A Day in The Quarantine Life

Like many Americans, you probably spent a day (or 14) in 2020 quarantined. Did you realize how TDEC was a part of your day?

7:00 a.m. Division of Radiological Health

Your alarm sounds, and you disconnect your phone from its charger. The power comes from a nearby nuclear power plant that is monitored for radiation releases.

7:05 a.m. Office of Energy Programs

You walk the kids to the bus stop. Their new school bus is part of a statewide fleet that will reduce 112,761 lbs. of nitrogen oxide (NOx) over its lifetime.

7:59 a.m. Division of Air Pollution Control

Instead of 30 miles and 1 hour, your new commute down the hall takes 10 seconds and keeps an average of 26 lbs. of carbon dioxide (CO2) out of the air.

8:00 a.m. Division of Natural Areas

You fire up your laptop and its AirCard pings a nearby cell tower. The tower’s location was found to have no impacts to Threatened and Endangered species.

10:00 a.m. Division of Water Resources

Your morning coffee break looks a little different today. You make yourself a strong cup of joe and refill your Keurig with water straight from the tap.

12:00 p.m. Division of Solid Waste Management

You prepare lunch at home with greens from your victory garden and make sure to compost your leftovers to add nutrients back to the soil.

5:00 p.m. Tennessee State Parks

It’s been a long day indoors, so you participate in the Tennessee State Parks Virtual 5k. You log your miles on the Healthy Parks Healthy Person app to earn rewards.

6:00 p.m. Underground Storage Tanks

To reward yourself for the run, you open a growler from your favorite local brewery. The brewery operates in an old gas station that was cleaned up thanks to the Underground Storage Tank fund.

From the Commissioner

Dear Tennesseans: In 2020, Tennessee has experienced fatal tornadoes, an unprecedented pandemic, economic collapse, record unemployment, and then historic social and civil unrest.

As 2020 has been full of unique threats and demands, this TDEC Annual Report shares how Team TDEC has risen to address and overcome these challenges.

COVID-19 arrived in March, and TDEC immediately responded by reimagining our work and adapting to make our staff, citizens, and visitors safe as possible while still meeting our mission. We know Tennesseans count on us to protect our environment, provide a variety of outdoor recreation opportunities and operate a well-run park system, even during a pandemic. That’s what we’ve done throughout 2020, and you can see those results in this year’s TDEC Annual Report.

Our divisions deployed technologies that empowered a mobile, remote workforce and enabled us to stay connected with each other and available to citizens. Once we better understood COVID-19 and how to manage through its implications, our park professionals were able to keep Tennessee’s 56 state parks open, accessible and safe for visitors.

Their dedication and commitment made it possible for state parks to be a haven and respite for Tennesseans. Citizens voted with their feet to show their appreciation and the value they place on outdoor recreational resources by generating record activity in our state parks for visitation, camping and cabin reservations.

Across the department, we continued our prudent management by making even more careful budget and spending decisions. We were also able to complete transformational investments in our state parks’ hospitality platforms that will create “WOW” moments for current and future generations of Tennesseans and park guests drawn from across the country.

While we have been moving through an extraordinary season, TDEC employees have been responding in a way that should make all Tennesseans proud. I trust you will be encouraged as this Annual Report shares examples of the skill, commitment, teamwork and resilience making it possible for TDEC to deliver on our mission for all of Tennessee’s communities – even in this new environment.

Yours in gratitude and service,
The coronavirus pandemic had all the potential to cause a serious disruption in the department’s ability to process septic system permits. Because of a new model of efficiency now in place, TDEC’s Division of Water Resources never missed a beat.

In FY19-20, the Division’s groundwater staff issued approximately 13,000 new and repair permits for septic systems. This represents a 19-percent increase from five years earlier. The peak demand for conventional permits occurred in the spring when the state was in the throes of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Yet turnaround times in the permitting process have shown TDEC’s ability to maintain top-notch service. From April to June of 2020, most counties in the state had average turnaround times of five days or fewer. In April, only seven counties had average turnaround times of 10 or more days. In May and June, only nine counties had average turnaround times of 10 or more days.

Sumner County illustrates how TDEC groundwater staff effectively managed a busy workload and improved turnaround times despite the pandemic. In November and December of 2019, the county was seeing an average turnaround time in the permit process of 18 days. By June of 2020, that average had decreased to five days.

While the Division of Water Resources continued to see a decrease in permit turnaround times during the pandemic, the foundation of this success story began several years earlier. In 2011, in an effort to reduce costs without continuing to reduce staff, the department developed and launched a comprehensive plan to reshape its decades-old business model that was reliant on hard-copy applications, permits and historical records housed at over 80 locations across the state.

The transition involved digitizing historical records and making them available online; developing online application capabilities; and, generating electronic documents with tablet technology. The use of technology allows the majority of field staff to work remotely.

Having implemented most of the planned changes, the program is on track to close all county satellite offices by June 2021, eliminating the historical costs associated with renting the office space and storing files. The closing of satellite offices also led to the decision to assign groundwater vehicles to staff. This minimizes their time spent driving and maximizes their ability to execute permits.

Efficiencies realized as a result of this transition have contributed to improved customer service and reduced permit turnaround times.

The commitment needed to accomplish the transition was shared at all levels. However, the real challenge was shouldered by the Division of Water Resources field staff who are ultimately responsible for implementing these changes on the ground. It is because of their willingness to embrace change, while often utilizing their own problem-solving capabilities, that the program is operating as a success today.

TDEC has the duty of regulating onsite wastewater disposal in a way that protects groundwater in Tennessee and protects public health. The systemic changes implemented by the department have proved beneficial in ways that go beyond the basic mission of managing the permit process. They have resulted in a more efficient and more customer-focused government – even in the face of a pandemic.
Vehicle Emissions Testing by the Numbers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>VEHICLES</th>
<th>Pass</th>
<th>Fail</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010-2019</td>
<td>1,058,018</td>
<td>92.24%</td>
<td>7.76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019 only</td>
<td></td>
<td>93.96%</td>
<td>6.04%</td>
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</tbody>
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Tennessee on Track to End Vehicle Emissions Testing

Thanks to Carter, Watson

Tennessee is on track to be free of vehicle emissions testing in a sign of years of diligence to clear Tennessee's air.

The Division of Air Pollution Control is charged with maintaining the purity of the air in the state. The division's responsibilities have included controlling pollution from mobile sources in counties that were not meeting federal ozone standards. That has meant vehicles registered in Hamilton, Davidson, Rutherford, Sumner, Williamson and Wilson counties have been required to pass vehicle emissions tests.

Led by State Rep. Mike Carter (R-Ooltewah) and State Sen. Bo Watson (R-Hixson), the Tennessee General Assembly passed a bill in 2018 that sought an end to the testing, paving the way for Tennessee to make a submission to the federal Environmental Protection Agency toward that end. The EPA establishes and updates National Ambient Air Quality Standards for pollutants that are deemed harmful to public health and the environment. States must develop and implement State Implementation Plans that are federally approved to attain and maintain the National Ambient Air Quality Standards.

On February 27 this year, Tennessee submitted to the EPA revisions to the State Implementation Plan to eliminate the testing. The state is awaiting approval. If EPA approves the revisions, emissions testing in Tennessee can end 120 days later, unless a contract with a vendor extends the period beyond that time. Tennessee is on track to be free of vehicle emissions testing in a sign of years of diligence to clear Tennessee's air.

Vehicle inspection and maintenance programs for certain levels of nonattainment should they occur. But now, Tennessee is on the verge of ending the tests.

While emissions from an individual car are considered low, emissions from numerous automobiles have created significant amounts of pollutants. But ozone levels have been reduced by lower volatility gasoline, and newer cars have improved emission control systems. Many Tennesseans have done their part by driving cleaner vehicles and by demonstrating a commitment to good maintenance of their vehicles. Tennessee's success in air quality has come from thoughtful decisions and perseverance through the process.

Note: At the time of writing this article, Tennessee State Rep. Mike Carter has been battling pancreatic cancer. The TDEC family would like to express its thoughts and prayers to Rep. Carter, his family, and his close colleagues in the Tennessee legislature.

TDEC remains committed to ensuring the air in Tennessee does not revert to previous levels of non-attainment. Alternative controls on air pollution may be necessary in the future to ensure Tennessee remains in compliance with the established air quality standards and the Clean Air Act requires vehicle emissions programs for certain levels of nonattainment should they occur. But now, Tennessee is on the verge of ending the tests.

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**TDEC Together: A Unified Approach**

Increasing demand for TDEC services paired with the stresses of a pandemic had the potential ability to severely disrupt work routines and place unhealthy levels of stress on TDEC employees.

Several leaders within the department saw a pressing need to address issues of mental health and well-being among TDEC employees. They responded with a comprehensive effort known as TDEC Together.

TDEC Together aims to be supportive of employees and acknowledges the challenges associated with working through a health crisis, while fostering a new type of togetherness to help the department function in innovative ways. In addition to meeting the needs of individual employees, the hope was that this approach would also help to better serve Tennesseans.

Maintaining the flow of communication through crisis is key. TDEC HR established a TDEC Together landing page on the Department’s internal communications network with resources. In addition, each month all staff receive the TDEC Together electronic newsletter. The newsletter includes an uplifting video message from the commissioner, interview stories with figures associated with mental health links, with information about informal discussions, and survey questions for employees to answer about their emotional health.

Over the summer months, more than 1,000 employees joined six different virtual Town Halls via Webex. These meetings not only allowed leadership to convey messages of importance to TDEC staff but gave all employees a direct line of communication to leadership to ask questions or give earnest feedback and feel heard.

Feedback gathered after the Town Halls demonstrated staff appreciation for the effort. One employee said, “Seeing all the smiling faces of my colleagues who I miss so much was wonderful. I also think it’s great that we can all still come together in a forum to ask questions and share concerns. It’s hard not to feel disconnected right now; I left the meeting feeling much more grounded and ‘part of something’ than before the meeting.”

In an effort to reframe the department’s duties in the “next normal,” TDEC employees responded by adjusting to new working conditions and creating new ways to perform vital department functions. TDEC’s mission statement says the department exists to enhance the quality of life for citizens of the state and to be stewards of the natural environment. While COVID-19 tested resolve to meet these goals, the department not only maintained its commitment to the stated ideals, employees found ways to cope – and evolve – in such an extraordinary time.

**TDEC Word Cloud**

On State Employee Appreciation Day, TDEC staff members were asked to use one word to describe their coworkers. This word cloud represents the most popular responses.
Cookeville Field Office Responds to Devastating EF-4 Tornado

On Tuesday March 3, 2020, Gov. Bill Lee declared a State of Emergency due to severe storms and multiple tornadoes that struck the state in the early morning hours. Multiple counties were affected: Benton, Carroll, Davidson, Fentress, Overton, Putnam, Smith and Wilson. Among them, Putnam County was hit particularly hard. An EF-4 tornado, the strongest to hit the nation in three years, touched down in a Cookeville neighborhood at 1:49 a.m. It cut a wide path, destroying more than 150 structures and taking the lives of 19 individuals, including five children.

The Cookeville Environmental Field Office is located just three miles south of the path of the tornado. Despite communication from the Governor that the field office was closed, on the morning of March 3rd half of the staff showed up for work. Those assembled immediately begin asking themselves: “What can I do to help?”

TDEC’s Cookeville Field Office Environmental Response (ER) team was first on site. Team members Shawn Puckett and Oakley Hall attended several of the twice daily tactical meetings with local emergency officials. Their role was to be available as the primary point of contact for any environmental issues that may arise.

Shawn Puckett, an environmental scientist with the Division of Water Resources, is assigned to oversee the Environmental Response Program in the region. “We answered questions and assisted in gathering and passing information to other TDEC personnel. TDEC’s Cookeville staff did a great job at quickly replying and assisting the local officials with environmental concerns as needed,” Puckett said.

Putnam County officials had many concerns and issues to address following this disaster. The Cookeville Underground Storage Tank team responded to a gas station leveled by the storm to check for damage. The Solid Waste Management team approved debris staging areas for the City of Cookeville and Putnam County the same day the requests were submitted. The Air Pollution Control team approved a borrow pit near the Putnam County Class III landfill for emergency burning of woody debris. Moreover, Cookeville’s Water Resources team worked to assist the local utility district with line repairs and quickly passed a statewide waiver of fees associated with groundwater protection services for affected homeowners.

Despite being confronted by feelings of grief and loss, despite COVID-19 constraints and anxieties, despite a housing boom and push to rebuild, TDEC’s staff has persevered. They rise each day to meet the challenge, not for themselves but for their neighbors, for their community, for all Tennesseans.

On March 4, Commissioner Salyers brought lunch to the Cookeville Field Office and listened as staff shared their experiences and concerns.

Rangers and Volunteers Unbury Bicentennial Capitol Mall State Park

At 12:45 a.m. on March 3, 2020, an F3 tornado tore through the north end of Bicentennial Capitol Mall State Park. As sunrise revealed the reality of the tornado’s devastating effects upon the park and its surrounding neighborhoods, Chef Ranger Shane Petty made an emergency callout, and Park Rangers from around the state answered.

Dr. Jerry Wooten, Park Manager of Bicentennial Mall, recalled the extraordinary efforts from those who assisted. “It was remarkable seeing so many caring people, including our Directors and Commissioners, who showed up, some even with chainsaws in hand, to jump in and assist our rangers and volunteers with cutting and dragging brush.”

Teams worked for three solid days to unbury the park from mounds of brush and debris. “Regardless of this year’s misfortunes from the tornado and impacts from Covid-19,” Park Manager Wooten says, “I am encouraged knowing that I have a team that understands the importance of moving forward and not letting misfortunes such as those from earlier this year, dampen our outlook as we move into our 25th Anniversary year in 2021. We have many great things planned in the upcoming year, and our future looks bright as we look to a new generation for Bicentennial Capitol Mall.”

The tornado’s path in Cookeville and Nashville included Bicentennial Capital Mall State Park, dense residential areas and thriving commercial centers.
Mapping ‘Smart Parks’ in a Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic presented an entirely new challenge for managing Tennessee State Parks. Conventional means of decision-making on issues like closing and opening parks simply weren’t enough in addressing the health crisis. It took a 21st century approach.

Fortunately, Tennessee State Parks staff was able to incorporate geographic information system (GIS) technology to make detailed, informed decisions about how to respond to the virus outbreak.

GIS allowed parks staff to visualize and analyze concerns related to keeping park guests and staff safe. Each park identified areas where it was impossible to properly social distance, identifying conditions that could lead to visitors being too close together or terrain that could involve rescues.

Staff also used GIS to keep track of personal protective equipment and cleaning supplies, deemed vital to decisions of whether a park should be open or closed.

The success of this system involved not only applying data from the parks but using data from the Tennessee Department of Health on the outbreak of the virus, as well as modeling data from the Institute of Health Metrics Evaluation. The department relied heavily on information input from park managers and rangers in the field, getting detailed data from the 56 parks.

This process not only informed leadership and staff throughout Tennessee State Parks but informed the Governor’s Office with updated data to assist in decision-making at the highest executive level.

While this GIS technology proved significant in a closed setting for staff in making informed choices in park management during the pandemic, it is certainly not new technology for Tennessee State Parks. The parks for years have employed GIS as a public service to enhance knowledge and enjoyment of the parks.

TDEC has used online maps and apps in a variety of GIS features about the parks. It offers maps showing boundaries of all public access land under the department, including Tennessee State Parks, state Natural Areas, archaeological sites, and historic sites. This includes details of hiking, biking, and horse trails in the parks, as well as trail surface, difficulty rating, and types of use. It includes the location of cabins in parks across the state.

The technology allows TDEC to pinpoint for anyone interested the natural features of waterfalls, mountains, cedar glades, and archaeological mounds. With the use of GIS technology, the department calls the program “Smart Parks,” using the data to make the smartest decisions possible. It’s a way to organize and present data on the parks’ more than 1,300 miles of trails, 245,000 acres of protected land, 3,230 campsites and 380 cabins.

In the case of the pandemic, GIS technology was a tool not just for the sake of recreation but literally for the sake of public health across Tennessee. It provided a way to make decisions that addressed the fundamental well-being of the thousands of Tennesseans who visit the state parks and need this level of trust with those who manage the award-winning system.
Chattanooga will soon have three new all-electric transit buses dedicated to travel through areas formerly in non-attainment status for air pollution. The new buses come from the Chattanooga Area Regional Transportation Authority (CARTA)’s successful application from the Volkswagen Diesel Settlement Environmental Mitigation Trust (VW Settlement EMT) this year.

The CARTA grant is one of three grants dedicated to support transit and shuttle bus replacement projects across Tennessee.

CARTA’s grant of $1.88 million will support the replacement of three diesel transit buses with three all-electric transit buses as well as the acquisition and installation of associated charging infrastructure.

“These grants will support the adoption of all-electric and diesel-hybrid buses, so they will have a significant environmental impact,” TDEC Commissioner David Salyers said. “This will help reduce emissions and enhance quality of life in these communities.”

The new transit buses will operate 70 percent or more of the time in former nonattainment areas for ozone and/or fine particulates (PM2.5) National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS). After its dirty industrial past, Chattanooga reached attainment for NAAQS standards in 2008 and has remained in attainment ever since.

“The Volkswagen settlement money helps CARTA fulfill our mission of providing a cost-effective, efficient and safe multimodal transit system for our more than 3 million passengers annually,” CARTA Executive Director Lisa Maragnano said. “We are so excited this funding will help us continue to operate, and expand upon, what was already one of the country’s largest electric vehicle fleets.”

Knoxville and Memphis also received a portion of the $5.69 million in VW Settlement EMT grants.
Tennessee State Parks is in the middle of an extraordinary era of capital investment in facilities that will welcome and delight guests across the state for years to come. Thanks to the support of the Tennessee General Assembly over the last two administrations, Tennessee State Parks saw major improvements, with capital investments totaling approximately $184 million. The new and renovated facilities are coming online in a year when the COVID-19 pandemic underscored the value of Tennessee State Parks. Tennesseans flocked to the parks while many other travel destinations were adversely impacted by the health crisis.

### Facilities That Opened in 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facility Name</th>
<th>Capital Investment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Lodge at Montgomery Bell State Park</td>
<td>$12.1 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Lodge at Pickwick Landing State Park</td>
<td>$11.7 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall Creek Falls State Park Visitor Center</td>
<td>$2.7 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mack S. Prichard Visitor Center at Cummins Falls State Park</td>
<td>$2.8 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In October, renovations were completed on the 117-room Lodge at Montgomery Bell State Park. Situated on the banks of Lake Acorn, the Lodge features modern rooms, a new full-service restaurant and bar, and 6,000 square feet of flexible event space. The Lodge features multiple room options with large windows and stunning balcony views. The restaurant serves breakfast, lunch and dinner daily. Guests have access to an outdoor pool, fitness room and outdoor patios overlooking the lake.

The new Visitor Center at Fall Creek Falls features 24-hour accessible restrooms, a gift shop, a rental conference room and a covered patio with a gas fire pit. Its friendly staff will conduct cabin and camper check-in as well as guide guests to the park’s many attractions and amenities.

The new Visitor Center at Cummins Falls State Park is named in honor of Tennessee Naturalist Emeritus Mack S. Prichard. The facility features a spacious lobby with exhibits, gift shop, rental conference room, two covered patios, restrooms, and staff offices. Visitors will pass under the building’s breezeway as they walk down the trail to the waterfall.

### Facilities Under Construction in 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facility Name</th>
<th>Capital Investment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Henry Horton State Park Restaurant and Visitor Center</td>
<td>$8.25 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Lodge at Fall Creek Falls State Park</td>
<td>$40.4 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Lodge at Paris Landing State Park</td>
<td>$43.9 million</td>
</tr>
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In May, construction was launched on a two-story Visitor Center and a new 6,381-square-foot restaurant at Henry Horton State Park. The visitors center at Henry Horton State Park will feature a 1,154-square-foot exhibit and interpretive area, as well as a conference room of matching size, and another 2,100 square feet of office space. The restaurant will seat 120 people in its dining area and lounge, along with outdoor dining for 52.

The new 85-room Lodge at Fall Creek Falls State Park will provide hotel resort-style vacation rentals on Kentucky Lake near Land Between the Lakes. The Lodge will feature modern room design, conference space and a full-service restaurant and lounge. The Lodge is expected to open in 2021.

The new 90-room Lodge at Paris Landing State Park will provide hotel resort-style vacation rentals on Kentucky Lake near Land Between the Lakes. The Lodge will feature modern room design, conference space, a full-service restaurant, bar, and lounge overlooking scenic lakes and natural beauty. The Lodge is expected to be completed in 2021.
A New Environment

DEC is proud to serve Tennesseans and support the work of communities across the state in their efforts to safely dispose of household hazardous waste, replace old school buses with cleaner and more efficient vehicles, engage residents in Parks and Recreation master planning and preserve historic structures and stories. In FY 2020, TDEC granting programs awarded just over $20.8 million.

In state fiscal year 2020, the State Revolving Fund (SRF) loan program awarded 21 different communities low-interest loans totaling $187,903,200 for infrastructure improvements to drinking water and wastewater systems. These loans came with over $2.1 million in loan forgiveness.

TDEC Grant Dollars Serving Tennessee Communities

The City of Paris used a Local Parks and Recreation grant to develop the $1.5 million Eiffel Tower Splash Park, the largest non-amusement-park splash pad in Tennessee. The 12,000 square foot splash pad features zones for family, teen and youth play and a 40-foot tidal tank, but the pièce de résistance is its miniature Eiffel Tower fountain.

The City of McKenzie made improvements to three parks with a Local Parks and Recreation grant. Both Mulberry Park and City Park received new playground equipment, and SplashPark installed outdoor musical play elements.

The TN Historical Commission’s Historic Preservation Fund supported the City of Etowah’s window restoration project for the Etowah L&N Depot. The project includes the restoration of +/-56 original double-hung wood sash windows and the restoration of +/-10 exterior door windows and transoms.

Clay County Schools received $220,500 to replace three diesel buses under the VW Environmental Mitigation Trust. Pictured is Ashley White with a new diesel bus.

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$220,500 grant to Clay County Schools

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$60,000 grant to City of McKenzie

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$125,000 grant to American Battlefield Trust in Chattanooga

The TN Historical Commission’s Civil War Sites Preservation Fund supported the American Battlefield Trust’s acquisition of a 9-acre tract containing Brown’s Tavern near Chattanooga. Brown’s Tavern is the oldest structure in Chattanooga and was built in 1803 by Cherokee businessman John Brown.

$45,600 grant to the City of Etowah

The TN Historical Commission’s Historic Preservation Fund supported the City of Etowah’s window restoration project for the Etowah L&N Depot. The project includes the restoration of +/-56 original double-hung wood sash windows and the restoration of +/-10 exterior door windows and transoms.

$500,000 in principal forgiveness to Town of Oliver Springs

Officials from TDEC and the TN Dept. of Economic and Community Development presented checks to the Town of Oliver Springs for a Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan of $500,000, with 100% principal forgiveness, and a Community Development Block Grant of $525,000. Pictured are Sammie Arnold, TNECD; Rep. Kent Calfee, Rep. John Rogers; Sen. Ken Yager; Mayor Omer Cox, Oliver Springs; George Garden, TDEC; Lt. Gov. Randy McNally; Leslie Gillespie-Marshale, TDEC; Commissioner David Salyers, TDEC; Joe Van Holst, Oliver Springs; Kenneth Brown, Oliver Springs; Thomas McCormick, Oliver Springs.

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The Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation
exists to enhance the quality of life for citizens of Tennessee
and to be stewards of our natural environment by:

- Protecting and improving the quality of Tennessee’s air, land,
  and water through a responsible regulatory system;
- Protecting and promoting human health and safety;
- Conserving and promoting natural, cultural and historic resources;
- Providing a variety of quality outdoor recreational experiences.