

ADVOCATES FOR THE OAK RIDGE RESERVATION
NEWSLETTER
January 2005

Another DOE Land Transfer
Proposal: ED-6

(Ellen's article here)

Concerns for the Three Bend Scenic and Wildlife Management Refuge

The present 5 year agreement between the DOE and the Tennessee Wildlife Resource Agency (TWRA) that places authority with TWRA to manage the Three Bend area for DOE as a wildlife refuge, will expire in January of 2006. Gerald Boyd, Manager of the DOE, Oak Ridge Operations, assured AFORR members, at a meeting in September 2003, that the Three Bend Scenic and Wildlife Refuge is a valued part of the DOE mission and that the present agreement with TWRA to manage the Three Bend area as a wildlife refuge would be renewed,

Since that time, a new appeal has been made, by Oak Ridge city officials, for the development of excess DOE land. Included in the city's appeal for excess DOE land is the 3000-acre Three Bend area. Oak Ridge city officials cite as the basis for their appeal an old arrangement with the DOE that identified 22 parcels of reservation land, totaling more than 10,000 acres, that could be conveyed to the city. Mayor Bradshaw was reported in the Knoxville News-Sentinel(May 31,2004) as saying that there should be "room for discussion" about the city obtaining Solway Bend, the bend of the Three Bend area nearest to the City of Oak Ridge.

AFORR is concerned that DOE may be pressured to cancel the agreement with TWRA or to reduce the three bends to just two. When the 5-year agreement with TWRA expires in 2006, it should be replaced with a permanent conservation agreement.

Back ground on the Three Bend Scenic and Wildlife Management Refuge Area

The "Three Bends"^{cc} 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 game birds, as well as opportunities for enhancement of conservation values.

In June 1999 Department of energy (DOE Secretary Bill Richardson announced that long-term management of 3,00 acres on the Oak Ridge Reservation would be granted to the Tennessee Wildlife Resource 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.

In January 201, 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 bush hogged, prescribed burns were done, and land was reseeded with native grasses and other crops. The area 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 for wildlife classes and ecological research 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.

(An article here to update members, on The Black Oak Ridge Conservation Easement, would be helpful. Bill Schramm might write it).

Farewell to Dev Joslin

Dev Joslin and his wife Harriet left Oak Ridge in September 2004 for their new home and permanent residence in Costa Rica. Both Dev and Harriet will be remembered for the years of service to the Oak Ridge community and will be greatly missed.

Dev was instrumental in founding the Advocates for the Oak Ridge Reservation (AFORR) as a community voice to increase public awareness of the unique environmental assets of the Oak Ridge Reservation (ORR). He served as AFORR’s president from its inception in 1999 until his departure in September 2004. Under his leadership, AFORR voiced concern about the threat to the continued existence of the 20,000-acre Oak Ridge Reservation Research Park, and actively challenged the DOE practice of piecemeal transfer of reservation land. His strong belief that DOE should be encouraged to engage in comprehensive land-use planning that considers the entire 34,000 -acre reservation before more land is transferred, is a guiding principle of AFORR. Dev will be remembered as a principal voice and initiator of the Oak Ridge Land Use Planning Focus Group whose work led to the agreement between the State of Tennessee and the DOE to preserve 3040 acres of undisturbed reservation land in an easement recognized as the Black Oak Ridge Conservation Easement.

Overview

AFORR’S Participation in the Secret City Hike Days, October 16–17, 2004 - As one of the principal sponsors of the Secret City Hike Days, AFORR helped to provide leaders for the hikes as well as assist Mayor Bradshaw, the TCWP and the Greenways Oak Ridge in planning the event.

Letters to commissioner Child of the Tennessee

Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) – AFORR and TCWP wrote a letter in May 2004 to Commissioner Child followed by a second letter in September 2004 expressing concerns regarding the length of time being taken to conclude the agreement between the State of Tennessee and DOE for the Black Oak Ridge Conservation Easement on the Oak Ridge Reservation. Concerns were expressed also about the lack of communication to the public on progress with the agreement as well as the lack of opportunity for public input in the planning process. AFORR and TCWP formally requested that TDEC provide the public with information on the matter.

Lunch with State Senator Randy McNally and State Representative Jim Hackworth –

(Maybe Lorene would write this blurb, in a hurry, if we want to include it).

Solway Bend Hike – The Solway Bend Hike, on September 26, 2004, was arranged by AFORR as an opportunity for the Oak Ridge City Council and other city officials to view the unique environmental value of the Three Bend Scenic Wildlife Refuge. Botanist, Larry Pound assisted hikers in exploring the bend as a natural area and experiencing firsthand, the ecological significance of the Three Bend area the need for its protection.

Ellen Smith prepared historical information for distribution to participants titled “Background on the Three Bend Scenic and Wildlife Management Refuge Area.”

AFORR Annual Meeting November 11, 2004 –

The following AFORR members were elected to their positions by a majority vote of members present:

William Schramm, President of AFORR

William Johnston, Executive Board of AFORR

Guest speaker for the evening was Bobby Fulcher, TDEC Superintendent of the Cumberland Trail.