

Congressman Wamp

Your past support, ~~and~~ involvement, and leadership in landuse planning for the Oak Ridge Reservation (ORR) has been appreciated by all the community. As discussed with your staff back in April, recent developments associated with the Three Bends area has resulted in renewed interest in defining the long-term management approach for that valuable resource.

On May 4, 2006, Advocates for the Oak Ridge Reservation (AFORR) convened a meeting of representatives of major regional conservation groups and environmental government agencies to discuss the future of the Three Bend Scenic and Wildlife Conservation Area that is located on the Reservation. The specific focus was discussion of how to respond to recent informal requests for consideration of future City of Oak Ridge development activities on the Solway Bend area of the Three Bends.

During the discussions, participants highlighted a diverse range of valuable attributes of the Three Bend Area and the surrounding Reservation, including:

- o Environmental sciences research based on the unique, protected environment provided by the Reservation results in excess of \$15 million annually in research funding for Oak Ridge National Laboratory (ORNL) alone, with additional funds also brought into The University of Tennessee (UT) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.
- o New, large scale environmental research initiatives by both UT and ORNL are focusing on Solway Bend for permanent research stations, due to its special mix of aquatic, woodlands, riparian and old field habitats in close proximity to one another.
- o The Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation has identified the entire Three Bend area as important Landscape Areas on the ORR that deserve to become State Natural Areas, and The Nature Conservancy also has recognized the biodiversity and unique habitats there as important areas for protection.
- o The Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, who currently manages the Three Bends for DOE, values the ORR as a hunting resource of high importance for the East Tennessee region.
- o All attendees recognized that the value of the Three Bends in its present, protected, state will only increase over the long-term, as similar resources are lost across the State to development pressures.

In addition, meeting participants affirmed the importance of (1) maintaining the Three Bend area as public land, consistent with its historical taking as a national resource, and (2) conducting comprehensive planning for the ORR, considering all of the regional, national and global values the area supports. The follow-on planning from the Land Use Focus Group that you were involved in during 2003 has not proceeded and hence, Reservation planning is still incomplete.

In particular, for the ongoing consideration of alternate use of the Solway Bend, AFORR and the meeting participants did not view residential development as the highest and best use of that resource. We continue to support multiple uses of these valuable lands primarily for conservation, environmental research, education and public recreation. The participants of the May 4 meeting stressed that the Three Bends area exemplifies the many benefits that are provided on the ORR, and which should be enhanced through proactive management approaches. At the same time, AFORR recognizes that the Oak Ridge community is at a cross-roads in terms of tourism, commercial and housing development needs and that it is vitally important to have a strong, vibrant community adjacent to the ORR to support and benefit from its resources. Hence, we want to express our willingness to work with the community to enhance the viability and health of the area in any responsible way.

The AFORR will continue to lead the charge to recognize and promote the best use of the ORR as a public resource. We intend to work across the community to advocate for the unique values of the natural resources on the ORR. We are proceeding with follow-up actions from this initial environmental constituents workshop to further define the AFORR position on the best uses for the Three Bends and to communicate the value of this area and potential for increased public access. We look forward to continued dialogue with you and your staff and welcome the opportunity for meaningful discussions on the best approaches for landuse planning for the Reservation and the surrounding community.

Sincerely,

Ellen Smith