

**West Tennessee River Basin Authority
Executive Committee Meeting Minutes
November 18, 2025**

The Executive Committee Meeting of the West Tennessee River Basin Authority was held at 9:30 am on Tuesday, November 18, 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 were Executive Director David Blackwood, Kristina Earley, Patrick Parker, Alison Franklin and Misti Pequignot.

The following agenda items were discussed:

Nominating Committee

- Executive Committee - Director Blackwood reminded the Executive Committee of the need to provide nominations for officers through a Nominations Committee. The committee will nominate an Executive Committee Chair, Vice Chair, and Secretary at the January 2026 Board of Directors Meeting. Mayor Cunningham made a motion that he, Mayor Butler and Mayor Davis will serve as the Nominating Committee. The motion was seconded by Joe McKinnon with all in favor and none opposed. The Nominating Committee will discuss and recommend the officers in January.

WET Center Update

Alison Franklin introduced the second official WET Center employee, Misti Pequignot. Misti is the new administrative assistant for the WET Center.

WET Director Alison Franklin noted having the third iteration of construction documents and hopes to have it out to bid in the next couple of weeks. Contract review is ongoing, with WTRBA Attorney Patrick Parker's help, for the interagency agreement (IA) with the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR). TBR will help with registration for students in classes, curriculum development, and maybe help with some marketing. This interagency agreement will ensure WTRBA can utilize available TBR systems. TBR will keep up with the records of students that enroll and the certifications that are given. The IA will come before the Board of Directors in January.

Director Franklin discussed ongoing collaboration with UT Institute of Agriculture and the need to include partners without limiting the WET Center through exclusive agreements for programming, staffing, and course offerings. One of the upcoming needs discussions with UTIA is concerning a curriculum coordinator.

Director Blackwood noted that several parties interested in sponsorship of the WET Center showed interest after the presentation of the central water table. Director Blackwood and Director Franklin are working with TDEC to create a separate budget code for the WET Center and to determine how partners may be able to contribute or support the WET Center. Director Blackwood stated that the range of potential partners and interest have been from a wide variety of entities from private companies to State and Federal partners, like the TVA.

Director Blackwood informed the Committee that we may have a special visitor coming through West Tennessee. The Governor's office requested information about a quick visit to review water conservation projects in West Tennessee. The WET Center is one of the proposed sites. No details were available at the time, but Director Blackwood will inform the Executive Committee if a visit to the WET Center site is confirmed. The Executive Committee is welcome to join.

Working Groups Update

Director Blackwood stated it has been a busy month and provided the following updates:

The Walton Foundation came and looked at the South Fork Forked Deer and has funded a couple nonprofits to look into gathering data on floods and community impacts and demographics. The initial efforts were well received, especially the community support around the South Fork Forked Deer River. A follow-up request was submitted to consider five more sites across West Tennessee for a preliminary evaluation of needs and opportunities. The Tennessee Wildlife Federation is heading up that effort. Gibson County, Carroll County, Dyer County, and McNairy County all have areas that have floodplains, floodplain conflicts, and floodplain restoration interests. The study will be going on throughout the winter with additional summary available likely this spring. Director Blackwood stated that the WTRBA will support with information where possible.

The Nutrient Task Force, created by TDEC, held the first summit meeting last week. Director Blackwood attended the meeting and reported on the restoration efforts and results in West Tennessee. The Task Force shared information and progress from partners across the state.

Director Blackwood reported on The Conservation Public Institute, organized by the Tennessee Wildlife Federation. The first group meeting of technical fellows was held in Nashville and focused on current and emerging issues around water and conservation. This meeting was introductory and a networking opportunity for the group. The group had productive discussions and received a keynote from Senator Bill Frist who applauded the effort to bring together experts in water, land use, conservation, and policy to ensure a positive water future for Tennesseans. Director Blackwood reminded the EC that his role was as a Technical Fellow for water resources, as approved previously by the Board of Directors.

The West Tennessee H2O Group, an ad hoc group, is a group focused on water and water use in West Tennessee. The water group held a float on the Hatchie River in October. The group kayaked from Highway 64 to Highway 18 to network and shared with members of the group about opportunities for continued improvement of West Tennessee water.

The US Army Corps of Engineers has PAS Study to further the Tennessee H2O Plan published during the Haslam administration. The West Tennessee group is focused on groundwater recharge and current resource inventories. The USGS, partner to the project, is flying a system where they fire electromagnetic pulses in the ground and it reports what the geologic layers are made of up to 100 meters deep detailing sand, silt, clay, water, or rock. The USGS plans are to update the groundwater model by flying the AEM survey. Flights are planned up the center of the rivers, and then they are flying some cross lines along true East-West directions. West Tennessee

should have good coverage on a regional scale. Director Blackwood stated, “we should know where our aquifers come out, where recharge is going to be, so we can start looking at where we should be worried about things getting in, and how much we're supplying, and start to make our water balance true”. Now that the shutdown has ended, the USGS has reached back out and are about to start data collection.

Grants Update

Director Blackwood shared the following updates on Grants:

The NDRC, the Jackson Greenway, funds were reallocated to help with the South Fork Forked Deer land acquisition project. The proposed Greenway goes right through the middle of the tracts and will allow for significant flood improvements for surrounding communities. The contract and acquisition should be completed in the first quarter of 2026.

WTBRA ARP grant, which are the Central Creek downtown Jackson, Hatchie and the tributaries, and removing a low head dam on Trace Creek. The projects are all in permitting phase. We expect to bid for those this spring and construct this summer.

Big Muddy is a TDOT mitigation project that we have had in the books and is part of our stream mitigation program. TDOT received their permit and we received revenue from that project, so we are ready to construct this next year. Projects like this help fund natural resources operations and technical staff. The revenue for this phase of the project is \$1.6 million for those credits.

For Crooked Creek in Huntingdon off Highway 22, TWF had a site visit with TDEC grant team. This is a 10,000-foot channel restoration that TDEC is requested to fund for about 4,000 feet. If the grant is approved, that will help with flooding on Highway 22 and the landowners through there. The visit was well received, and this process is continuing.

2026 Proposed Meeting Schedule

Director Blackwood presented the 2026 Proposed Meeting Schedule. He asked if there were any conflicts and if there would be any mayor's meetings on the books that would conflict. Mayor Massey stated that he will cross-reference with their meeting schedules. Mayor Massey suggested as an additional point that the Executive Committee Meetings be moved to 10:00 am or later to provide additional time for everyone to arrive. Director Blackwood stated that there should not be any issue and will be brought to the January Board meeting to approve a new standard of time. Director Blackwood suggested 10:30 to ensure adequate travel time.

Other Business

For other business, Director Blackwood informed the Committee that the Federal funding bill passed the House for reopening the government and money for the Tennessee Riverbank stabilization project was included in that bill. There is a \$2.5 million direct appropriation to the West Tennessee River Basin Authority, per Congressman Kustoff's office. Congressman Kustoff called Director Blackwood to inform him of the funding and to prepare to start work on that project. The WTRBA has allocated an additional \$1.5 million toward the overall project. TVA is discussing how they are able to contribute as a partnership. The project will likely kick off next summer.

Dr. Byford asked the status of the interest across the state for establishing similar river basin authorities like the WTRBA in the other sections of the state. Director Blackwood noted there was interest at one time in the state, and he would be glad to tell them what we do and how we do it but that there was no active discussion that he was aware of.

Director Blackwood stated that the WTBRA has asked for two full-time employees to be added on the technical team and one full-time employee on the maintenance team. The purpose is to be better equipped to respond to the annual increase in maintenance work, help with additional watershed lakes, and be positioned to take on potential new areas proposed in the previous General Assembly bill. This request will be considered for inclusion in the next budget year. We have only asked for recurring funds. Three positions and about a half million dollars total for over 100 new lake permits and lake structure maintenance.

Joe McKinnon asked where we are on the new greenhouses and occupying it. Director Blackwood confirmed that Crystal received the deed. Staff have figured out what is in working order and now they are looking at how to make it work for what we need. There are three technical staff working at the location. They have internet and power. With some of the stream funds, we will be able to look at the capital improvements to make there next year. The Executive Committee suggested that signage will need to be updated soon to promote the good work being done there. It would provide more visibility for the WTBRA. The committee noted that the facility opens opportunities for school system involvement. Mayor Massey noted the Jackson-Madison County School System (JMCSS) has the LOOP program where students work half a day and go to school half day, another potential partnership. Director Blackwood agreed to have a ribbon cutting and updated signage.

With no further business, Chairman Massey asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mayor Cunningham made the motion and was seconded by Joe McKinnon.

Mayor AJ Massey, Chairman

Joe McKinnon, Secretary

Upcoming meeting:

Executive Committee Meeting on December 16, 2025, at 9:30am