

## NEWSLETTER - January 2006

### *Announcement*

**AFORR Annual Meeting  
& DOE Appreciation Night**  
**Tuesday, January 31, 2005, 7 pm**  
Midtown Community Center (Wildcat Den)  
102 Robertsville Rd., Oak Ridge  
Guest Speaker: Gerald Boyd, US DOE

### **What's Happening on the Black Oak Ridge Conservation Easement?**

The Black Oak Ridge Conservation Easement (BORCE; 3000 acres of DOE land, most of it forested, in northwestern Oak Ridge) should soon be officially open to limited public access.

One year ago, January 11, 2005, the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) and the Tennessee Wildlife Resource Agency (TWRA) introduced the *BORCE Draft Management Plan* to the public at a meeting in Oak Ridge. The meeting was well attended and elicited a large number of public comments – both oral and written -- on the plan.

In September 2005 AFORR wrote to TDEC Commissioner Jim Fyke requesting an update. In his reply, Fyke told us that the draft management plan was under final review and that the agencies intended to release it by the end of December. In addition, he said that the agencies would welcome offers of volunteer assistance in developing the infrastructure needed to open and maintain public access to the easement area. He indicated that soon after the management plan is finalized, the agencies would make plans to install the first trailhead and hiking trail and would solicit volunteer assistance at that time.

The latest word on the BORCE management plan comes from TWRA officer Jim Evans. In a January 14, 2006, communication, Jim said that TWRA and TDEC expect to release the management plan to the public in February 2006.

### **Three Bend Area - Progress, Possibilities, Threats**

The Three Bend Scenic and Wildlife Refuge Area on the Oak Ridge Reservation, including Solway, Freels, and Gallaher Bends, with 20 miles of shoreline on the Clinch River (Melton Hill Reservoir), is a natural treasure in the midst of increasing urbanization. In July 1999 DOE Secretary Bill Richardson declared that this 3,000-acre area

would henceforth be committed to conservation and wildlife management.

There's plenty to report about the Three Bend area – progress toward fulfilling the area's potential, interesting new possibilities, and threats:

- The 5-year agreement under which the Tennessee Wildlife Resource Agency (TWRA) manages the Three Bend area for wildlife was due to expire in January 2006, but was extended while the agencies finalize a new agreement. AFORR is hoping that a new 5-year agreement will be announced soon.

- TWRA expects that the dilapidated buildings on the property can be demolished during the current fiscal year. Removal of these hazardous structures should allow for increased public access for hiking, birding, and similar activities.

- University of Tennessee faculty and officials, together with some of their counterparts at ORNL, are actively exploring the possibility of locating a field station for biological education and research at Solway Bend. The university has long had an interest in establishing a field station, and recent experience with conducting class activities and research in the Three Bend area has led to the area's being identified as an ideal site, due to its unique combination of ecological habitats and its accessibility from the Knoxville campus. The proposed station also would support ORNL activities and is expected to help attract additional research programs and funding to both institutions.

- Discussions have also occurred about locating a center for research, education, and practice in the rehabilitation of Tennessee wildlife at the Three Bend site, in association with the proposed field station and under the auspices of the UT College of Veterinary Medicine and College of Agriculture, in collaboration with TDEC, TWRA, and the East Tennessee Council of Wildlife Rehabilitation. A science camp, where youth from around the country could be exposed to nature study and Oak Ridge science, also is being discussed as a possible activity at the Three Bend area. A field station, wildlife center, and/or science camp could coexist with, and even support, continued wildlife management efforts.

- Local development interests have been pressing DOE, state agencies, AFORR, and other conservation groups to support a proposal to convert Solway Bend into a high-priced lakefront residential subdivision, with some project revenues to be dedicated to the support of the American Museum of Science and Energy. Residential

development would eliminate hundreds of acres of wildlife habitat, foreclose the possibility of a UT biological station or other future research and education uses, and would prevent the type of public access that should finally become possible after the dilapidated buildings are removed.

- The Oak Ridge City Council has listed “Three Bends Property Disposition” as one of the priority issues on its federal agenda for 2006, with the stated objective “Avoid long-term lease and placement of parcel into permanent easement.” City Council hopes to convene a stakeholders meeting “to work out suitable compromise.” Instead, AFORR hopes that city leaders can be helped to recognize that the Three Bend Scenic and Wildlife Refuge Area is a greater asset for the community in its natural state, with public access, than as a residential enclave.

- Another item on the Council's federal agenda is “Continued support from DOE concerning the transfer of excess/underutilized parcels of DOE property.” The Council intends to work with the area's congressional delegation “to secure a continued commitment to transfer of identified parcels.” Historically, the city's interests in land have included the Three Bend area, tracts in the developed portion of the city, and other Oak Ridge Reservation lands. AFORR is not concerned with lands in developed areas and has not opposed certain other transfers (see article about Parcel ED-6 later in this issue), but believes that the public's long-term interest is best served by maintaining the Three Bend area and the majority of the Oak Ridge Reservation for research, education, conservation, public safety, and related public purposes.

---

## Birdwatching in Oak Ridge

By Jo Ann Thompson

*“Oak Ridge is one of the top locations for birdwatching in the southeast . . . More than 200 species reside here throughout the year.”*

– Birdwatching brochures, Oak Ridge Convention & Visitors Bureau

Whether engaged in the joy of birdwatching from a picture window or from a secluded path along a greenbelt or greenway, Oak Ridge is a bird lover's paradise. Within the corporate city limits are two principal environments that make this one of the top locations for birdwatching in the southeast.

The first, and most unique, is the mature protected ecosystem of the 34,000 acre Oak Ridge Reservation (ORR) with its varied habitats and large tracts of unbroken forests. The wetlands, grassy meadows, open waters, stream banks, cedar barrens and contiguous forest of the

reservation are magnets attracting as many as 200 species of birds to its landscape— more than on any other single tract of land in Tennessee.

Many reservation birds are migratory songbirds, referred to as migrant neotropicals (songbirds that breed in North America and winter in the tropical climates of Mexico, Central and South America). These migrants, prized for their beauty and dexterity, are in decline due to habitat loss on both their winter and summer range. Numerous forest-dwelling neotropicals, particularly warblers, vireos and tanagers, nest in the interior forest of the reservation, and even more stop to rest and forage on their migratory path through Tennessee.

The habitat, abundance, and seasonal presence of reservation birds have been carefully monitored by the Partners in Flight (PIF) initiative. The mission of PIF is to help establish an international framework to conserve migratory birds. Data from PIF surveys reveal that area birdwatchers could expect to find, in abundance on the reservation, these songbirds whose overall numbers are decreasing: Red-eyed Vireo, Wood Thrush, Indigo Bunting, Scarlet Tanager, Yellow-breasted Chat and Yellow-billed Cuckoo.

The second environment contributing to Oak Ridge's value as an outstanding site for birdwatching is the residential area of the City. Here, coexisting well with humans, are the more familiar and abundant songbirds often referred to as “backyard” or “neighborhood birds” such as cardinals, robins, chickadees, woodpeckers, sparrows, finches, bluebirds, mockingbirds, blue jays, etc. Drawn to the greenbelts, greenways, lawns and feeders of Oak Ridge, neighborhood birds are appealing and easily observed. Birdwatching is second only to gardening as the nations leading hobby and most are viewing birds that come to their backyard feeders.

Some birds are common to the reservation as well as the City. Lists of bird species, gathered by Partners in Flight, identifies these birds as abundant on the reservation: Red-bellied Woodpecker, Blue Jay, Carolina Wren, Carolina Chickadee, Northern Cardinal, American Goldfinch, and American Crow. With the exception of the American Crow, these species are popular neighborhood birds as well.

Although public access to the reservation has been restricted since the land was acquired in 1942, Oak Ridge offers bird enthusiasts a number of greenways and trails that are primary locations for birdwatching. Also, reservation birds may be viewed on guided walks arranged by the American Museum of Science and Energy (AMSE) in conjunction with ORNL and TWRA.

Plans are underway, by TWRA and DOE, for public access to the scenic 300-acre Freels Bend Peninsula, and

the unbroken forest of the 3000-acre Black Oak Ridge Conservation Easement (BORCE). Like children outside a candy store, area citizens have been waiting a long time (indeed a lifetime) to partake of the natural treasures preserved on these unique parcels of land.

Fortunate is the birder who spies the Grasshopper Sparrow on a guided walk at Freels Bend, or meets the American Woodcock at its "singing ground" on Black Oak Ridge.

□□□□□□□□□□□□

Visit [www.oakridgevisitor.com](http://www.oakridgevisitor.com) to download a copy of the Oak Ridge birdwatching brochure (found at [www.oakridgevisitor.com/maps/birdwatch.pdf](http://www.oakridgevisitor.com/maps/birdwatch.pdf)) or contact the Oak Ridge Convention & Visitors Bureau, (865) 482-7821 or the American Museum of Science and Energy (AMSE), (865) 576-3200 for maps and other information.

### **Parcel ED-6 - Proposed Transfer Pending**

In late summer of 2005, DOE published the long-expected draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for Conveyance of Parcel ED-6 to the City of Oak (DOE/EA-1514). (See AFORR's March 2005 newsletter for background on this area.) AFORR members participated in DOE's informal public meeting on the draft EA and provided written comments to DOE. DOE's schedule for concluding the decision process is not known.

AFORR's written comments on the draft EA (excerpted below) focused on concerns about the size of the proposed transfer and DOE's proposal to build a new gravel road within the adjacent Black Oak Ridge Conservation Easement (BORCE) near the boundary of the transferred land:

*AFORR continues to contend (as indicated in a January 2001 letter to DOE written on AFORR's behalf by the Southern Environmental Law Center) that DOE should not continue to consider land-transfer proposals such as this one on a piecemeal basis because the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) obligates DOE to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) that considers the combined, long-range impacts of land-use decisions on the Oak Ridge Reservation as a whole. However, the organization does not object in principle to this particular proposal because (1) it is an outgrowth of the Land-Use Planning Focus Group process that AFORR supported as the first stage of an EIS-like assessment process and (2) earlier we agreed to acquiesce to the city's plans for a residential development in this area in exchange for the city's agreement to accept the establishment of the*

*adjacent Black Oak Ridge Conservation Easement.*

*AFORR is, however, disappointed that the proposed transfer and development will reduce the conservation value of the BORCE, and our organization would like the proposal to be modified to reduce its adverse impacts. We have identified two major objections to the specifics of the land-transfer proposal as presented in the draft EA:*

*(1) The land area proposed for transfer is much larger than had been discussed previously*

*(2) The draft EA states that after the transfer DOE would build a new gravel road on the eastern edge of the BORCE, near the new federal boundary.*

*In addition, we believe that the draft EA is deficient in its assessment of impacts to deep forest-interior habitat.*

*The two aspects of the proposal to which we object increase the ED-6 transfer's adverse impact on the large stand of deep forest-interior habitat that is the most significant ecological value of this portion of Black Oak Ridge. This forest provides rare forest-interior habitat, a type of habitat that some songbirds require for breeding and that is rapidly disappearing from our landscape. According to the draft EA, ED-6 contains 174 acres of this habitat type, part of an 863-acre contiguous tract that is mostly in the BORCE. The actual loss of forest interior habitat would be much larger than 174 acres because the clearing of forest eliminates the "interior" attribute from remaining forest within a substantial distance of the new forest edge. To reduce the impacts of this proposal, DOE should withdraw plans for the road and reduce the size of the transfer area in keeping with the spirit of earlier discussions and agreements.*

*During the DOE Land-Use Focus Group process in 2001 and 2002, city officials indicated an interest in a total of about 220 acres for residential development, not the 362 acres that DOE now proposes to transfer. When DOE reserved this large area from the BORCE for consideration of a possible transfer to the city, AFORR understood that a larger area had been reserved in order to allow more detailed study and the crafting of a transfer proposal (for the acreage desired by the city) that was sensitive to the special features of the land. (AFORR also understands that some of the 362 acres consists of state highway right of way that is not suitable for either conservation or development.)*

*During informal scoping for this EA, our members asked DOE to survey the ED-6 area for sensitive plants and other sensitive features, then present an additional alternative in which the western boundary of ED-6 was redrawn to follow natural topographic boundaries, excluding steep areas with little development potential and areas with sensitive vegetation, thus reducing the acreage of the transferred parcel and allowing some of the land to be added to the adjacent BORCE. We were disappointed to see that this option is not considered in the draft EA and, indeed, that the EA does not even mention that this issue was raised. City officials have told us informally that if DOE transfers the entire parcel, they would consider reserving western portions of the parcel and giving them to the State of Tennessee to be added to the Conservation Area. However, AFORR would prefer that DOE (as steward of this land on behalf of the people of the United States) assume the responsibility of identifying some land for conservation, thus respecting the basis for AFORR's and other groups' agreement not to object to a proposed transfer.*

*DOE's planned perimeter road does not appear to have any useful purpose. The draft EA states that DOE "would need" to build a road "to provide continued security and fire suppression for that portion of the ORR" and to "separate the proposed residential development from the BORCE area." The need for "continued security access" is not apparent, since the area to be secured has no DOE programmatic function other than conservation. Public roads nearby and intersecting the existing boundary patrol road (including Wisconsin Avenue and the new roads that would be built in the proposed residential development) should be more than ample to provide fire suppression access to the BORCE.*

*Finally, it is difficult to conceive of why a residential development and a conservation area would need to be separated by a 20-foot-wide gravel road... The road would substantially extend the adverse ecological impacts of the proposed ED-6 land transfer (by eliminating some habitat, extending the loss of forest interior habitat farther into the BORCE), would be considered an eyesore*

*by adjacent residents, would increase DOE's management costs, and could increase trespasser access to both the conservation area and the residential area. This road should be deleted from DOE's proposal.*

---

## **AFORR News & Notes**

- In June 2005 AFORR partnered with Tennessee Citizens for Wilderness Planning (TCWP) to hold a public meeting with TVA to discuss the Watts Bar Reservoir Land Management Plan. Scoping Document. Earlier we had provided comments on the document scope. AFORR submitted extensive comments on the draft plan, which deals with management of TVA-managed public lands adjacent to Watts Bar reservoir, including the site once designated for the Clinch River breeder reactor and other tracts near the Oak Ridge Reservation.

- In September TCWP, AFORR, and other area groups hosted a TDEC Appreciation Luncheon in Oak Ridge. Guests included TDEC Commissioner Jim Fyke, Deputy Commissioner Paul Sloan, and several other TDEC staff members located in Knoxville, Nashville, and Oak Ridge. Fyke and Sloan delivered short speeches about TDEC's vision and current challenges, and participants enjoyed the opportunity to become acquainted and discuss various issues.

- AFORR partnered with the City of Oak Ridge, TCWP and Greenways Oak Ridge to sponsor the second annual Secret City Hiking Day, Saturday, October 22, 2005. Our volunteers participated as leaders for some of the four guide hikes held that day. Solway Bend on the ORR was a hike destination again this year. Secret City Hiking Days are planned to become a yearly or twice-yearly event.

- AFORR officers and board were pleased to learn recently that The Nature Conservancy's Tennessee organization had designated Tim Myrick to serve on the AFORR board as TNC's representative. At the January 31 meeting, members will be asked to ratify this appointment and elect a slate of officers and board members. Bill Schramm, Ellen Smith, Jo Ann Thompson, and Frank Hensley have agreed to stand for re-election as officers, and Virginia Dale, Bill Johnston, and Lorene Sigal are candidates for re-election as at-large members of the board. In addition to Myrick, organizational representatives serving on the board are Hensley (representing TCWP) and Wolf Naegeli (Foundation for Global Sustainability).

## Get involved with the Oak Ridge Reservation!

**Please join us.** If you are receiving this newsletter but have not yet joined AFORR, please consider doing so, using the form provided below.

**Please volunteer.** If you have time to contribute (and even if you don't), your volunteer involvement on mailings, membership, research, organizing programs, and other areas could make a difference for the future of the Oak Ridge Reservation as a resource in East Tennessee.

**Tell people about the ORR.** Tell your friends and your elected officials that you value the Oak Ridge Reservation and want it to remain as a public resource. Use this newsletter or our website as sources of information.

**Sign up for AFORR's e-mail notifications.** Go to <http://www.discoveret.org/mailman/listinfo/aforrlist> or use the membership form to add your e-mail address to our e-mail list (used only for announcements and other notifications).

---

### Advocates for the Oak Ridge Reservation (AFORR) MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Phone: Home: \_\_\_\_\_ Work: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Membership Level:

\_\_\_ Individual - \$15/year

\_\_\_ Family (2 people at same address) - \$20/year

\_\_\_ Supporting - \$50/year

Additional Contribution \_\_\_\_\_

Total Amount Enclosed \_\_\_\_\_

Make checks payable to AFORR. Please mail completed form to:

AFORR

c/o Hensley

136 W. Revere Circle

Oak Ridge, Tennessee 37830

*NOTE: Nothing of monetary value has been provided in consideration of these membership dues and additional contributions. AFORR is a nonprofit organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue code, so donations are tax-deductible as contributions.*

Are you a member of an Affiliated Organization (our affiliates include TCWP, Nature Conservancy, Tennessee Wildlife Federation, Foundation for Global Sustainability, and Tennessee Ornithological Society)? Please name:

\_\_\_\_\_

Can you assist AFORR with any of the following? \_\_\_PUBLICITY \_\_\_MEMBERSHIP \_\_\_EVENTS  
\_\_\_RESEARCH \_\_\_OTHER: \_\_\_\_\_