
NEWSLETTER – December 2006

AFORR Hears Billy Minser on 'Conservation of Public Lands'

On Thursday evening November 16, 2006, Billy Minser, instructor and research associate in the University of Tennessee's Department of Forestry, Wildlife, and Fisheries, spoke at AFORR's annual meeting on "Conservation of Public Lands; You Can Make a Difference." Mr. Minser first discussed the many ways in which public land is used, focusing on public land used for recreation.

Next, he identified the great number of agencies and organizations both state and federal that control public land. Many of these entities are obvious to us, for example, the National Park Service; others, may not be as obvious, such as the Department of Defense's control over military installations. Fort Campbell, for example, has the largest native grass prairie east of the Mississippi, some 10,000 to 15,000 acres.

In the most dramatic of his slides, Mr. Minser demonstrated that between now, 2006, and the year 2030, Tennessee's green space will be totally decimated because of increased housing, retail, and commercial demand along with the concomitant building of roads and other infrastructure to support housing and industry.

In fact, Tennessee is losing the land equivalent of one county per year to "asphalt and real estate."

In the third portion of his talk, and at its heart, Mr. Minser addressed the controversy over TVA's use of public land. The current conflict between those who wish further residential and commercial development of TVA public land and the overwhelming public outcry against such development is a perfect demonstration of the classic struggle of a bureaucracy in conflict. TVA's record of public stewardship of the land is not an enviable one.

TVA has 49 reservoirs that are used like state parks, but TVA is not under any administration or jurisdiction; it monitors itself. Twenty-two million people per year use these reservoirs for recreation, but they are also an important economic boon to the communities around the reservoirs.

Originally, TVA took 1.27 million acres of land by eminent domain. Only 293,000 of those acres remain, and only 53% of that remaining acreage is presently approved for public use. About 506,000 acres of the original 1.27 million acres were sold or transferred by TVA.

Minser told us that the most interesting and puzzling facet of TVA's "land use policy" is that it has none. However, TVA has recently opened a dialogue with the public, which is its largest, though perhaps not its most influential stakeholder. The public has been responding by phone call, letter, and e-mail as to its desire for future TVA land use. That response is a resounding "No" to TVA's taking of further land by eminent domain, or of selling or trading parcels of land to residential or commercial developers, even when those developers give other parcels, perhaps even larger parcels of land, in its stead. Such trades actually took place in two recent and well-

publicized cases.

Follow-up news

Two weeks after the meeting, on Thursday, November 30, 2006, the Tennessee Valley Authority board voted 8 to 1 to adopt a new land policy that has the effect of banning sales of TVA lands to the public. The AFORR Board had written to TVA to endorse the new land policy.

Further reading

For further reading on Mr. Minser's topic, see the following:

Knoxville News Sentinel, Monday, Oct. 9, 2006, Editorial, "TVA Land Policy: Trying to Do the Right Thing"

Knoxville News Sentinel, Friday, Nov. 17, 2006, Letters to the Editor, "TVA Should Not Sell or Trade Public Land" by William G. Minser

The Oak Ridger, Monday, Nov. 20, 2006, Banner Headline, page 1-A, "TVA Land: 'Let's Keep It for the Public'"

Knoxville News Sentinel, Friday, Nov. 24, 2006, Headline, page A1, "TVA Eyes Vote on Land-Sale Ban"

Knoxville News Sentinel, Friday, Nov. 24, 2006, page B5, "E-mail TVA to Seal Good Deal"

Knoxville News Sentinel, Sunday, Nov. 26, 2006, page G1, "TVA's Land Mine"

Visit Solway Bend on January 20

AFORR is arranging access to Solway Bend for a mid-winter hike on Saturday, January 20, 2007. We will meet at 1:00 pm at the parking lot behind the Scarboro Facility at the corner of Bethel Valley Road and Scarboro Road (the road that leads to Clark Center Park). The hike will be entirely on relatively level, paved or gravel surfaces. Contact Bill Johnston (482-7663 or bill.johnston22@comcast.net) if you would like additional information.

AFORR Plans January Meeting on Wildlife Rehabilitation Centers

Tuesday, January 23, 2007, at 7 pm, LouAnn Partington will make an informal presentation to AFORR entitled "Herding Cats: Developing a Wildlife Rehabilitation Center." We will meet in the Wildcat Den at the Midtown Community Center, 102 Robertsville Rd., Oak Ridge.

As chairman of the board of the Tims Ford Environmental Education Association and President of the Tennessee Wildlife Educators and Rehabilitators Association (formed in February 2006), Partington is engaged in efforts to establish a wildlife rehabilitation and nature center at Tims Ford State Park, as well as working with the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) to provide park interpretive specialists with in-service training on wildlife rehabilitation and captive/education animal management, care and training.

One of the functions that AFORR envisions for the future at the Three Bend area is a wildlife rehabilitation center to serve this part of East Tennessee, and Partington should be able to help us better understand the requirements and benefits of this type of center. She's an experienced wildlife rehabilitator, with state and federal licenses and experience working with songbirds, raptors, small mammals, reptiles, and amphibians at institutions including Warner Park Zoo in Chattanooga and the WildCare organization in San Rafael, California. She is also an outdoor enthusiast who serves as treasurer of the Tennessee Trails Association.

ORR Field Research Center to Continue

AFORR has learned that the DOE Office of Science has selected the Oak Ridge Environmental Remediation Sciences Program Field Research Center (formerly the NABIR Field Research Center) for a 5-year renewal of financial support. This is an ORNL-operated "user facility," located in Bear Creek Valley on the ORR, where scientists from ORNL and other institutions conduct research on contaminant transport and environmental remediation technologies. Continuation of research at this site will aid environmental cleanup and long-term stewardship, as well as benefiting the local economy. This is an example of how the continued availability of the ORR for research benefits the local economy and well-being.

Three Bends were Focus in 2006

The Three Bend area of the Oak Ridge Reservation was a dominant focus for AFORR's activities during 2006 and will continue to be a major focus in the coming year.

The AFORR Board vision for the Three Bend area, which we began to formulate after a meeting with state officials and conservation group representatives in May, is posted on the web at www.discoveret.org/aforr/3bendvision.pdf

Ongoing efforts to help make this vision a reality include:

- The August 31, 2006, meeting at which University of Tennessee faculty member Nate Sanders spoke about

some of UT's ongoing research activities in the Three Bend area.

- Continuing communication with UT-Battelle (which manages ORNL) and UT regarding near- and long-term visions and opportunities for the Three Bend area
- Sharing the vision statement with elected officials at all levels of government.
- Our plans to learn more about wildlife rehabilitation centers at our January 23 meeting (see announcement elsewhere in this newsletter).
- Our plans for a public hike at Solway Bend on January 20 (see announcement in this newsletter).

Organization News

At the November 16, 2006, meeting, membership ratified two changes to the AFORR executive board. Board member Virginia Dale was elected to fill the vacancy in the position of AFORR president, while Becky Van Dyke joined the board as secretary. (Previous secretary Jo Ann Thompson continues as an at-large board member.) Current officers and board members are:

Virginia Dale, President

Ellen Smith, Vice President

Becky Van Dyke, Secretary

Frank Hensley, Treasurer (also represents Tennessee Citizens for Wilderness Planning on the board)

Bill Johnston, at-large board member

Tim Myrick, representative for The Nature Conservancy, Tennessee Chapter

Wolf Naegeli, representative for Foundation for Global Sustainability

Bill Schramm, at-large board member

Lorene Sigal, at-large board member

Jo Ann Thompson, at-large board member

Please Join AFORR or Renew Your Support

Name _____

Address _____

Phone - Home: _____ Work: _____ Cell: _____

Email: _____

Membership level: ___ Individual (\$15/yr) ___ Family (2+ at same address) (\$20/yr)

___ Supporting (\$50/yr) ___ Additional contribution

Ways that you want to assist AFORR:

___ Trail development and maintenance

___ Communications (web sites, newsletters and mailing lists)

___ Educational outreach (planning hikes and presentations)

___ Proposal development and fund raising

Mail to AFORR, 136 West Revere Circle, Oak Ridge, TN 37830