

Board of Directors Meeting West Tennessee River Basin Authority January 17, 2025

The Board of Directors meeting of the West Tennessee River Basin Authority was held at 11:30 a.m. on Friday, January 17, 2025, in the West Tennessee River Basin Authority conference room. Board members in attendance included: Mayor Mark Ward, Mayor Gary Reasons, Mayor David Quick, Mayor Rhea Taylor, Mayor Robbie McCready, Mayor Randy Geiger, Mayor Danny Cook, Mayor AJ Massey, Dr. James Byford, Mr. Joe McKinnon, and Rep. Chris Todd. Advisory Board members and other guests in attendance were Jimmy Moody, Winfred Allen, Richie Chilcut, Jai Templeton, Brad Robbins, Rudy Collins, Tyler Lock, Libbie Rushton, Matt Fennel, and Patrick Parker (OGC). Mayor Todd Pulse and Ellie Eggink (TWF) joined via TEAMS. A quorum was verified, Mayor Gary Reasons gave the invocation, and Chairman AJ Massey called the meeting to order.

The following agenda items were discussed:

Public Comment

Chairman Massey asked if there was anyone to offer public comment. There was no response from members of the public. No action was taken during the public comment period.

October 2024 Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

Director Blackwood presented the October 2024 WTRBA Board of Director meeting minutes. With no questions, Chairman Massey asked for a motion to approve the October 2024 Board of Directors meeting minutes. A motion was made by Mr. Joe McKinnon and seconded by Mayor David Quick. All voted in favor and the motion passed.

WTRBA Financials

Director Blackwood reviewed the financial reports and graphs with the board, stating that as of November 2024, expenses were **\$1,599,081** of the **\$7,094,500** annual budget for **Operating Funds (327.26)**. The **Maintenance Account (327.24)** began the year with **\$1,615,500** and actual expenses through November 2024 were **\$641,481**. Year-to-date county funds for **FY24/25** are **\$546,265**. Copies of the financial reports were attached to the minutes. A motion to accept the financial reports was made by Mayor Gary Reasons and seconded by Mayor Mark Ward. All voted in favor and the motion passed.

Nominating Committee

- F2025 Executive Committee Recommendations

Director Blackwood reported that the Nominating Committee convened to review and discuss recommendations for the 2025 Executive Committee. The committee recommends maintaining the current officers: Mayor AJ Massey as Chair, Dr. James Byford as Vice Chair, and Mr. Joe McKinnon as Secretary. Director Blackwood noted that this recommendation is being presented through the Executive Committee and does not require a second.

FY24 Annual Report Review

Director Blackwood presented the annual report, noting that it is a continually improving document that highlights the agency's accomplishments. He emphasized its value, particularly for those unable to attend meetings, and outlined several key points:

- Flood Control and Maintenance
 - The agency's core responsibility remains the maintenance of 131 flood control structures across the region. These structures are critical for flood risk management and are maintained to ensure optimal functionality, often unnoticed by the public.
 - The maintenance work is performed diligently year-round by the team to ensure rivers flow efficiently and risks are minimized.
- Beaver Damage Management
 - The agency manages approximately 200 sites affected by beaver-related issues, including 165 county road sites in West Tennessee.
 - Brad Robbins provided additional information, highlighting:
 - The importance of maintaining active sites and reallocating resources as needed.
 - Collaboration with county highway departments to address problem areas promptly.
 - A recent staff retirement has led to the reallocation of coverage areas among remaining staff, which may result in minor adjustments to service timelines.
- Lone Oaks Wetland Project
 - A unique project at Lone Oaks Farm, a property managed by the University of Tennessee, was highlighted. The agency planted a wetland in the shape of the UT "Power T" using cypress trees. This wetland is expected to be a distinctive and visible feature, particularly in the winter when the trees turn orange.
- Technical Expertise and Innovation
 - Director Blackwood praised the agency's technical team for their expertise in wetland and stream design and for staying at the forefront of best practices in the field.
 - He emphasized the team's vital role in ensuring that projects are conducted effectively and responsibly, which is documented in the report.
- Future Plans and Maintenance Needs
 - The 2024–2025 calendar and stream maintenance plans were included in the report.
 - Director Blackwood encouraged stakeholders to review these plans and provide feedback if any areas in their counties require attention.
 - He assured attendees that any identified needs could be added to the maintenance list by contacting him or agency staff directly.

Director Blackwood concluded by encouraging attendees to review the annual report and acknowledged the hard work and dedication of the agency's team in fulfilling its mission.

Engineer Update

Kris Gordon provided the Engineer's Update and offered a summary of recent activities and accomplishments by the technical and construction teams. He emphasized the importance of recognizing the contributions of team members who are directly involved in executing projects, many of whom were unable to attend the meeting. Key points included:

- Technical Team Update
 - The team's work was highlighted in the annual report and is consistent with discussions from the October meeting.
 - Current projects include planning for the following:
 - Crockett Creek (Phase 1B and Phase 2)
 - Wetland restoration projects
 - Other job-specific initiatives, many of which are expected to move into construction in the coming year.
 - The team also assisted the University of Tennessee at Lone Oaks Farm with evaluating fish passage through a fish structure. This involved tagging fish to assess usage.
- Upcoming Projects
 - Dire Creek (Massac County) – Supporting Great Wolf Lodge.
 - Cypress Creek (Fayette County) – Flood risk reduction.
 - Central Creek (Downtown Jackson) – Supported by ARP grants.
 - Hatchie River and Trace Creek – Including debris removal and maintenance.
- Construction Team Update
 - Despite limited construction activity since the last meeting due to weather, several tasks were completed, including:
 - Bank stabilization and debris removal.
 - Replacement of bonnet gates and repairs identified by the Safe Dams program, such as a repair at Crockett Creek.
 - Completion of the Claybrook rehabilitation project.
- Maintenance Efforts
 - Maintenance highlights included work on the following waterways:
 - **Beach River** (Weakley County)
 - Big Creek, Big Muddy Creek, Opel Creek, Spring Creek
 - Little Cypress River, Rutherford Fork, Forked Deer River, and Big Sandy River
 - Maintenance activities were mapped visually to better communicate work progress and coverage, categorized as:
 - **Red:** Contracted work
 - **Yellow:** Work by the amphibious crew
 - **Blue:** Airboat and chainsaw work
 - **Green:** Land-based work
- Equipment Updates
 - Two new trucks were acquired, equipped with flatbeds and tools, to enhance spring readiness.
 - Trailers underwent repairs, including lighting and brake maintenance, while amphibious vehicles received track maintenance.

- Highlights and Observations

- Gordon noted the success of work on the Beach River, which restored water levels to a point where local waterfowl populations have returned, showcasing the effectiveness of maintenance efforts.
- He reiterated the importance of balancing crew assignments and spatial coverage to ensure comprehensive service across the region.

Gordon concluded by encouraging members to reach out if there are any maintenance needs or concerns in their areas. He thanked the team for their continued dedication and readiness for the spring season.

Special Projects/ Programs

- WET Center Progress

The WET Center Executive Director, Alison Franklin, provided an update on the progress of the WET Center project, covering design, development, curriculum, and strategic planning. The following points were discussed:

- Grant Applications

- In November, the team submitted a Community Change Grant in collaboration with the University of Tennessee at Martin, the Northwest Development District, and other regional development districts.
- The grant, submitted to the EPA, aims to fund the WET Center project and a comprehensive infrastructure study focusing on culvert assessments across the Twin County area.
- The team is awaiting the outcome of the grant application.

- Brand Development

- Work is underway on logo design, with initial concepts to be reviewed next week.
- Following logo finalization, the team will begin developing a dedicated website for the WET Center.

- Building and Site Progress

- The project is currently in the design development phase.
- Plans will be presented to the state in March, followed by construction design, bidding, and groundbreaking anticipated in Fall 2025.
- The timeline aims for a grand opening in late Fall 2026.
- The building will be located on the north side of the dam at Lone Oaks, adjacent to the big lake and near existing cabins, ensuring consistency with the site's aesthetics.

- Architectural Renderings

- The building design reflects the style of the Lone Oaks cabins and the existing hunter education building.
- Renderings are subject to further refinement to optimize usability for future customers.
- A breezeway space, featuring an oculus for natural light, will serve as a central feature where the building's three wings converge.

- Interactive Demonstration Table

- The centerpiece of the breezeway will be a hands-on water demonstration table designed to highlight water's role across Tennessee's regions.

- The table will represent the three grand divisions of the state (West, Middle, and East) and showcase interactive displays related to mountains, hydroelectric power, erosion, floodplains, farming irrigation, and more.
- The table will emphasize water's natural flow, human interaction, and problem-solving related to water management.
- Strategic Planning and Curriculum Development
 - Work continues on establishing a strategic plan and developing a curriculum to align with the WET Center's mission.

Franklin concluded the update by expressing excitement for the project and invited questions from the attendees. The presentation sparked enthusiasm for the interactive elements, particularly the demonstration table, likened to a discovery center for visitors.

Regional Outreach

- MVFCA- New Orleans
Blackwood provided an update on regional outreach, focusing on the annual Mississippi Valley Flood Control Association (MVFCA) trip to New Orleans. He reported that the trip facilitated productive discussions with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers regarding upcoming initiatives and funding opportunities for regional sponsors and partners. Blackwood expressed gratitude for the opportunity to attend and emphasized the importance of this event in fostering regional collaboration. Blackwood also highlighted the involvement of Kris Gordon, newly appointed Secretary of the Engineering Committee for the MVFCA, who accompanied him on the trip. The experience allowed Gordon to gain valuable insight into federal programs and processes managed by the Army Corps of Engineers, which are critical to benefiting the region. Blackwood concluded by noting the success of the trip and its relevance to the area's flood control efforts.
- Stantec Flood Predictor Training
David Blackwood provided an update on the recent flood predictor training held at the Madison County Emergency Management Agency (EMA). The training introduced a free program developed by Stantec, designed for state and emergency personnel to simulate rainfall scenarios, and predict potential flooding using publicly available data. Users can select a county and watershed, pre-calculate flood risks for various scenarios, and access these results during active events to prioritize response efforts. Using the Hoosier Creek watershed as an example, Blackwood demonstrated how the tool identifies high-risk roadways and neighborhoods based on runoff levels. He emphasized the importance of adopting such tools to enhance flood preparedness and encouraged attendees to explore its capabilities. Blackwood offered assistance with accessing the program and noted its value in raising awareness about flood risks across Tennessee.

Other Business/Adjourn

David Blackwood announced that nominations for the Governor's Environmental Stewardship Awards are open until March. These awards recognize individuals and organizations in 12 categories for their contributions to environmental stewardship and conservation. Blackwood encouraged local communities

to submit nominations to highlight individuals making significant environmental contributions. He emphasized the importance of using this opportunity to bring attention to deserving efforts and noted that the awards are issued by the Governor, adding prestige to the recognition.

With no further business, Chairman Massey called for a motion to adjourn. A motion to adjourn was made by Mayor Mark Ward and seconded by Mayor Gary Reasons.

Mayor AJ Massey, Chairman

Mr. Joe McKinnon, Secretary

Upcoming meetings:

Executive Committee on Tuesday, February 18, 2025 @ 9:30am

Executive Committee on Tuesday, March 18, 2025 @ 9:30am

Board of Directors on Friday, April 11, 2025 @ 11:30 a.m.