

Executive Committee Meeting
West Tennessee River Basin Authority
March 18, 2025

The Executive Committee Meeting of the West Tennessee River Basin Authority was held at 9:30a.m. on Tuesday, March 18, 2025, via in-person at the WTRBA office. Executive Committee members in attendance were, Mayor Joseph Butler, Mayor Nelson Cunningham, Dr. Jim Byford, and Mr. Joe McKinnon. Others attending in person were Executive Director David Blackwood, Paige Keith, Alison Franklin, Kris Gordon, and Patrick Parker. In Chairman Massey absence Vice Chairman Byford verified a quorum and called the meeting to order.

The following agenda items were discussed:

Audit Committee Approval

Director Blackwood informed the committee that the risk assessment report has been received and is designated for review and approval by the Audit Committee. As Mayor Butler was the only committee member present, the report will be emailed to the other two members, Mayor Reasons and Mayor Davis, for their review. The Audit Committee will formally review and approve the report at the April Board of Directors meeting.

Special Projects

- Wet Center

Director Blackwood gave an update on the Wet Center, stating the project is progressing through the State Building Commission process and is nearing the completion of the design development phase. Once finalized, the project will move to construction drawings, with groundbreaking expected to begin in the summer. Updated renderings were shared, showcasing the layout, water flow, and structural elements, including a large pond, raceways, box culverts, tanks, and a gate system to control water direction through rapids or an erosion basin. The facility is designed to integrate with the existing landscape while maintaining a strong connection to the water. Three pumps are being installed, with an additional bay reserved for future expansion. In addition to construction updates, the project is moving forward with branding efforts, including a logo set to be presented for board approval next month, followed closely by the launch of a website. The development of a course curriculum is also underway, with ongoing research into structuring an effective educational program. Furthermore, Lon Oaks has hired NRCS personnel to conduct soil and water instruction, utilizing the facility for educational purposes. The project continues to generate excitement, with stakeholders expressing enthusiasm over the design and progress.

- Obion River Flood

Director Blackwood discussed with the committee, the recent flooding events in late February, which significantly impacted the Obion River and surrounding areas. The Obion River reached near-record gauge levels, with multiple levee failures occurring along its course, particularly near Three Rivers. One such failure on private farmland resulted in approximately 50 acres being covered in sand, creating significant challenges for farmers preparing for planting season. The affected levees, primarily built from spoil dirt without proper clay cores or elevation design, were not state-funded structures, and there is no designated funding for private levee repairs. While the state does not have a direct responsibility to fix private levees, discussions were held regarding potential stabilization efforts in critical areas where river channelization and public interest justify intervention.

- Lewis Creek Watershed Plan

Blackwood discussed erosion concerns in Lewis Creek, which has experienced severe bank degradation and a nine-foot headcut that has reached a bridge. The creek's highly erosive soil composition presents significant stabilization challenges, and prior NRCS efforts did not fully address the problem. In response to a request from Dyer County, Blackwood discussed conducting a watershed study for Lewis Creek to assess erosion control measures, including previously unbuilt structures from the original watershed plan. Director Blackwood stated the estimated cost for the study is approximately \$100,000 which would cover surveys and engineering assessments. Dr. Byford asked for a motion to be made for the recommendation that the Board proceed with the watershed study for Lewis Creek. Mr. McKinnon made a motion with Mayor Cunningham seconding. All voted in favor and the motion passed.

- South Fork Forked Deer Restoration

Director Blackwood stated that the South Fork Forked Deer River near Jackson has been designated for community and environmental restoration, focusing on flood-prone, low-to-moderate-income areas. Blackwood added that a recent site visit highlighted persistent flooding in Bemis and South Jackson despite prior mitigation. The floodplain offers opportunities for waterway restoration, flood reduction, and improved storage capacity, benefiting both upstream and downstream areas like Lauderdale County. Director Blackwood informed the committee of a private landowner listing 1,000 acres for sale in this key region, adding The Nature Conservancy and Tennessee Conservation Fund are working toward a purchase agreement, expected to close by June. The state has been approached to assume ownership post-purchase, allowing for stream restoration, flood control, and revenue generation, while also supporting recreation through Blueways and potential Greenway partnerships. Blackwood also stated a kayak site visit confirmed the ecological value of the cypress swamp, reinforcing its restoration potential. Discussions also addressed surrounding land ownership, including private and industrial properties. Successful past projects at Central, Sandy, and Cane Creeks demonstrate the viability of similar efforts here. The Executive Committee voiced concerns about long-term state ownership, but Blackwood clarified that no additional funding commitments would be required, and ownership would facilitate grant access. Blackwood added that with strong conservation partnerships and financial backing, this project presents a major opportunity for flood control, recreation, and ecological restoration. Blackwood concluded the discussion by saying that the next steps will include securing funding, finalizing acquisitions, and advancing restoration planning, with Blueways committing \$100,000. A motion was proposed by Dr. Byford to bring the topic before the Board of Directors to accept ownership upon purchase, enabling future restoration and funding efforts. Mr. McKinnon made a motion with Mayor Butler seconding. All voted in favor and the motion passed.

Restoration Property

Director Blackwood proposed the acquisition of the old Dutch Card Center, adjacent to the Middle Fork Bottoms State Park, for multiple purposes, including supporting WTRBA's stream mitigation program. Blackwood stated the facility includes greenhouses, and with funds allocated for stream restoration, the property could provide resources for tree planting and other necessary materials. Director Blackwood also stated the facility's location and infrastructure make it an ideal site for improvement, potentially offering office space for the growing staff, and adding that additionally, the greenhouses, imported from Holland, are a valuable asset, with an estimated value of around \$1.8 million, matching the appraisal. Blackwood concluded his discussion by stating the property also offers potential for partnerships with agencies such as TWA and Forestry, especially for aquatic and wildlife conservation efforts. With no further discussion Dr. Byford asked for a motion to be made to present the proposition of acquiring the property to the full Board at the April meeting. Mayor Butler made a motion with Mr. McKinnon seconding. All voted in favor and the motion passed.

Outreach

Director Blackwood provided an update on recent outreach activities, including the successful WTWR Symposium, which had around 125 attendees. The event was partially funded by sponsors, covering just over half of the \$10,000 approved budget. The symposium featured engaging talks and discussions, including a presentation on microplastics by a University of Memphis researcher, who examined water and sediment in Jackson and discovered plastic contamination. The event received positive feedback, with many attendees noting it as their favorite annual gathering, contributing to the organization's influence in the scientific community. Additionally, the Augustine School's seventh and eighth-grade students visited, engaging with the stream table and touring the office. The outreach continued with a career day event in Carroll County, where Dustin took an airboat and enjoyed enthusiastic participation from the community. The event featured a helicopter that released brochures, creating a memorable experience.

Other Business/Adjourn

With no further business, Vice Chairman Byford asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mayor Cunningham made the motion with Mayor Butler seconding.

Mayor AJ Massey, Chairman

Joe McKinnon, Secretary

Upcoming meeting:

Board of Directors – April 11th, 2025 @ 11:30am

Executive Committee - May 19th, 2025 @ 9:30am

Executive Committee – June 17th, 2025 @ 9:30am