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## NEWS

# DOE, TWRA sign pact that will lead to transfer of 3,500 acres to state

The Oak Ridger

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The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) signed an Agreement in Principle with the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA) that lays the groundwork to transfer more than 3,500 acres of scenic East Tennessee land to the state.

"Transferring this federally owned land will increase natural resource management and designate areas for green space and mixed-use recreational opportunities for the public," an official DOE news release stated.

"Conservation of this essential piece of the East Tennessee landscape is vitally important. I am grateful for the partnership between the Department of Energy and the TWRA that will make this possible," Tennessee Lt. Gov. Randy McNally, R-Oak Ridge, stated in the release.

"This agreement will cultivate collaboration and support the long-term vision of creating an asset for the community and the region," the news release stated.

"The East Tennessee region is unique, and we are pleased to be working together with DOE on these property transfers that will allow us to expand our services in the area," Bobby Wilson, TWRA executive director, stated in the release. "We will be able to increase recreational opportunities, prioritize wildlife habitat management, and introduce new programs that will benefit both the community and the environment."

DOE and TWRA will complete the transfer process under federal law, which requires regulatory approvals and generally takes one to three years to complete.

"This partnership between DOE and TWRA is an excellent opportunity for both organizations to act as one in preserving areas of the Oak Ridge Reservation," stated Johnny Moore, manager of DOE's ORNL Site Office. "We're pleased to be part of an effort to expand access to the outstanding natural assets we have."

Once complete, the community will have greater connectivity to the region's abundant natural assets. The ultimate vision is to provide open spaces where residents and visitors can experience and enjoy nature. The terrain of these areas offers abundant opportunities for fishing, hunting, boating, hiking, birding, mountain biking and wildlife viewing.

"This is an exciting step forward in our efforts to transfer land that can be reused and benefits the community," stated Laura Wilkerson, acting manager for DOE's Oak Ridge Office of Environmental Management. "Our program has always focused on advancing conservation and sustainability, so finding new and diverse opportunities to connect people with the environment is a great achievement. I want to thank our contractor partner, UCOR, for their incredible support and helping bring this agreement to fruition."

The release stated the agreement is a component of a larger effort by DOE's Oak Ridge EM office and its cleanup contractor UCOR to transform the East Tennessee Technology Park into a multi-use industrial park for the community. To date, DOE has transferred nearly 1,300 acres to attract new economic development, constructed facilities that share the site's unique history, and set aside thousands of acres for conservation. That latter will be under the watch of TWRA through these future transfers.

DOE's Oak Ridge Reservation is located on about 32,000 acres. It lies within the Great Appalachian Valley of East Tennessee between the Cumberland and Great Smoky Mountains, and it is bordered by the Clinch River that ultimately joins the Tennessee River. Since the 1940s, the site has played a vital role in energy, technology, and defense missions worldwide.