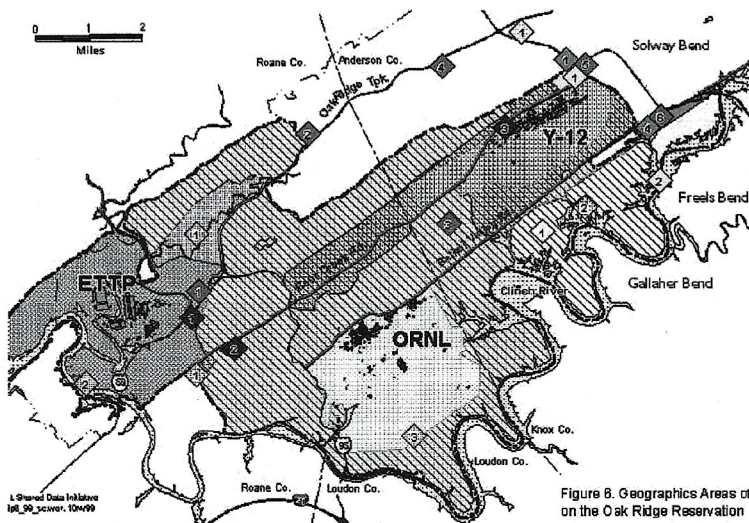


## Background on the Three Bend Scenic and Wildlife Management Refuge Area



In June 1999 Department of Energy (DOE) Secretary Bill Richardson announced that long-term management of 3,000 acres on the Oak Ridge Reservation would be granted to the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA), which would manage it as the Three Bend Scenic and Wildlife Management Refuge Area. Secretary Richardson proclaimed in June 1999, "From today on, 3,000 acres within the Oak Ridge Reservation's buffer zone will be committed to the pursuit of conservation and wildlife management." Advocates for the Oak Ridge Reservation (AFORR) had no role in seeking this action, but we were very pleased by the announcement.

The "Three Bends" are Solway, Freels, and Gallaher Bends, with 20 miles of shoreline on the Clinch River (Melton Hill Reservoir). This area is widely recognized by ecologists and conservationists as extremely valuable

for wildlife and wildlife-related recreation and education. These lands are a diverse mosaic of field, woodland, and shoreline with substantial value as habitat for songbirds, waterfowl, and upland game such as deer, turkey, and small gamebirds, as well as opportunities for enhancement of conservation values and wildlife habitat.

In January 2001 DOE and TWRA concluded a management agreement for the area. Wildlife management in the area was already overseen by TWRA as part of the Oak Ridge Wildlife Management Area, under a 5-year renewable agreement. The new agreement was also for 5 years, but it gives TWRA additional latitude in making wildlife management decisions. Other land set-asides that Richardson announced in the summer of 1999 led to permanent agreements with other federal agencies, but this agreement is not permanent, apparently because it is with a state and not with another federal agency. DOE continues to manage Clark Center Park, which is located between Freels and Gallaher Bends.

Since 2001, the TWRA has made progress with wildlife habitat improvement on the Three Bend area. Fescue on Freels and Solway Bends has been sprayed with herbicide, other areas were bushhogged, prescribed burns were done, and land was reseeded with native grasses and other crops. The areas around barns, structures, and roads have been cleared. The University of Tennessee has been using the area for wildlife classes and ecological research activities. UT faculty have appreciated being able to bring students to such a high-quality area located so close to the UT campus. ORNL continues to conduct K-12 educational activities, including a summer camp, at the historic Freels cabin. Other public use is still limited, but the area is open for hunting during the controlled hunts on the Oak Ridge Reservation and the Gallaher Bend Greenway is open for public walking and bicycling at all other times. Access control on Solway Bend helps to protect the City of Oak Ridge's water supply intake.

Effective conservation management requires a long-term commitment. When the 5-year agreement with TWRA expires in 2006, it should be replaced with a permanent conservation agreement. We are concerned that DOE may be pressured to cancel the arrangement -- or to reduce the three bends to just two bends. Even at the time of the announcement, there were complaints locally that these public lands should be available for private development. Although Richardson proclaimed that the area would be protected "from today on," there is a different administration in Washington now, and we cannot predict whether previous administrations' commitments will be honored.

In communicating with others about the Three Bend area, point out:

1. The value of the area for wildlife, recreation, and continued wildlife/ecological education and research.
2. The importance of long-term decision-making authority for TWRA. Also, TWRA needs to be able to implement habitat improvement measures such as prescribed burns without obstruction from DOE.
3. Secretary Richardson's promise that the Three Bend area would be preserved forever. In response to a question at the announcement ceremony he said: "It's permanent. This is for the people of Oak Ridge, for the kids. It's a wildlife preserve, for conservation purposes."

– Advocates for the Oak Ridge Reservation (AFORR), September 2004 – [www.kornet.org/aforr](http://www.kornet.org/aforr)