

## **THREE BEND SCENIC WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT REFUGE AREA**

Advocates for the Oak Ridge Reservation (AFORR) wants to convene representatives of various environmental groups to discuss land use issues related to the Three Bend Scenic Wildlife Management Refuge Area on the Department of Energy (DOE) Oak Ridge Reservation. It is our hope that open discussion will establish broad categories of outcomes for Three Bends (e.g., maintain the area as is for conservation, research and public use, allow development on Solway Bend in exchange for permanent preservation of Freels and Gallaher Bends).

### **Background**

In July 1999 DOE Secretary Bill Richardson surprised all of Oak Ridge with the news that 3,000 acres of local federal land would henceforth be committed to conservation and wildlife management as the Three Bend Scenic and Wildlife Refuge Area. The "Three Bends" are Solway, Freels and Gallaher Bends, with 20 miles of shoreline on the Clinch River (Melton Hill Reservoir), a natural treasure in the midst of increasing urbanization.

The land remains in federal government ownership, but DOE has partnered with the Tennessee Wildlife Resource Agency (TWRA) to manage the land for wildlife. The original 5-year management agreement was renewed in January 2006.

### **Ecology**

The Three Bends contain a diverse mixture of field, woodland and shoreline. Wildlife ecologists say this rare mixture makes wonderful habitat for songbirds, waterfowl and upland game such as deer, turkey, and small game birds. As a result, this area has great potential for outdoor recreation activities such as hunting and birdwatching.

Since 2001 TWRA has been conducting long-term projects to make the excellent wildlife habitat on the Three Bends even better. TWRA has sprayed nonnative fescue grass on Freels and Solway Bends with herbicide, bush-hogged parts of the area and conducted prescribed burns to control undesirable vegetation and reseeded some of the land with native grasses and crops. Areas around barns, structures and roads have been cleared for safety and conservation purposes.

### **Current Uses**

The University of Tennessee uses 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 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. TWRA expects to demolish dilapidated buildings this fiscal year which should allow for increased public access. Access control on Solway Bend helps to protect the City of Oak Ridge's water supply intake.

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. 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.

#### Issues

- 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.
- While TWRA manages the Three Bends area under a 5-year agreement with DOE, there is no written commitment to longer-term preservation or a permanent conservation agreement.
- The DOE Oak Ridge Office has stated publicly that proposals for the area will be considered if they come with broad support from the community.
- 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."