

Description of Pellissippi Blueway

The Pellissippi Blueway is a concept initiated by Advocates for the Oak Ridge Reservation (AFORR) and Tennessee Citizens for Wilderness Planning (TCWP) to identify and promote recreation and conservation opportunities along Melton Hill Lake. Pellissippi Blueway is located in east Tennessee along the Clinch River, extending from Melton Lake Park in Oak Ridge to Melton Hill Dam. The 26+ miles of Blueway can provide greater opportunities for residents and visitors to appreciate and experience the vast tracts of forested land bordering the Clinch River, while maintaining its treasured natural attributes.

Many people drawn to jobs in east Tennessee seek out outdoor recreational activities in natural settings. The Pellissippi Blueway has the potential to provide excellent experiences to families and people of all ages. Many outdoor activities such as canoeing, kayaking, paddle boarding, fishing, swimming, and bird watching are easily accessible on the Blueway. Increased awareness of the Blueway and improved access should benefit businesses that sell or rent recreation equipment and provide services to Blueway users. Users of the Blueway who get to experience the clean waters, extensive forests and natural beauty of the Blueway are likely to encourage protection of these natural areas, thus supporting the community's health and economy.

A coalition of governmental and non-governmental organizations and recreation companies has come together to seek improved access to the Pellissippi Blueway and greater public awareness of the many opportunities provided by the Blueway. The group is working with governmental agencies to maintain existing access and create new access where needed.

The Pellissippi Blueway runs alongside unfragmented forests with high biodiversity and scenic value. Some of the adjacent public lands are owned and managed by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), Knox County, and the US Department of Energy (DOE). While protecting the diverse values of those public lands, the coalition would like the broad community to recognize and appreciate the Blueway as an opportunity to experience the scenic area.

Under the guidance and coaching of the National Park Service's River, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program (NPS RCTA) (<https://www.nps.gov/orgs/rtca/index.htm>), the coalition supporting the Blueway have made much progress including the following:

- Developed the concept for the Blueway and organizational structure of the Blueway
- Expanded the coalition to include 15 governmental (local, state and federal) and non-governmental organizations and companies including the City of Oak Ridge, the Tennessee Valley Authority, The Nature Conservancy, TennGreen, Explore Oak Ridge (<https://exploreoakridge.com/>), and the Adventures Outdoor Center (<https://adventuresoutdoorsrentals.com/>)
- Held 5 meetings to work on establishing the Blueway organization and working access issues and publicity activities
- Began work on a Memorandum of Understanding with the organizations in the Blueway coalition and other organizations
- Identified the vision and goals for the Blueway
- Received funding under the Small Grant Program of the Tennessee Chapter of the Sierra Club to develop and distribute a brochure about the Blueway
- Began drafting the brochure describing the Blueway

- Began establishment of a Pellissippi Blueway webpage: <https://aforr.info/pellissippi-blueway/>
- Completed access assessment forms for 6 access locations and completed float segment forms for 3 different segments
- Applied for continued support from the NPS RTCA.

Over the next five years, the coalition expects to accomplish the following activities:

- Complete and distribute a brochure about the Blueway
- Provide an operating, informative, and well-maintained webpage for the public
- Complete all the access and float segment assessments for the Blueway and have them accessible through the webpage
- Revise the Blueway map to better represent all the accesses and important features needed to explore the Blueway
- Expand the Blueway coalition to include more community, governmental, and non-governmental organizations
- Extend existing walking trails or create new walking trails to access the Blueway to promote hiking.
- Conduct 15 or more outings on the Blueway to increase public awareness
- Establish Clark Center Park as a public destination park focusing on the waterfront and natural surroundings

Clark Center Park, located halfway along the Blueway, is a key access location. It is owned and operated by the US Department of Energy (DOE), which is not in the recreation business and would like to transfer the Park to another entity. The coalition would like to maintain and enhance Clark Center Park as a central access point under management of another organization. The City of Oak Ridge is in discussion with DOE about the fate of the Park.