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Oak Ridge, TN 37830

LETTER TO THE OAK RIDGER

Are Oak Ridgers aware that their City government opposes the agreement reached between DOE and the State to set aside 3000 acres of undisturbed federal government land for public use and enjoyment as a permanent, state-managed natural wildlife area - identified as the Black Oak Ridge Conservation Easement? The easement, located on the west end of Oak Ridge, was conveyed, by DOE, to the people of Tennessee, as partial settlement/payment for past environmental damages to the lower Watts Bar Reservoir.

Are Oak Ridgers aware of the resolution and official comments of the City Council and staff sent on September 22, 2003 to DOE and State officials requesting boundary changes in the conservation easement? Citing previous "self-sufficiency agreements" with DOE, the City asks that 225 acres be removed from the easement now and offered to the City for residential development. City officials ask, also, that another 417 acres of the easement be made available, to the City, before the conservation easement is finalized.

Are Oak Ridgers aware that the Black Oak Ridge Conservation Easement is principally unsuitable for development due to its steep slopes and geology, but is of inestimable public value as an accessible wildlife area recognized nationally for its ecological richness? The easement represents an effort by the Oak Ridge community, as well as DOE and the State, to balance development with conservation.

Are Oak Ridgers aware that boundary disputes and delays can defeat the purpose of the easement? Citizens support the conservation easement. The value Oak Ridgers place on the natural environment is a matter of record, and is revealed at public hearings, on DOE surveys, and in the final report of the Land Use Focus Group. The Focus Group was a DOE sponsored twenty-member, community-wide panel that met for a year and engaged the public in a land planning process that identified the 3000-acre Black Oak Ridge tract as most suitable for permanent preservation.

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