

Executive Committee Meeting
West Tennessee River Basin Authority
August 19, 2025

The Executive Committee Meeting of the West Tennessee River Basin Authority was held at 9:30a.m. on Tuesday, August 19, 2025, via in-person at the WTRBA office. Executive Committee members in attendance were, Mayor AJ Massey, Mayor Nelson Cunningham, Dr. Jim Byford, and Joe McKinnon. Others attending in person were Executive Director David Blackwood, Kris Gordon and Paige Keith. Chairman Massey verified a quorum and called the meeting to order.

The following agenda items were discussed:

FY '27 Budget Request

Director Blackwood reported on the FY27 budget request, which will be submitted for the Governor's consideration. The request includes funding for three new full-time positions—two technical/engineering positions tied to potential program expansion, and one additional operator position to provide support and flexibility across maintenance crews. He noted that crews are currently spread thin, and the additional operator would allow coverage when team members are absent. In addition, the request includes approximately \$250,000 in recurring maintenance funding for the management of “Orphan Lakes,” of which there are an estimated 113 across the region. The total request amounts to roughly \$1 million in recurring funds. Director Blackwood emphasized that combining these needs into a single request would ensure adequate staffing, enable ongoing maintenance, and prepare the organization for any new responsibilities. Blackwood acknowledged that recurring funding and full-time positions have historically been difficult to secure but stressed their importance to sustain long-term conservation efforts. The plan would also allow the organization to assume responsibility for certain lakes if local drainage districts or counties decline liability, ensuring safety and proper maintenance. Director Blackwood concluded that the proposal represents a strategic, comprehensive approach to position the organization for future growth and responsibilities.

Updates

- WET Center Progress
Director Blackwood provided an update on the WET Center project, noting that it remains in the construction document (CD) phase. Discussions are ongoing regarding groundwater and water supply considerations, and the contractor selection process must be restarted due to a procedural error. Because of these delays, the planned October 10 groundbreaking is under review, with the possibility of postponing until spring to ensure construction documents and contractor selection are finalized, as well as to align with key stakeholders' availability, including the Governor's office and UT representatives. Director Blackwood emphasized the importance of hosting the groundbreaking as a strong kickoff event once all details are in place, even if that means rescheduling. In addition, he reported continued progress on Swiftwater Rescue program development, including upcoming subject matter expert meetings with the National Guard unit in Jackson. Equipment such as trailers, ropes, life jackets, and wetsuits has been purchased through Blueways funding, generating enthusiasm and strong collaboration among partner groups.
- Spring Flood Recovery
Director Blackwood reported that spring flood recovery efforts are progressing more slowly than hoped, though recent dry weather has been beneficial. Work is currently underway at

six sites, with significant challenges posed by the extraordinary volume of sand deposits that must be removed before levee reconstruction can proceed. Specialized equipment, including an amphibious excavator purchased with recovery funds, has been critical in accessing and clearing tributary streams such as the Obion and Middle Fork. Certain areas, including a deep channel near Highway 45, remain difficult to address but are scheduled for attention in the coming weeks. While full recovery is unlikely to be completed by fall, substantial progress has been made. Director Blackwood acknowledged the dedication of field crews, who continue working long hours despite fatigue and heavy equipment wear caused by the sand conditions. He noted that significant maintenance will be required once construction activity slows this winter.

Outreach

- USACE Low Water Inspection
Director Blackwood reported that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers recently conducted their annual low water inspections, with stops in Caruthersville, MO and Dyersburg, TN. Director Blackwood hosted the Corps at the Dyersburg Farm Bureau Office, where he provided a presentation on West Tennessee's history, current challenges, and the need for an Obion River comprehensive plan. The discussion emphasized the importance of securing authorization for the Corps to collaborate on regional projects. Director Blackwood noted that strong relationships have been established with Corps leadership, including the Mississippi River Commission, who expressed interest in supporting West Tennessee initiatives. Members of the Corps requested copies of his presentation for further review and educational use. Blackwood concluded that this engagement represents meaningful progress in raising awareness of regional needs at the federal level and strengthening partnerships for future projects.
- Governors Conservation Summit
Director Blackwood reported his attendance at the Annual Governor's Conservation Summit held on August 4–5. Blackwood stated he served as a panelist on the first day, where he emphasized the importance of long-term maintenance and follow-through on major conservation initiatives. Director Blackwood noted that while significant projects are often launched with enthusiasm, challenges frequently arise in sustaining them over time. Blackwood stated his presentation highlighted the need for continued commitment to ensure lasting impact. Director Blackwood stated that the summit was highly productive, with meaningful discussion and strong engagement from participants.
- Greater Jackson Chamber Day on The Hill
Director Blackwood reported that he will be attending the upcoming Greater Jackson Chamber's Day on the Hill in Washington, D.C., where regional leaders will meet with federal officials to discuss development priorities and collaborative opportunities for West Tennessee. Blackwood noted that the trip is fully chartered with 50 participants and will include meetings with Representative Kustoff, Senators Blackburn and Hagerty, as well as high-ranking officials from the White House and federal agencies. The cost of attendance is approximately \$2,400, which covers all expenses in a single package. Director Blackwood emphasized the value of this annual event in strengthening partnerships and advocating for regional priorities. A motion for Director Blackwood's attendance was made by Dr. Byford, seconded by Mr. McKinnon, and approved unanimously.

Other Business / Adjourn

With no further business, Chairman Massey asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Dr. Byford made a motion with Mr. McKinnon seconding

Mayor AJ Massey, Chairman

Joe McKinnon, Secretary

Upcoming Meeting:

Executive Committee – September 16, 2025 @ 9:30am

Board of Directors – October 10, 2025 @ 11:30am

Executive Committee – November 18, 2025 @ 9:30am