

TCWP Newsletter

1. OAK RIDGE NEWS

1A. Reservation Hazardous Waste Landfill Proposal Still in Play

In recent weeks, there has been a frequently heard refrain—The draft Record of Decision (ROD) on the Oak Ridge Operations Environmental Management Disposal Facility will be released in July. At press time, no draft ROD had been released.

From a recent letter to Department of Energy Secretary Granholm from Advocates for the Oak Ridge Reservation and the Sierra Club: “The proposed site for the new landfill is in an area of the ORR that the OREM End Use Working Group (a federal-state-local community partnership, see <https://www.energy.gov/orem/downloads/end-useworking-group-report>) designated to be kept uncontaminated, while other areas were stipulated to be permanently sacrificed to contamination. This site has shallow and upwelling groundwater (hydrology unsuitable for waste disposal), is in a watershed that has been relatively unaffected by past federal nuclear activities, and supports mature forest and wetlands. Because the proposed landfill is classified as a remedial action under CERCLA (Superfund), it would be built and operated without the prescriptive regulatory oversight that applies to ordinary landfills. Furthermore, OREM will request waivers from some substantive environmental regulations. More information can be found at <https://aforr.info/hazardous-waste-landfill-emdf/> and specifically at <https://aforr.info/wpcontent/uploads/2021/03/Radioactive-and-hazardous-waste-disposal.pdf>.

Recently, representatives from Southern Environmental Law Center, Sierra Club, Advocates for the Oak Ridge Reservation, and TCWP met with EPA staffers to discuss these concerns and others. It is hoped that such exchange of information can continue as the long-term effects of such a project are more fully considered.

A big shout-out to our friends at Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation: Thank you for standing up for Tennessee’s water quality in regard to the project. We Tennesseans deserve pure drinking water as well as best practices in waste disposal.

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2. TENNESSEE NEWS

2A. The Declining Coal Industry

During the 2020 legislative session, the Tennessee legislature passed, and the Governor signed a bill to assume authority for regulating coal mining in the state. Reasons given for this bill being necessary include reversing the decline in coal production and jobs. In addition, Rep. Powers stated on the house floor, that “Kentucky should never be beating us at coal mining...” and obtaining primacy would put Tennessee on the road to bringing back the coal industry in Tennessee.

Given the current state of the coal industry, are these reasonable expectations? After all, the decline in the coal industry is hitting coal communities hard with disappearing severance taxes.

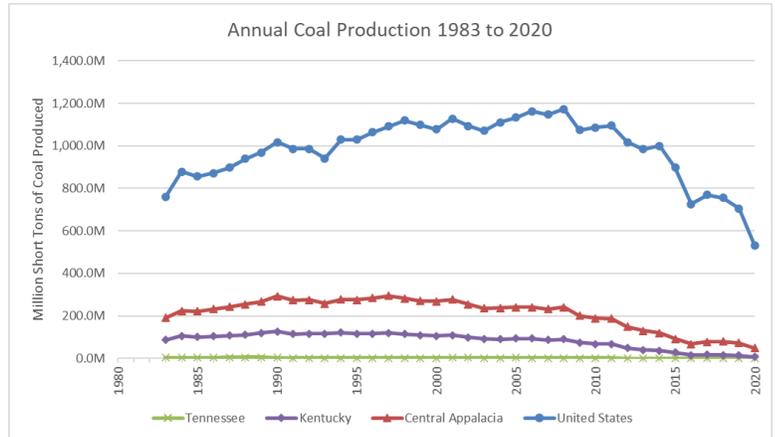


Figure 1: Comparison of National, Central Appalachia, and Tennessee coal production from 1983 through 2020 showing the relative magnitudes of the annual production and production declines.

In 1987, Tennessee produced just shy of 5 million short tons of coal.* Never again has the state produced as much. By 2020, Coal production had decreased from this peak by 98 percent to just 91,000 short tons with no production in the last three quarters of 2020. Over the same time, coal jobs decreased from a 1518 to just 40.

Putting the declines occurring in Tennessee into context, nationally, coal production peaked at 1,172 million short tons in 2008 before decreasing 55 percent by 2020 while Jobs decreased from 86,000 to 42,000 over the same time. Meanwhile, in Central Appalachia, coal production and jobs were already decreasing. Coal production peaked in 1997 at 296 million short tons before declining by 84 percent by 2020. Job declined from 36,000 to 12,000 in 2020. When Tennessee was producing 5 million tons at its peak in 1987, Kentucky produced 109 million short tons. Like Tennessee, Kentucky’s coal production has decreased over 90 percent from its peak. Tennessee has always been a minor player in the coal industry. The only coal race with Kentucky that Tennessee looks likely to win is a race to the bottom.

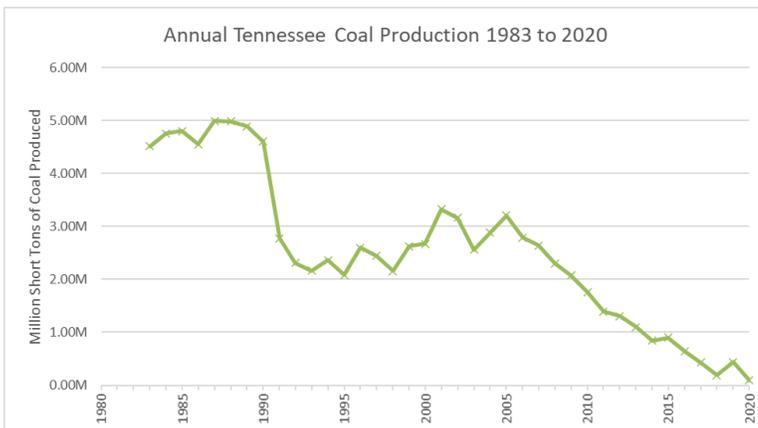


Figure 2: Expansion of the annual Tennessee coal production from 1983 through 2020.

The coal industry nationally, regionally and within the state has been in decline for decades, though the peaks in production occurred at different times. The cost of coal production is the likely overarching reason for the earlier decline in Central Appalachia and Tennessee coal production. With the advent of larger surface mining equipment requiring fewer employees and larger mines, mining the large western mines became more cost effective than mining the smaller, more labor intensive Appalachia mines. Nationally the number of coal jobs peaked in 1984 at 180K. Later, inexpensive natural gas coupled with increased regulations and public pressures to address climate change drove the national coal production declines.

The thermal coal industry will continue to decline as electric utilities continue to close aging costly and polluting power plants as TVA is doing in the Tennessee Valley. These power plants cost more to operate than it costs to build utility scale solar. Tennessee does not have the coal reserves necessary to compete with the large western mines nor even the larger eastern mines on a cost basis. — Dan Firth

*All production and jobs data obtained from OpenSourceCoal.org

3. OBED/BIG SOUTH FORK NEWS

3A. Comments Sought: Plan to Increase Petroleum Production Includes Injection on Obed

An Environmental Assessment for ENREMA, LLC to enhance the production of its mineral rights within the Obed Wild and Scenic River, around Clear Creek, was released the first of this month. The EA, with July 30 comment deadline, can be viewed at <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/showFile.cfm?projectID=102992&MIMEType=application%252Fpdf&filename=ENREMA%20EA%2016June20212%2Epdf&sfid=484703>.

ENREMA plans to utilize a natural water flood injection technique through existing functioning wells, which are located outside the boundaries of OWSR, to increase production on these wells. Some of the wells on which ENREMA plans to use the enhanced recovery techniques reside around Clear Creek land that is managed by the NPS.

For this EA, six park resources, values, and concerns for evaluation are considered: air quality; fish and wildlife; federally and state-listed Species; vegetation; soils and geology; water quality and hydrology. With the proposed “natural water flood injection” there will be impacts to the hydrology of the area. As John Muir observed, “When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe.” The hydrology changes will change geology and so on.

TCWP will be sending comments on this proposed action on behalf of our members. Thanks for being on our team!!

3B. TVA Proposes Kingston Fossil Plan Closure

TVA announced its intentions to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to assess the impacts associated with the proposed retirement of the nine coal-fired units at the Kingston Fossil Plant (KIF) and the construction and operation of facilities to replace the retired generation. The electricity generation replacement is one of three alternatives in the upcoming EIS: (A) construction and operation of a Combined Cycle Combustion Turbine (CC) Gas Plant at the same site; (B) investment in local and regional transmission, and construction and operation of Simple Cycle Combustion Turbine (CT) Gas Plants at alternate locations; (C) construction and operation of Solar and Storage Facilities, primarily at alternate locations.

All retirement options will also include the demolition of the current plant. Of concern to TCWP is the plant’s proximity to Obed Watershed, and placement of any natural gas pipeline that might be involved.

TCWP submitted comments on the scope of the EIS addressing the current lack of detailed information about pipelines’ sites.

Contributors

Tim Bigelow Steward of Oak Ridge Cedar Barren and member of Smoky Mountains Hiking Club. Electrical engineer with focus on fusion energy.

Michelle Campanis Board member of the Tennessee Bluebird Society, a facilitator for the Project Learning Tree program and the planning board for Oak Ridge’s Flatwater Tales Storytelling Festival. Education coordinator for the UT Arboretum.

Dan Firth Works on energy, mining and water quality issues with the Sierra Club, Appalachian Voices, Appalachian Citizens Law Center and others.

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4. NATIONAL NEWS

4A. Americans Eating Less Meat

In a Gallup poll reported in 2020, nearly one in four Americans (23%) said they were eating less meat than previously. The primary reason reported was for good health. Women, non-whites, city residents, and Democrats lead the reduction in meat consumption in their respective demographics. Smaller portions and plant substitutes are ways of reducing meat consumption, in addition to simply eliminating meat from a meal.

The poll did not distinguish between eating red meat vs. chicken or fish. However, an older study by the National Resources Defense Council specifically looked at beef consumption and found a significant reduction that corresponds to a reduction in carbon emitted.

While health was the reason most often given in the Gallup poll for reducing meat consumption, the environment and animal welfare were also prominent reasons. Water use is a serious environmental impact. The USGS estimates a quarter pound of beef requires about 460 gallons of water to grow grain, forage, and roughage to feed a cow. Water is also needed for drinking as well as for servicing the cow. In addition, habitat loss is a serious environmental impact as forests are felled and prairies are plowed under to grow grass for livestock. For example, the scourge of "chaining" on arid BLM lands in the west is specifically to plant non-native grass for cows.

Additionally, concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) pose a health threat with their pollutants. According to the CDC, manure contains plant nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus, pathogens such as E. coli, growth hormones, antibiotics, chemicals used as additives to manure or to clean equipment, animal blood, silage leachate from corn feed, and copper sulfate used in footbaths for cows. CAFOs are also no fun for the animals.

So in addition to reducing our consumption of meat for health and the environment, especially beef, we can also ensure our meat and animal products come from animals raised on "free-range" farming operations ("cage-free" could still be a CAFO). Free-range not only benefits the animal, in a small way it also steers the economy away from CAFOs.

- The Gallup poll: https://news.gallup.com/poll/282779/nearly-one-four-cut-back-eating-meat.aspx?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiosam&stream=top
- NRDC study: <https://www.nrdc.org/sites/default/files/less-beef-less-carbon-ip.pdf>
- Water usage: <https://water.usgs.gov/edu/activity-watercontent.html>
- CDC report: https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/docs/understanding_cafos_nalboh.pdf

—Russ Manning

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4B. Mississippi River Initiative to be Introduced

Minnesota Congressperson Betty McCollum will soon introduce the Mississippi River Restoration and Resilience Initiative (MRRRI) in the U.S. House of Representatives. The “Great River” not only serves as a source of drinking water for 20 million Americans and as a corridor of commerce, but also hosts one of the great migrations of North America—the Mississippi Flyway.



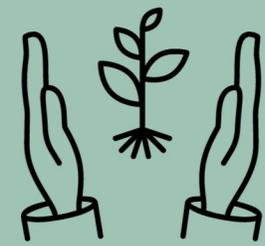
Originating in the northern breeding grounds of the Prairie Pothole Region of the Northern Great Plains and also the Western Boreal Forest of Canada, Mississippi Flyway birds migrate south come fall, following the river through the Mississippi Valley to reach wintering grounds along the Gulf of Mexico and in Central and South America before returning north in spring. Astonishingly, more than 325 bird species, including 60 percent of migratory waterfowl, migrate along the Mississippi Flyway, perhaps the most important flyway in the world. However, pollution, runoff, flooding, wetland loss, and a changing climate threaten the health of the river.

This year’s omnibus funding bill already includes language to establish a national strategy for the MRRRI. This new legislation will formally authorize the EPA to get started. The MRRRI will use a non-regulatory approach by providing grant opportunities for state and local governments, tribes, and nonprofit organizations working for the health of the river. The MRRRI will provide critical funding, research, and coordination to improve water quality, protect species habitat, enhance flood resilience, and combat aquatic invasive species.

The Mississippi River Network, a coalition of organizations, instituted the 1 Mississippi program to work for protection and restoration of the Mississippi River. “We all count on the river,” they ask, “but can the river count on us?” The program’s name evokes the children’s device for counting seconds (one Mississippi, two Mississippi, three...). 1 Mississippi encourages citizens to sign up as River Citizens to take action to protect the river—from volunteering for river cleanups, tree plantings, and restoration workdays to encouraging Congress and local elected officials to enact policies that protect the river from pollution and provide funding for habitat restoration. MRN/1 Mississippi is leading the advocacy for the MRRRI by gathering petition signatures prior to the bill’s introduction.

- To sign the petition: <https://mississippirivernetwork.salsalabs.org/msriver2021petition/>
- 1 Mississippi: <https://1mississippi.org>
- MRRRI editorial: <https://www.startribune.com/keeping-it-mighty-the-mississippi-river-needs-us/600066937/>

— RM



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Newsletter Changes

As you can see, we are trying something new with the newsletter. We hope these changes make the newsletter more readable and aesthetically pleasing. Tell us what you think about the new format and bear with us while we fine tune the new format.

Ken Mayes

5. TCWP NEWS

5A. Upcoming Activities

TCWP's Guidelines for Activities during the COVID-19 Pandemic

In an effort to reduce the spread of COVID-19, TCWP will be conducting its activities following CDC guidelines:

- We ask that you not participate if you are sick or were recently exposed to someone who is.
- We ask that unvaccinated participants practice social distancing, maintain at least 6 feet of separation between themselves and other unvaccinated participants.
- We ask that unvaccinated participants continue to wear a mask especially when social distancing is not possible.
- We will organize activities into group of 20 or fewer.
- We recommend that you bring hand sanitizer or other ways to wash your hands.
- We recommend that everyone bring their own water, lunch, snacks, and sunscreen.
- We recommend caravanning for unvaccinated participants, rather than carpooling.
- Keep in mind that restrooms may be unavailable at activity locations.
- Activities are subject to change or cancellation as we monitor and react to local, state, and federal data and guidelines.

Thank you for your patience while we work through ways to serve our community.

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

Hike on Cumberland Trail in New River Valley – Saturday, July 24

In this joint event with the Smoky Mountains Hiking Club, we will caravan or carpool from Oak Ridge to the Norma Road trailhead of the Cumberland Trail in the New River valley. We will hike southwest along the New River then tributary Lick Creek, then climb to the top of the ridge and hike out to the Lick Creek overlook for views of the New River valley and surrounding mountains.

If there is interest in the party, we will drive back a different route up to the headwaters of the New River and look at a few historic railroad and coal mining sites and Brushy Mountain penitentiary along the way. The hike will be eight miles round trip, rated moderate. The drive is 80 miles round trip.

We'll meet to carpool or caravan at 8 a.m. at Golds Gym/Books-a-Million parking lot along Illinois Ave in Oak Ridge, on the end near Salsarita's. For more information contact Tim Bigelow, 865-607-6781, Bigelowt2@mindspring.com. – *Tim Bigelow*

"Ranavirus: What It Is, and Why It Matters to Our Box Turtles in East Tennessee" – Tuesday, August 17

Ranavirus can cause severe infections in amphibians, reptiles (including box turtles), and fish. It has a mortality rate of 90% to 100%, and there is currently no treatment. On August 17 Dr. Matt Allender, director of the Wildlife Epidemiology Lab at the University of Illinois, will discuss his work in connection with the ranavirus in a free Zoom program cosponsored by TCWP, the UT Arboretum Society, and the Clinch River Environmental Studies Organization of East Tennessee (CRESO).

Dr. Allender is a zoo and wildlife veterinarian who received his DVM from the University of Illinois in 2004, and completed a residency in Zoological Medicine at the University of Tennessee and the Knoxville Zoo. He then joined the faculty at the College of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Illinois and jointly completed a PhD, studying the epidemiology of ranavirus in free-ranging turtles. He currently teaches, performs research, and provides clinical service for free-ranging and captive wildlife, and also volunteers for CRESO.

Registration for this event is required. Register at: www.utarboretumsociety.org. Contact Michelle Campanis at mcampani@utk.edu regarding any questions or registration issues. – *Carol Grametbauer*

Cory Holliday, Karst Topography in East Tennessee – August 24

Cory Holliday, Cave & Karst Program Director of The Nature Conservancy in Tennessee, will speak on Karst Landscapes of East Tennessee: Linking Water, Woods, and Wildlife at 7:00 p.m. on Tuesday, August 24.

The Advocates For the Oak Ridge Reservation are sponsoring the program, which is free and open to the public.

Summer Cedar Barren Cleanup/Weed Wrangle® – Saturday, August 28

This will be the second of our three annual workdays at the Oak Ridge Cedar Barren. Located next to Jefferson Middle School in Oak Ridge, the barren is a joint project of the City of Oak Ridge, the State Natural Areas Division, and TCWP. One of just a few cedar barrens in East Tennessee, the area is subject to invasion by Chinese lespedeza, Japanese privet, autumn olive, mimosa, Nepal grass, multiflora rose, and woody plants that threaten the system's prairie grasses. Our spring, summer, and fall cleanups help to eliminate invasives and other shade-producing plants that prevent the prairie grasses from getting needed sun. The late-summer workday is optimum for viewing prairie wildflowers that flourish at the barren.

Volunteers should meet in the Jefferson Middle School parking lot at 9 a.m.; wear sturdy shoes, and bring loppers, gloves, and water. For additional information, contact Tim Bigelow at Bigelowt2@mindspring.com or at 865-607-6781.

“Against the Current: Paddling Upstream on the Tennessee River” – Thursday, September 9

On September 9, TCWP, the UT Arboretum Society, and the East Tennessee Whitewater Club will cosponsor a 7 p.m. free online Zoom by Maryville College professor Kim Trevathan based on his latest book, **Against the Current: Paddling Upstream on the Tennessee River**.

Trevathan has taught journalism, creative nonfiction, and fiction at Maryville College for more than 20 years. In the spring of 2018 he paddled the length of the Tennessee River—652 miles—going upstream, with his 10-month-old puppy Maggie, then wrote a book about their experiences. His earlier books are **Paddling the Tennessee River: A Voyage on Easy Water** (2001), **Coldhearted River: A Canoe Odyssey down the Cumberland** (2006), and **Liminal Zones: Where Lakes End and Rivers Begin** (2013). All three books were published by the University of Tennessee Press.

Registration for this event is required. Register at: www.utarboretumsociety.org. Contact Michelle Campanis at mcampani@utk.edu regarding any questions or registration issues. – CG

Cumberland Mountain Wildflower Walk – Saturday, September 11

This is a joint outing for TCWP and the Tennessee Native Plant Society. We will have an opportunity to see fall wildflowers and views on the Cumberland Mountain ridgetop. As usual, hikers may turn around at any point, but most flowers will be on top. We will hike from a trailhead (Sarvis) that is about halfway up the mountain. The hike is about four miles round trip on a good trail, but with a steep climb of about 1,000 feet from the trailhead to the top.

We'll meet at the Dollar General on TN 63 east of LaFollette at 10 a.m. Eastern time. It's located on the southeast side of a crossroad with Greene Lane to the north and Calhoun Rd. to the south (115 Calhoun Rd.), and is about an hour's drive from Oak Ridge. Bring water, a lunch, and bug spray.

For information or to make reservations (not required, but helpful), contact Larry Pounds at 865-705-8516 or PoundsL471@aol.com. – Larry Pounds

Additional information on all TCWP activities may be obtained from TCWP Executive Director Sandra K. Goss at Sandra@sandrakgoss.com or at 865-583-3967.

5B. Recent events

"Birdability: Because Birding Is for Everybody and Every Body!" – Thursday, May 27

On May 27 TCWP and the UT Arboretum Society co-sponsored a virtual presentation by Freya McGregor, occupational therapist and a coordinator for Birdability, a nonprofit organization focused on removing barriers to access for birders with mobility or health challenges. McGregor pointed out that "time spent in nature is good for us," and that birding, which has the potential to be both inclusive and accessible, can be the gateway to that experience.

She described some of the problems encountered by physically challenged people in the outdoors, such as parking, gates, restroom facilities, steps and curbs, and railing heights, and how these might be addressed to give them better access. "No one can predict what a person with a disability can or cannot do," McGregory told her audience. – CG

North Ridge Trail Improvement Installed on Nat'l Trails Day

With the leadership of North Ridge Trail Steward Ray Garrett and the help of 13 NRT fans, 80 feet of chain rail were installed, and 85 feet of trail rerouted on June 5. The work was done on a very steep slope on the main trail west of the Walker Lane access in honor of National Trails Day.

The North Ridge Trail and its access trails provide a lengthy path through woodlands with creeks, rocks, and wildflowers. Running east-west, the main trail is accessible at various places along the way.

The North Ridge Trail was built years ago by volunteers organized by event sponsor Tennessee Citizens for Wilderness Planning. It has been maintained by volunteers since then.

East Fork Poplar Creek Greenway Cleanup - Saturday, June 12

We had a good turnout for this joint effort to clean up the new trail, with about 14 people participating in a very productive outing on a warm day. This trail follows the East Fork of Poplar Creek west of Illinois Avenue a little way south of the Oak Ridge Turnpike. Joining TCWP were the Clinch Valley Trail Alliance and Greenways Oak Ridge. CVTA was instrumental in getting the trail built, and Greenways OR has included the trail in the greenway system.

East Fork Poplar Creek occasionally floods its banks and washes all sorts of trash into the creek. This was the second workday held since the trail was built, and a large amount of trash was picked up and carted off. Items found included mostly old tires, various car parts, and other trash. The warm weather and cool water made it much more comfortable to rescue items from the creek, especially many of the tires which were buried in the sediment. CVTA brought a tire hook, and a motorized trail work buggy to haul the tires and other heavy items back to a central location. This year Jon Hetrick, Oak Ridge Recreation and Parks Department Director, provided a dump truck for the trash and arranged for the City to dispose of the tires. We filled the truck to capacity.

The crew did a great job, working as far west as the fire station where the trail currently ends. There are several large logjams in the creek where lots of floating debris gets trapped, so another workday will be needed to clear these and retrieve several more tires still in deeper water. – *Jimmy Groton*

"Eco-epidemiology of Tick-Borne Diseases in the Southeast U.S." – Thursday, June 24

This Zoom program was co-sponsored by TCWP and the UT Arboretum Society; 190 people registered for the program. Dr. Gerhold gave us a thorough overview of ticks' lifecycle and ways we can protect ourselves and our pets in the outdoors.

Dr. Gerhold emphasized the importance of wearing long-sleeved shirts and long pants tucked into socks, and making a thorough tick check daily rather than relying only on insect repellents. He confirmed that Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever and Lyme disease are established in East Tennessee and that the prevalence of ticks carrying Lyme has greatly increased in

Tennessee in the past five years, so there is a need for the medical community to catch up with their diagnostics and treatment plans.

The Zoom program recording is available for 100 days at:

<https://tennessee.zoom.us/rec/share/wL9dNQ2cXZSV3U65PqRUdw3wofoOSxKuRPzSdE8Mq6lvi-Y55dmwMMTGKHY-bB6r.jvGs8yt-jFSc-hr7?startTime=1624573850000> - Michelle Campanis

5C. Members in the Print Media

A guest column about expanding Medicaid written by Neil McBride appeared in the April 21 Oak Ridger.

Chuck Coutant and David Adler are quoted in a May 4 News Sentinel article about the Aquatic Ecology Lab of Oak Ridge National Laboratory.

Lance McCold co-signed a letter to the editor of the May 5 News Sentinel about education funding.

The May 7 News Sentinel carried a letter from Anne Child about expanding rental assistance.

Jeff Mellor wrote a letter about Liz Cheney. It appeared in the May 16 News Sentinel.

Roger McCoy, Director of State Natural Areas Division, is quoted and pictured in an article about the 50th anniversary of the passage of the Natural Areas Preservation Act in the May 16 News Sentinel.

The May 17 News Sentinel carried a column about the Energy Innovation Act that was co-authored by Jan Berry.

A Search for Safe Passage, a book authored by Frances Figart, was reviewed in the June 1 Erwin Record as well as the Summer, 2021 issue of the NPCA Magazine.

Joe Feeman authored an article about invasive exotic plants in the June 3 Norris Bulletin.

The June 10 Oak Ridger and the June 14 News Sentinel included Anne Child's letter to the editor about global education.

The results of the Norris Urban Forest Questionnaire were the subject of an article by Chuck Nicholson in the June 10 Norris Bulletin.

Frances Figart's letter to the New York Times editor about infrastructure for safe wildlife crossings appeared in the June 21 edition.

Government investment was topic of Jeff Mellor's letter to the June 25 News-Sentinel- editor.

Don Barkman's letter to the editor of the NPCA magazine about the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal appeared in the Summer, 2021 issue.

TCWP (Tennessee Citizens for Wilderness Planning) is dedicated to achieving and perpetuating protection of natural lands and waters by means of public ownership, legislation, or cooperation of the private sector. While our first focus is on the Cumberland and Appalachian regions of Tennessee, our efforts may extend to the rest of the state and the nation. TCWP's strength lies in researching information pertinent to an issue, informing and educating our membership and the public, interacting with groups having similar objectives, and working through the legislative, administrative, and judicial branches of government on the federal, state, and local levels.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

- July 24, Hike on Cumberland Trail in New River Valley
- August 17, "Ranavirus: What It Is, and Why It Matters to Our Box Turtles in East Tennessee"
- August 24, Cory Holliday, karst topography in ET
- August 28, Summer Cedar Barren Cleanup/Weed Wrangle®
- September 9, "Against the Current: Paddling Upstream on the Tennessee River"
- September 11, Cumberland Mountain Wildflower Walk

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