,571,556.50 for the creation of a new 16.2-acre park to be named River Park. "Providing quality recreational opportunities for residents to enjoy is very important," said State Rep. Iris Rudder, R-Winchester. "The addition of River Park to South Pittsburg will provide more green space for the health and enjoyment of our citizens for generations to come. I am tremendously grateful for TDEC's support and for the leadership of our local partners on this project."





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## Why Wetlands Matter: The Success of Middle Fork Bottoms

**F**rustrated farmers finally gave up on Middle Fork Bottoms in Madison County when persistent floods damaged the farmland. But that created an opportunity for recreation in the area and paved the way for one of Tennessee’s newest state parks.

Roughly 1,200 acres have been transformed into the future Middle Fork Bottoms State Park, a shining example of flood management and improved quality of life through outdoor recreation, located just north of Jackson in the community of Three Way.

In 2018, the West Tennessee River Basin Authority began working in collaboration with the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency and The Nature Conservancy of Tennessee to restore the natural landscape at the Middle Fork of the Forked Deer River. They created the Middle Fork Bottoms Recreation Area.

The area features 250,000 recently planted hardwood trees, 20 acres of warm-season prairie, over 200 acres of restored shallow-water wetlands, and two miles of restored stream. These natural enhancements store floodwaters on site and protect farmers downstream from flood events. For outdoor recreation enthusiasts, the area also provides five miles of paved walking and biking trails, four fishing areas, paddlecraft access to the Middle Fork Forked Deer River, and several restored habitats for wildlife viewing.

In 2023, Governor Lee announced that Middle Fork Bottoms Recreation Area would soon become a new state park. When all the plans are realized, the park will have a visitors center, maintenance facility, boardwalk, boat ramps, trail bridge(s), utility infrastructure, and additional visitor amenities.

**Middle Fork Bottoms has been transformed from a problem in land use to a natural flood risk management area that protects farmers downstream and will soon blossom into a proud new state park all Tennesseans can enjoy.**



Governor Lee visits Middle Fork Bottoms with West Tennessee River Basin Authority Executive Director David Blackwood, Michael Champagne, park manager future Middle Fork Bottoms State Park, and members of the TDEC Executive Leadership Team.



TREES  
ABSORB  
BETWEEN

**10-150 Gallons**

OF  
WATER  
PER DAY

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Each year bottomland hardwood forests provide:

**\$4,700**  
per acre in flood control

**\$3,479**  
per acre pollution treatment

**\$1,157**  
in water supply value

**Ducks Unlimited** finds that **restored wetlands** remove excess nitrogen fertilizer at a cost of \$1/pound while traditional water treatment plants remove it for \$7-\$40/pound.

10

11



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## Making Lifetime Memories: Lamberth Family Adventures in State Parks

**A**s Tennesseans, we are extraordinarily fortunate to live in a state with an abundance of natural beauty.

Within our state's three grand divisions are stunning landscapes and winding waterways that have inspired countless celebrated works of art, music, books, and movies. Enjoying Tennessee's great outdoors is not just a pastime, but part of our cultural heritage and a unifying force for togetherness we have passed down through generations.

As Tennesseans, we also have a reputation for being serious outdoor lovers and my family is no exception. We hunt, we hike, we camp. Beyond that, enjoying all Tennessee has to offer can be as simple as going for a walk, stargazing, or watching wildlife.



*The Lamberth Family*

My wife and I began early on, when our children were very young, encouraging their love for the outdoors and fostering a connection to the natural world. Experiences in nature are important for every child's healthy development but also provide great opportunities for fun and spontaneity.

One of the best ways we've done this is by visiting our spectacular state parks. We can be proud that Tennessee provides free access to more than 200,000 acres in our state parks and ample opportunities for world-class recreation.

Detaching from our daily routines to discover new places has allowed us to make unforgettable family memories. In all, our family has visited 32 of Tennessee's state parks and counting. The more we do, see, and learn, the more our love and appreciation for the Volunteer State deepens.

Tennessee's state parks are one of the best investments we've ever made in ourselves as a state. These lands represent our commitment to the conservation of our natural beauty and the preservation of our rich history. **I encourage you and every Tennessean to take advantage of these priceless treasures.**

– Representative William Lamberth,  
Tennessee House Majority Leader, District 44

# TENNESSEE STATE PARK ADVENTURES

*Lamberth Family Parks Visited:*

- Bicentennial Capitol Mall
- Bledsoe Creek
- Burgess Falls
- Cedars of Lebanon
- Chickasaw
- Cumberland Mountain
- Cummins Falls
- David Crockett Birthplace
- David Crockett
- Dunbar Cave
- Edgar Evins
- Fall Creek Falls
- Harpeth River
- Henry Horton
- Johnsonville
- Long Hunter
- Montgomery Bell
- Mousetail Landing
- Nathan Bedford Forrest
- Norris Dam
- Paris Landing
- Pickett CCC Memorial
- Port Royal
- Radnor Lake
- Reelfoot Lake
- Roan Mountain
- Rock Island
- Rocky Fork
- Scott's Gulf – coming soon
- Standing Stone
- Sycamore Shoals
- Warriors' Path



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## The Endangered Species Act at 50: Bald Eagles Nest Eight Miles from the State Capitol

**A** dramatic turnaround for bald eagles at Radnor Lake State Park couldn't have come at a more fitting time than the 50th anniversary of the federal Endangered Species Act.

The State announced in January 2022 that American bald eagles had nested at Radnor Lake State Park, the closest bald eagle nest to the State Capitol and the fourth registered in Davidson County. Two eaglets were hatched there, but one of the eaglets was lost when a strong wind destroyed the nest leaving them vulnerable to predators. The future of a nest at Radnor Lake became uncertain.

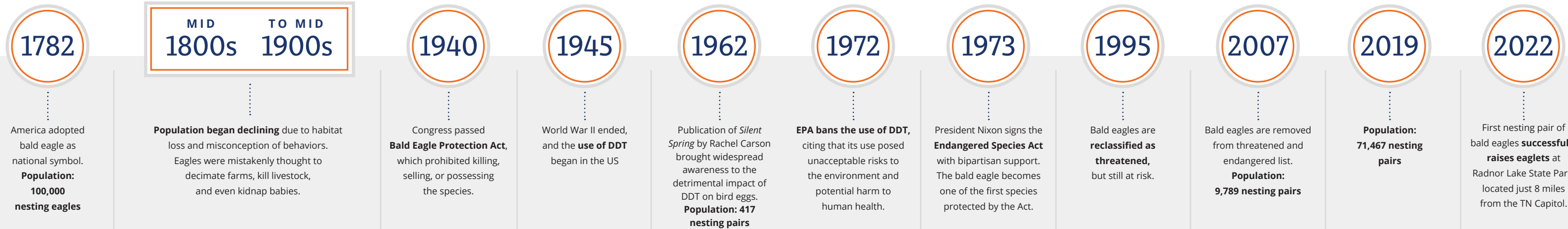
Park staff and volunteers built a platform nearby and built a temporary nest, hoping to keep the family in place. The eagle parents returned to raise the remaining eaglet, ultimately leading it to fly. Today the two eagles have built a new nest at Radnor, and park visitors can view bald eagles with all the promise as before.

Bald eagles can be found in other state parks, most notably Reelfoot Lake State Park, where visitors can see dozens of them. **The latest data from the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency show 251 registered nests in Tennessee.** The Radnor story is a reminder that preserving a habitat is never simple.

When America adopted the bald eagle as its national symbol in 1782, there were 100,000 nesting eagles in the country. By 1963, there were only 417 nesting pairs. The Endangered Species Act was established in 1973, and the bald eagle was one of the first species protected. The nest at Radnor Lake has proved to be a comeback story for the park and another symbol of the national revival of the bird.



Top: One of the two eaglets hatched at Radnor Lake this year fledges out of the nest to be fed by an adult eagle. Photo credit: Ron Boniol.  
 Bottom Left: The Barbara J. Mapp Aviary Center at Radnor Lake is home to seven raptor ambassadors. Eagle #2 came to the center eight years ago after being deemed non-releasable due to injury. Photo credit: Damian Piotrowski  
 Bottom Right: One of the two eaglets hatched at Radnor Lake this year shortly after leaving the nest. Photo credit: Ron Boniol.





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## ARP Non-Competitive Grant Program Statistics

TDEC is excited to announce that it has awarded and executed 100% of the grant dollars for the American Rescue Plan (ARP) non-competitive grants for drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure projects.



The program received 100% participation from counties and 98% participation by cities. This represents 329 unique grantees spread across 337 unique grants.

1,166  
Total projects proposed across the state

“Our non-competitive ARP grants empower communities to strategically invest in Tennessee’s water resources for future generations – while continuing to meet immediate needs.”

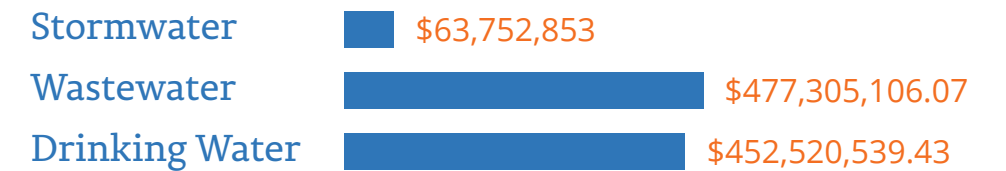
- TDEC Commissioner David Salyers



The non-competitive grant program will fund 1,166 projects across a range of three project types:



### Funding Breakdown by Project Type

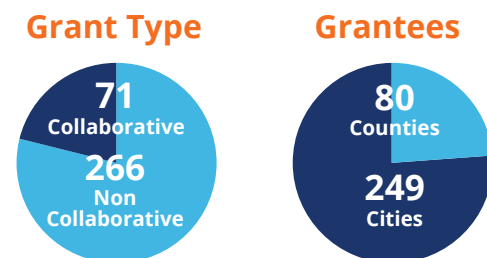
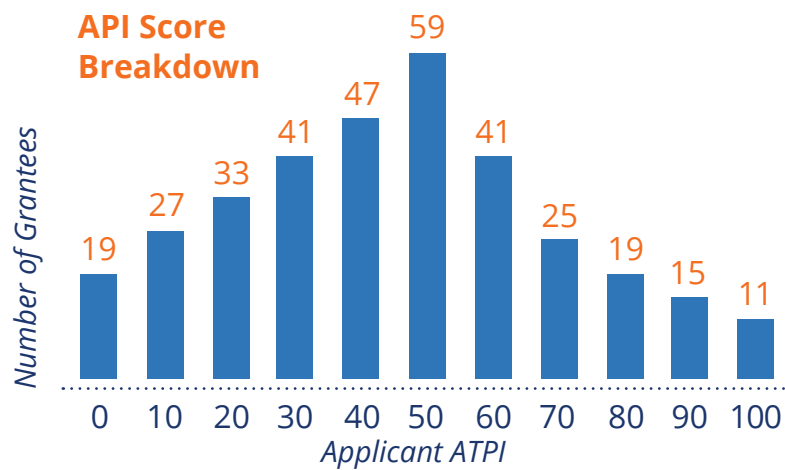
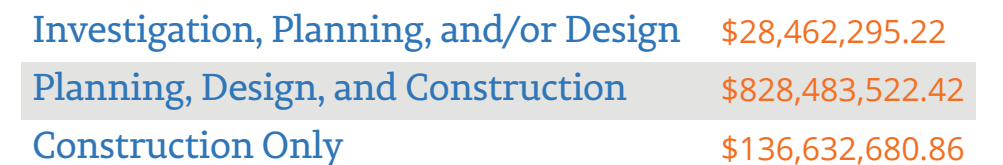


The projects are broken down by the following project award types:

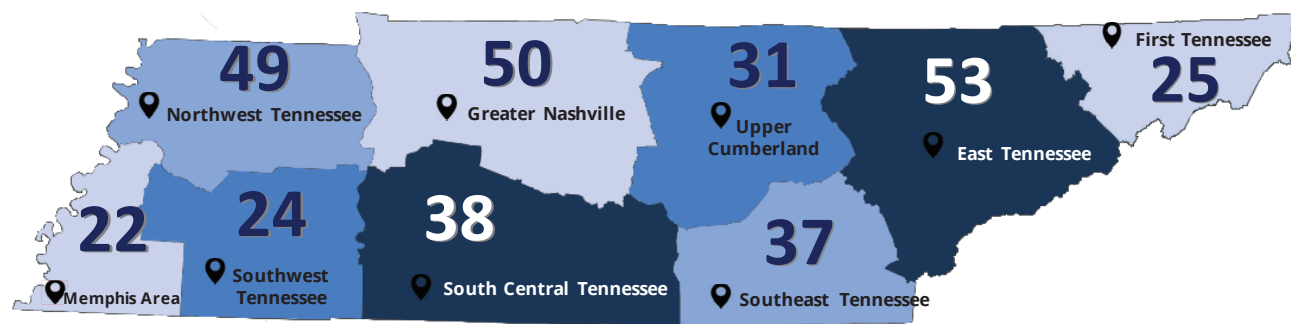


253  
Asset Management Plan Projects

### Funding Breakdown by Project Type



TDEC reached a diverse range of communities both geographically and socio-economically. 67% of applicants represent disadvantaged communities.



Note: As projects are implemented, final numbers are subject to change.

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## Partners in Conservation: Bill Dance Fishing Lakes Make a Splash

**H**aving Bill Dance's name on a group of lakes in Tennessee is like having George Washington's name on the nation's capital. It couldn't be more natural. Now, Tennessee State Parks are joining the fishing legend on an exciting venture that will enhance communities throughout the state.

Through a partnership with the state Department of Tourist Development, the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, and Bill Dance Outdoors, TDEC is part of a team overseeing Bill Dance Signature Lakes, connecting the famed fisherman with some of Tennessee's most spectacular lakes. The collection will promote Tennessee as a top-notch fishing location for anglers from around the world.

The state and TWRA are investing \$15 million at 18 lakes bearing the name of the fishing celebrity. The collaboration will enhance not only outdoors enjoyment but also economic activity at the areas surrounding the lakes. Fishing generates \$1.2 billion in economic impact annually and supports 7,480 jobs across the state. The plan brings upgrades such as courtesy docks, parking, more access points, fishing piers, fish-cleaning stations, and signage.

Each Grand Division of the state will have lakes in the group.

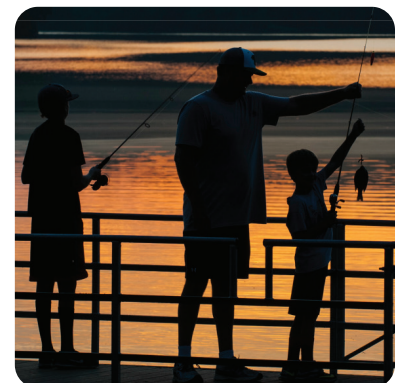
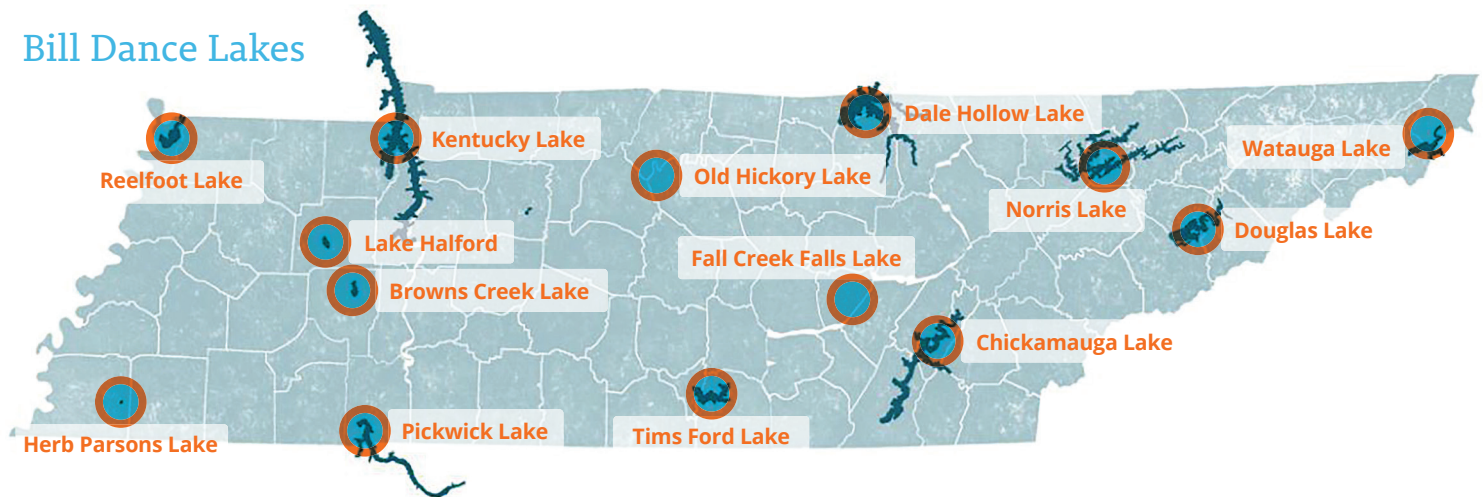
Tennessee is seeing phenomenal success at its state parks and state natural areas, and the Bill Dance Signature Lakes are expected to produce even greater enjoyment and community development. **This is like landing a big one.**



The State of TN and TWRA  
**IS INVESTING**  
**\$15,000,000**  
**AT 18 LAKES**

Fishing generates **\$1.2 billion** in economic impact annually and supports **7,480 jobs** across the state

### Bill Dance Lakes





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## Recognizing Industrial Excellence: The TN Green Star Partnership

When businesses practice responsible environmental protection, TDEC believes they should be recognized, honored, and assisted. The department has a program – the Tennessee Green Star Partnership – specifically designed to shine a light on those businesses, and it highlighted three in the last year.

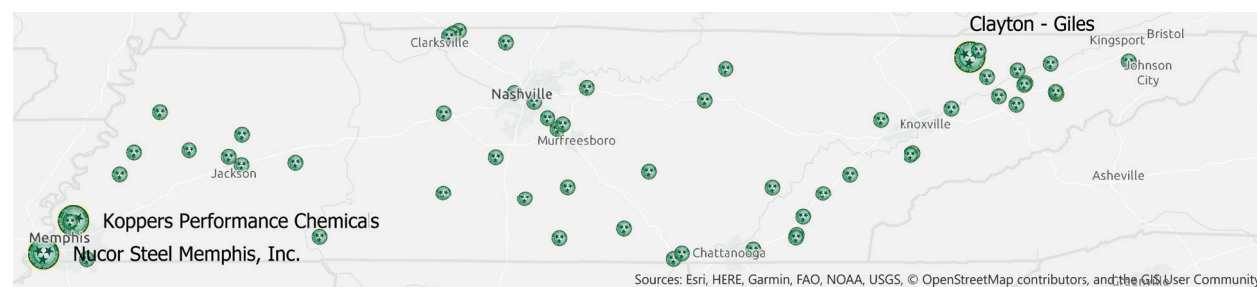
Koppers Performance Chemicals of Millington, Clayton Giles of New Tazewell, and Nucor Steel Memphis joined the list of partners, bringing the total in the program to 61. Green Star partners can be found from West Tennessee to the mountains of Upper East Tennessee.

Koppers Performance Chemicals produces several proprietary chemicals used in wood preservation and supplies nine of the 10 largest wood treating companies in the United States.

Clayton Giles is a homebuilding and supply company committed to sustainable building practices, focusing on increasing recycling and decreasing waste and water consumption.

Nucor Steel Memphis produces special bar quality steel using an electric arc furnace. The mill, which Nucor began operating in 2009, melts recycled scrap metal and turns it into new steel products.

### Tennessee Green Star Partnership Members



The Green Star Partnership's objectives promote the health and well-being of all Tennesseans and help stimulate economic development. The partnership has resulted in many positive environmental outcomes including pollution prevention and significant CO2 emissions reductions through waste diversion and increased energy efficiency.

The Green Star Partnership is funded in part through an EPA Pollution Prevention Grant, which will assist with technical assistance for manufacturers.

Environmentally safe practices boost the cause of environmental protection and also the success of businesses. Many businesses are interested in environmental protection, and some go above and beyond what might be expected. This program will continue to recognize such commitment.



Left: Clayton Giles joined the Green Star Partnership in June 2023. Clayton Giles is part of Clayton Manufacturing Group, an integrated homebuilding and supply company committed to driving change through sustainable building practices. It joins Clayton Savannah, Clayton Rutledge, Clayton Bean Station, and TRU White Pine in this respected partnership.



Right and Below: Nucor Steel Memphis, Inc. joined the Green Star Partnership in November 2022. Nucor Steel Memphis produces special bar quality (SBQ) steel using an electric arc furnace (EAF). The mill, which Nucor began operating in 2009, melts recycled scrap metal and turns it into new steel products.



Right: Koppers Performance Chemicals of Millington joined the Green Star Partnership in May 2023. Koppers Performance Chemicals produces several proprietary chemicals used in wood preservation, including MicroPro®, MicroShades, and the NatureWood family of products.



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# The Wonderful One: Justin P. Wilson's Tenure at TDEC

**N**o figure in Tennessee history could be more synonymous with the cause of conservation than Justin P. Wilson.

Wilson was named the Robert Sparks Walker Lifetime Achievement Award winner this year, part of the Governor's Environmental Stewardship Awards – a fitting accolade because Wilson has devoted a lifetime of work to his love of natural resources. **His contributions to the public sector, private sector, and nonprofit organizations have enhanced conservation in countless ways.**

He helped establish the 300-mile Cumberland Trail, securing funding for it as commissioner of TDEC in 1996 and 1997, and as a policy leader the next six years for Gov. Don Sundquist. The trail was formally established in 1971 as a State Scenic Trail, and in 1998 became the state's 53rd state park – a linear park that spans 11 counties. The park was renamed for Wilson in 2002.

Wilson's influence went beyond Tennessee. He led a regional air quality collaboration in 2001 with the governors of North Carolina, Georgia, and Tennessee. The collaboration focused on the Smoky Mountains but fostered regional interest and collaboration on future low-carbon and renewable energy expansions.

When policy impacted the well-being of the state, Wilson wanted the state to take a stand for conservation. He saw the "virtuous circle" of economic success being linked to conservation, and to the never-ending cycle linking the two. His vision and commitment to the environment will serve Tennessee for hundreds of years or more. TDEC can thank him for his work in the past and can use him as a model for the future.

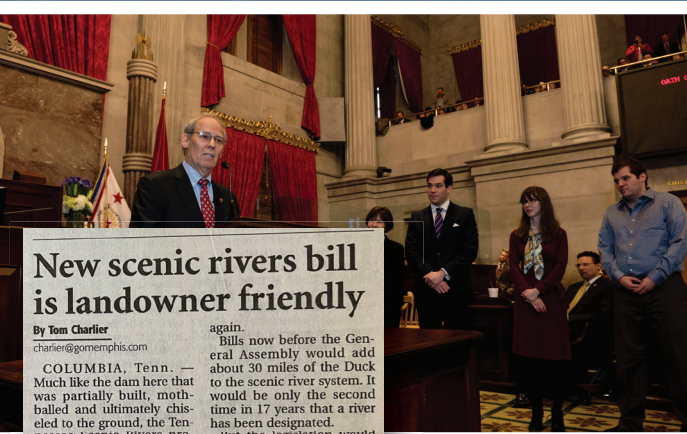
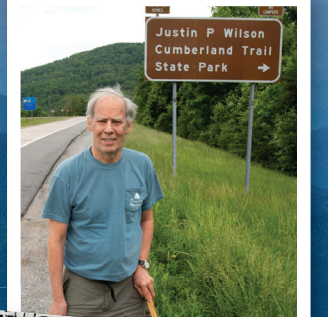
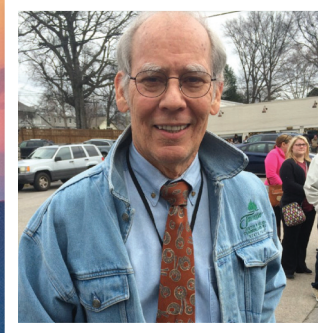
**"I am both amazed and honored to receive this award. In Tennessee, the outdoors is our heritage and the basis of our culture, not just to hunt, or to fish, or to hike, or even do some birdwatching, but more often simply to enjoy our porches, our backyards, and our public spaces. When I first became Commissioner at TDEC, I soon learned that economic success promotes environmental protection and a cleaner environment attracts desirable business, which in a virtuous circle encourages an even better environment. I hope that I have contributed to this virtuous circle, to which Tennessee is truly blessed."**



Justin P. Wilson receives his award with TDEC leadership and Comptroller Jason E. Mumpower

## State goes to bat for Fall Creek, demands hard look before strip mining allowed in watershed area

**By DYANA BAGBY**  
HERALD-EXAMINER  
Do it over again. That's the message the State of Tennessee sent to the federal Office of Surface Mining this week regarding the agency's recently released environmental study of the impact strip mining would have in the watershed of Fall Creek Falls State Park. And for area citizens groups who have worked for years to have the entire 86,000-acre watershed surrounding the state park protected by federal law from mining, the state's public position signifies a victory. "I think we all felt the administration of Gov. Sundquist thought about its stance carefully and got input from several state agencies," said Brian Paddock of Coopers & Lybrand, a member of Save Our Cumberland Mountains, who along with several other SOCM members and representatives from other citizens groups met this week with state officials to discuss the state's official stance. "And the state's position on the independence of the Office of Surface Mining is exactly right," Paddock said. "It's a victory for us." The threat of acid mine drainage and the poisonous effects it can have on the streams, creeks and the majestic Fall Creek Falls itself fueling the citizens' fight to protect the park's watershed from strip mining. Skyline Coal Co., which is currently strip mining coal just a few miles outside the park's watershed, could not be reached for comment.

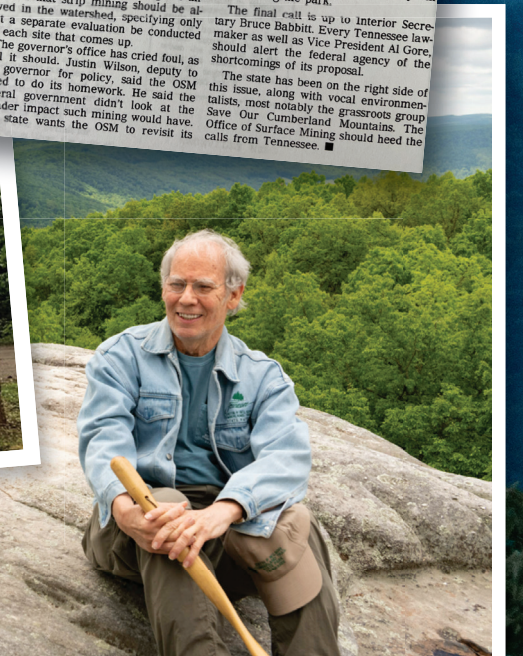
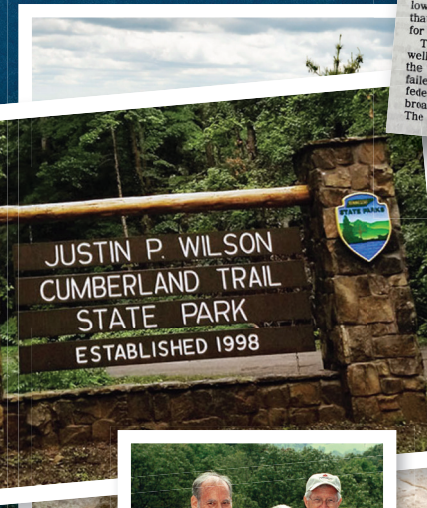


## New scenic rivers bill is landowner friendly

**By Tom Charlier**  
charlier@governments.com  
COLUMBIA, Tenn. — Much like the dam here that was partially built, mothballed and ultimately chiseled to the ground, the Tennessee Scenic Rivers program has been stalled for years — a hostage to competing interest groups. But at this spot on the Duck River, where anglers cast for crappie in currents that swirl beneath cedar-draped limestone bluffs, the stream-protection program soon could be flowing again. Bills now before the General Assembly would add about 30 miles of the Duck to the scenic river system. It would be only the second time in 17 years that a river has been designated. But the legislation would do much more than expand the system. Lawmakers want to change the process by which rivers are protected in a way that addresses property-rights concerns expressed over the years by landowners and agricultural and industrial groups.

## Saving Fall Creek Falls

**Federal plan falls far short of what is needed**  
The Sundquist administration is far ahead of what's supposed to be an environmentally conscious Clinton administration regarding Fall Creek Falls State Park. The Skyline Coal Company is strip mining near the park, a gem in Tennessee's state park system. Skyline holds leases on land both inside and outside the park's watershed. It is currently operating closer to it. Any mining in the watershed could cause great damage to the park. For starters, the very act of strip mining creates acidic drainage that can seep into the park's streams. It could kill plants and adversely affect the wildlife in the park. It could also prove unsafe for humans. But apparently, the federal government sees the issue quite differently. The federal Office of Surface Mining has announced that strip mining should be allowed in the watershed, specifying only for each site that comes up. The governor's office has cried foul, as well it should. Justin Wilson, deputy to the governor for policy, said the OSM failed to do its homework. He said the federal government didn't look at the broader impact such mining would have. The state wants the OSM to revisit its decision and analyze the data again. Wilson has sent the Office of Surface Mining a letter explaining the value of the natural resources in the park and noting the vulnerability to strip mining. Skyline officials have said the mining could be done without creating the runoff by mixing lime with the rock removed to get to the coal. But make no mistake: The company's primary interest is the coal, not the environment. It's hard to see how the business would be motivated to follow through on its assertion. The state also has revenue from the park sources are not being protected, they will stop visiting the park. The final call is up to Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt. Every Tennessee lawmaker as well as Vice President Al Gore should alert the federal agency of the shortcomings of its proposal. The state has been on the right side of this issue, along with vocal environmentalists, most notably the grassroots group Save Our Cumberland Mountains. The Office of Surface Mining should heed the calls from Tennessee.





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