

**Board of Directors Meeting**  
**West Tennessee River Basin Authority**  
**July 11, 2025**

The Board of Directors meeting of the West Tennessee River Basin Authority was held at 11:30 a.m. on Friday, July 11, 2025, in the West Tennessee River Basin Authority conference room. Board members in attendance included: Mayor Mark Ward, Mayor Barry Hutcherson, Mayor, Mayor Gary Reasons, Mayor Mike Creasy, Mayor Nelson Cunningham, Mayor Todd Pulse, Mayor Robbie McCready, Mayor Randy Geiger, Dr. James Byford, Sen. Ed Jackson, and Rep. Chris Todd. Advisory Board members and other guests in attendance were Winfred Allen, Ranson Goodman, Stefan Maupin, Tyler Lock, Libby Rushton, Brian Hicks, Danny Rich, Brian Caton, Nathan Rich, and Patrick Parker (OGC). Mayor AJ Massey and Jai Templeton joined via TEAMS. A quorum was verified, Mayor Gary Reasons gave the invocation, in Chairman AJ Massey absence Vice-Chairman James Byford called the meeting to order.

The following agenda items were discussed:

**Public Comment**

Vice Chairman Byford 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.

**April 2025 Board of Directors Meeting Minutes**

Director Blackwood presented the April 2025 WTRBA Board of Director meeting minutes. With no questions, Chairman Massey asked for a motion to approve the April 2025 Board of Directors meeting minutes. A motion was made by Mr. Gary Reasons and seconded by Representative Chris Todd. 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 January 2025, expenses were **\$3,723,892** 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 **\$1,251,833**. Year-to-date county funds for **FY24/25** are **\$546,790**. 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 Sen. Ed Jackson. All voted in favor and the motion passed.

**2025 Emergency Flood Update**

Director David Blackwood provided a combined update on engineering, maintenance, and the 2025 emergency flood response, noting the region has experienced nearly 45 inches of rainfall in just six months—10 inches above the average for this time of year. This excessive rain has created numerous flood events, resulting in approximately 500 miles of river requiring cleanup and restoration. Emergency contracts and amphibious equipment have been deployed to key river systems, including the Forked Deer, Obion, and Big Sandy Rivers. Progress has been slow due to high river levels and large-scale debris blockages, but staff and contractors have been actively clearing drift piles and addressing critical infrastructure concerns. Levee breaches have been a major challenge, with multiple repairs required on the same sites due to recurring rain events. The team continues to push forward under difficult conditions, often requiring innovative problem-

solving in hard-to-reach areas. Photos and updates from field staff illustrate the scale and complexity of the work, and Director Blackwood encouraged board members to thank field crews for their dedication.

Additional updates included technical team activities such as continued monitoring of floodplain reconnection projects at White Oak WMA and Middle Fork Bottoms, as well as mussel surveys across various river systems in collaboration with TWA. These surveys help establish baseline data for native mussel populations, which play a key role in water quality and environmental assessments. Mitigation and ARP-funded projects continue to progress in several counties, with new studies beginning on Crooked Creek at Highway 22 to address chronic flooding issues. A motion to support this new study was made by Representative Chris Todd and seconded by Mayor Gary Reasons, all voted in favor and the motion passed.

Director Blackwood also introduced new staff members, including Dr. Melody S., a botanist who will assist with stream restoration and native species work, as well as summer interns Mickey Rodriguez and Drew Barkley. Both students gave presentations highlighting their hands-on experiences with vegetation assessments, mussel surveys, eDNA sampling, electrofishing, and water quality research. Their work contributes to project development and environmental monitoring, while also supporting academic partnerships with UT Martin and UT Knoxville. Their enthusiasm and contributions were well received, and their field photos and findings are expected to support both project documentation and public outreach

### **WET Center Update**

WET Center Executive Director Alison Franklin shared a comprehensive update on the center's progress. Now marking her first year in the role, Franklin highlighted several key milestones. The WET Center's building plans have advanced significantly, with draft construction documents currently under review. The project is using a "best value" procurement method to ensure both cost efficiency and contractor expertise, given the facility's unique requirements. Bid solicitation is expected in August, and a groundbreaking ceremony is scheduled for October 10, coinciding with the next WTRBA board meeting, to be held on-site at the Long Oaks property.

Curriculum development is also well underway. The center is actively partnering with the University of Tennessee's Institute of Public Service—including CTAS, MTAS, and the Center for Industrial Services—and the Tennessee Board of Regents, which oversees the state's technical and trade colleges. Initial focus areas include swift water rescue and rivers and roads (culvert installation). The Swiftwater subject matter team includes representatives from emergency management, fire departments, rescue squads, and state institutions. A key innovation being explored is a more scientific, interactive approach to swift water training—allowing trainees not just to react to moving water, but to understand and simulate water dynamics in controlled environments.

On the marketing front, the center has launched both Facebook and LinkedIn pages and is developing a website set to go live in September. Franklin encouraged board members to follow, like, and share the WET Center on social media and announced the creation of a central contact email. The team is also preparing for increased media and public engagement ahead of the October groundbreaking.

### **Funding Fiscal Year 2027**

Director David Blackwood provided an early overview of budget planning for Fiscal Year 2027. Initial requests include the establishment of a dedicated financial account for the WET Center to allow for collection and tracking of tuition and program-related payments. This change requires direction from the General Assembly to the Governor's office and will be included in WTRBA's budget request.

In addition, Blackwood noted the potential reintroduction of the Houston-Humphries-Stewart-Perry Bill, which passed last year but went unfunded after going behind the budget. The Authority remains supportive of the bill, contingent upon the provision of two new full-time staff members to handle the increased workload it would create—this request will be maintained in the upcoming budget cycle.

Ongoing discussions also continue around orphan lakes and culvert infrastructure. The Tennessee Department of Agriculture is exploring legal liabilities associated with watershed lakes, many of which are aging and undocumented. WTRBA remains engaged in interagency conversations and may bring forward a fiscal request based on those outcomes.

An official FY27 budget proposal, including amounts and justifications, is expected to be presented at the October meeting.

In response to a question from Sen. Ed Jackson, Blackwood also provided a brief update on flood-related damage at Lewis Creek near a Nissan dealership in Dyersburg. The Authority visited the site and determined that while the issue is serious, it is best addressed in partnership with local entities. If the city proceeds with an engineered plan, WTRBA is open to collaborating and potentially bringing a project proposal to the board in the future. This site may also be incorporated into the broader Lewis Creek watershed study.

### **Regional Outreach**

Director Blackwood reported on recent regional outreach efforts, including his attendance at the One Water Summit held in Pittsburgh. Representing the West Tennessee H2O group—a regional collaborative focused on water-related issues—Blackwood noted that the national summit provides an opportunity to engage with other water-focused organizations across the country and exchange ideas on water management and innovation. He highlighted Pittsburgh's integration of its natural aquifer system into the design of its conference center as a noteworthy example of sustainable infrastructure.

Looking ahead, Director Blackwood requested board approval for travel to the annual Mississippi Valley Flood Control Association meeting in New Orleans this December adding a \$2,500 ask for travel expenses. This conference is a key event that includes participation from U.S. Army Corps of Engineers officials and Mississippi River Valley leadership. Mayor Gary Reasons made a motion with Mayor Barry Hutcherson seconding. All voted in favor and the motion passed.

### **Other Business/Adjourn**

Director Blackwood provided two key informational updates before adjournment. First, he reported that the greenhouse facility located in the Three-Way area has officially closed, according to a recent call from the property owner. The facility, which the West Tennessee River Basin Authority is in the process of acquiring with state approval, will be repurposed to support stream mitigation work and accommodate organizational growth driven by increasing contract and grant-funded activities.

Second, Blackwood shared that The Nature Conservancy has successfully closed on the purchase of approximately 1,000 acres in the South Fork Forked Deer River floodplain, south of Jackson. This acquisition presents significant opportunity for floodplain restoration, including an estimated 20,000 feet of stream restoration work. He noted this effort is reminiscent of the successful coalition that led to the Middle Fork Bottoms restoration project, which ultimately became a state park. While early in the process, the recent land acquisition lays the groundwork for a similar large-scale flood mitigation and natural resource project in South Jackson.

With no further business, Vice Chairman Byford called for a motion to adjourn. A motion to adjourn was made by Mayor Todd Pulse and seconded by Mayor Barry Hutcherson.

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Mayor AJ Massey, Chairman

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Mr. Joe McKinnon, Secretary

Upcoming meetings:

Executive Committee on Tuesday, August 19, 2025 @ 9:30am

Executive Committee on Tuesday, September 16, 2025 @ 9:30am

Board of Directors on Friday, October 10, 2025 @ 11:00 a.m. – Lone Oaks Farm