

— T D E C —  
STRONG. RESILIENT.  
**READY FOR THE FUTURE.**



Department of  
**Environment &  
Conservation**

T D E C 2 0 2 4 A N N U A L R E P O R T



TDEC is strong, resilient, and ready for the future

Dear Fellow Tennesseans

David W. Salyers, P.E.



Much of the success achieved by our department over the past year has been the result of building sustained relationships that benefit Tennessee. These relationships go beyond just agreements in principle. They reflect a shared commitment, common goals, interest in mutual success and the well-being of all affected citizens.

I've focused on making this relationship approach a hallmark of my tenure as TDEC Commissioner. I've worked closely with federal leaders at the U.S. Department of Energy and Environmental Protection Agency to make our department's engagement and oversight at the Oak Ridge Reservation efficient and effective. The quality of relationships we've built to support our improved state-federal relationship has been a contributor to sound decisions, accelerated cleanup, and increased economic development opportunities for the region. Ongoing communication, involvement, and meaningful relationships with members of the General Assembly have supported TDEC's provision of more parks for more people (pp. 4-5) – with emphasis on greater accessibility for all.

I'm proud a similar investment in relationships shines through the work of TDEC staff like Roger McCoy and Donovan Grimwood. As State Naturalist (pp. 22-23), Roger is respected for his intellect, care, and creativity. He also has strong connections to individuals, organizations and communities that have increased conservation awareness and protection for special places, spaces, and species in Tennessee. Our department's Small Business Environmental Assistance Program has been recognized as best in the nation (pp. 18-19) not just due to Donovan's skill and expertise but because of the long-standing trust and rapport Donovan has established across a variety of small business sectors.

Enduring relationships enable TDEC to meet our mission for Tennessee today and tomorrow. They make us strong, resilient, and ready for the future. I'm pleased we can showcase results of these relationships in this 2024 Annual Report.

David



In July 2024, the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) and TDEC signed a \$42 million agreement to restore natural resources and recreation areas in Oak Ridge. It received concurrence from both USFWS and TVA.



Commissioner Salyers listened intently as stakeholders shared insights and built consensus at the TDEC Wetlands Summit on August 5, 2024. The event was a central component of the TDEC-directed summer study issued by the Senate Energy, Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee.

Organizational Composition of the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation

Bureau of Operations, Strategy & Engagement

- Business IT Solutions
- Communications
- Executive Administrative Assistance
- Financial Services
- Operational Administrative Services
- People and Organizational Development
- Policy and Planning
- Stakeholder Engagement

Bureau of Environment:

- Air Pollution Control
- Energy Programs and Emergency Services
- Mineral and Geologic Resources
- Radiological Health
- Remediation
- Solid Waste Management
- Underground Storage Tanks
- Water Resources

Bureau of Conservation:

- Conservation
- Facilities and Land Management
- Marketing, Revenue & Guest Experience
- Outdoor Recreation
- Tennessee State Parks Hospitality
- Tennessee State Parks Operations

Office of General Counsel

- Internal Audit
- Legal

Boards, Commissions and Councils:

- Air Pollution Control Board
- Archaeological Advisory Council
- Commissioner's Council on Greenways and Trails
- Great Smokey Mountains Park Commission
- Ground Water Management Board
- Heritage Conservation Trust Fund Board
- Monuments and Memorials Commission
- National Historic Preservation Act State Review Board
- Ocoee River Recreation and Economic Development Fund Board
- Small Business Environmental Assistance Compliance Advisory Panel
- Tennessee Historical Commission/Members
- Underground Storage Tanks and Solid Waste Disposal Control Board
- Water and Wastewater Operators Certification Board
- Water Quality, Oil and Gas Board
- West Tennessee River Basin Authority



Above Right: Governor Bill Lee hosted his Conservation Summit on August 7, 2024, and challenged leaders to think big and work together to advance conservation initiatives across the state.



Right: The Executive Leadership Team for the TN Department of Environment and Conservation: Greer Tidwell, Jenny Howard, David W. Salyers, Karen Simo, and Ronné Adkins.



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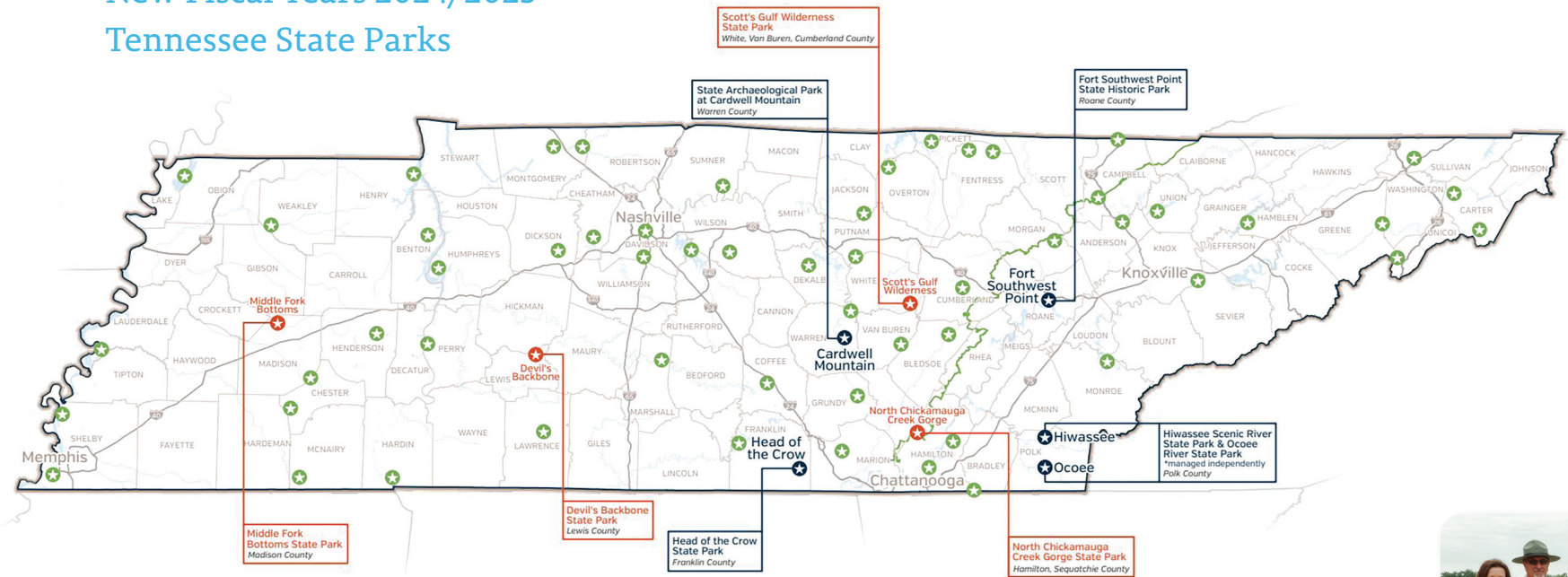
# Expanding the System While Upholding the Tennessee State Parks Standard

Governor Bill Lee has launched a broad conservation strategy, and the Tennessee General Assembly has shown its full support. Central to the strategy is an historic expansion of the Tennessee State Parks system, including the creation of eight new state parks. In 2024 the state dedicated two of the new parks: Middle Fork Bottoms State Park and North Chickamauga Creek Gorge State Park.

Amidst the growth, TDEC will ensure all parks in the system uphold the highest standards in customer service, safety, resource protection, and an authentic sense of place that Tennesseans and park visitors deserve.

Tennessee State Parks recognizes the importance of meeting expectations. It takes something special to be a Tennessee State Park.

## New Fiscal Years 2024/2025 Tennessee State Parks



Future State Parks first announced in fiscal years 2024 & 2025 include: Scott's Gulf Wilderness State Park in White County; the Archaeological Park at Cardwell Mountain in Warren County; Devil's Backbone State Park in Lewis County; Fort Southwest Point State Historic Park in Roane County; Head of the Crow State Park in Franklin County; and splitting the current Hiwassee/Ocoee River State Park into two stand-alone parks: Hiwassee Scenic River State Park and Ocoee River State Park..



Dedicated on September 5, 2024, North Chickamauga Creek Gorge State Park in Hamilton and Sequatchie counties, originally a state natural area, offers kayaking, fishing, and over 20 miles of trails.



Dedicated on August 12, 2024, Middle Fork Bottoms State Park in Three Way in Madison County offers a blend of rich history and natural beauty, including diverse landscapes, fishing areas, paddle craft access, and four miles of scenic walking trails



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## Tennessee is Leading a Nuclear Renaissance

**Tennessee and TDEC are playing a crucial role driving a nuclear energy revival spanning the globe.**

Gov. Bill Lee issued an executive order in May 2023 establishing the Nuclear Energy Advisory Council, chaired by TDEC Commissioner David Salyers, to accelerate the development of reliable, safe, clean nuclear energy to meet the state's growing power demand. In October 2024, the council delivered its final report that included 19 recommendations in five key areas that leverage Tennessee's leadership in the nuclear industry, enable deployment of critical baseload energy, and support a vibrant nuclear ecosystem.

The report's primary recommendation was for the State to actively coordinate with and assist the Tennessee Valley Authority to construct a small modular reactor (SMR) at their Clinch River site – potentially the first SMR to generate power for the electrical grid in the United States.

**Other priority recommendations include:**

- There are more than 230 nuclear companies in Tennessee, but the State still has opportunities to strengthen incentives that are relevant to the nuclear industry by increasing the State's investment in the Tennessee Nuclear Energy Supply Chain Investment Fund.
- While Tennessee has significant nuclear education assets, there is still need for an integrated approach for training and educating the number of new workers needed for an expanding nuclear industry. The Council recommended a new *Tennessee Nuclear Energy Workforce Center* (T-NEWC), that will develop an integrated nuclear workforce enterprise addressing the need for inter-agency coordination, resource sharing, and program mapping to bridge gaps in workforce development.
- The State should develop a unified roadmap that aligns Tennessee's regulatory, emergency preparedness and workforce strategies with the needs of the nuclear industry. A particular opportunity exists for TDEC to develop a comprehensive regulatory framework addressing fusion power that continues to enhance Tennessee's reputation and appeal to pioneering companies.

More information about the council and the final report is available at [www.tn.gov/environment/tneac](http://www.tn.gov/environment/tneac).



TDEC's Division of Radiological Health met with Type One Energy and TVA to discuss the plans for their fusion facility. Type One Energy plans to build its first R&D facility at the site of the former Bull Run plant. This will be the first of its kind in Tennessee.

## TN Nuclear Energy Supply Chain Investment Fund

The council's activities and report complemented the Tennessee Nuclear Energy Supply Chain Investment Fund that was established in 2023 with the Tennessee General Assembly approving a total of \$60 million to support nuclear energy, nuclear supply chain and related workforce activities in the state.

**Since February 2024, the Fund has announced economic incentive and workforce awards for:**

- Type One Energy to establish headquarters and expand R&D operations to Tennessee
- Roane State Community College for startup equipment in a new Nuclear Technology Program and University of Tennessee Knoxville to establish a nuclear minor in the Tickle College of Engineering
- Orano USA to locate uranium enrichment operations in Oak Ridge as its multi-billion-dollar project represents single largest investment in Tennessee history
- Tennessee Tech University to launch new B.S. in nuclear engineering



TNEAC member and State Representative Clark Boyd led a legislative delegation on a site visit to the TVA Watts Bar nuclear facility in Rhea County on Oct. 21, 2024. TVA leadership provided an informative, hands-on experience for the 11 legislators and shared an overview of TVA's New Nuclear Program that will help power the future of 10 million customers in their service area. Pictured: Rep. Rush Bricken, Rep. Paul Sherrell, Rep. Greg Vital, Speaker Pro Tempore Pat Marsh, Rep. William Slater, Rep. Jody Barrett, Rep. Kelly Keisling, Assistant Majority Leader Mark Cochran, Rep. Chris Todd, Rep. Tandy Darby

“Tennessee is rapidly becoming the epicenter of new nuclear and leading America’s energy independence. Generating reliable, resilient, safe, clean nuclear energy is necessary to meet increasing power needs while promoting economic growth and prosperity across Tennessee, and this report will guide our efforts to effectively address growing power demand over the next 25 years.”

- Gov. Bill Lee



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# New State Forest Established with Tennessee Heritage Conservation Trust Fund

One of the best funding opportunities for land conservation partnerships in the state is the Tennessee Heritage Conservation Trust Fund.

The General Assembly established the Fund in 2005 to permanently conserve land to promote tourism and recreation by protecting and restoring physical, cultural, archeological, historical, and environmental resources, and preserving working landscapes. Supporting Governor Lee’s Conservation Strategy, **the General Assembly made historic investments in the fund in FY23 and FY24.** Administered by a board of trustees, the fund leverages partnerships with individuals, government agencies, non-profit organizations, for-profit companies, and others to deliver impactful conservation results for Tennessee.

A prime example of the Fund’s impact in 2024 is the purchase and protection of 5,477 acres of the historic **Ames Plantation in Fayette County along the Wolf River.** The Fund awarded \$16.9 million to the Tennessee Division of Forestry, with The Conservation Fund, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, and the Forest Legacy Program providing additional funding and support. Ultimately, the partners came together to protect a richly diverse habitat and establish a new state forest: **The Wolf River State Forest.**

The Wolf River State Forest will continue the UTIA-School of Natural Resources’ long tradition of teaching forestry students valuable practical forest management skills and understanding of how to effectively manage bottomland hardwoods. This acquisition ensures that the longest tree improvement project in the United States will carry on, informing reforestation efforts across the region.

The forest will still serve the timber industry while protecting dozens of species of wildlife, important archaeological sites, and the recharge areas for both the Memphis and Fort Pillow aquifers. **This single project more than doubles the acres of the protected Wolf River watershed.** Its multifaceted conservation benefits highlight the tremendous impact of the Fund and demonstrate **Tennessee’s collaborative conservation leadership.**



The  
Heritage  
Conservation  
Trust Fund  
supported

21  
PROJECTS

IN FY24 FOR A COMBINED

\$61 Million

IN TOTAL PROJECT COSTS AND  
PERMANENT PROTECTION OF

7,656  
acres



Historically managed by the University of Tennessee & Hobart Ames Foundation, the new Wolf River State Forest is an entirely forested portion of historic Ames property along the Wolf River.



The Wolf River State Forest will still serve the timber industry while protecting dozens of species of wildlife, important archaeological sites, and the recharge areas for both the Memphis and Fort Pillow aquifers.



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# The Future of Tennessee Conservation Is Bright

TDEC recognizes the importance our next generation will play in conservation in Tennessee.

A great example is Cash Daniels, a teenager in Chattanooga, who has a passion for protecting Tennessee’s abundant natural resources. He’s so active he is known as the Conservation Kid.

Daniels organizes cleanups to collect and dispose of litter. He has launched a project installing monofilament bins in Tennessee State Parks to collect used fishing line to be recycled. Daniels has seen how waste from the fishing lines can entangle fish and other wildlife, and the bins provide a convenient way to recycle the material. He realized he could make the bins with money he earned by recycling cans.

Daniels sees the big picture. He sees how fish that eat microplastics can go up the food chain to humans. He sees how trash in rivers can eventually become trash in oceans. When famed fisherman Bill Dance received an honor on the floor of the Tennessee House of Representatives, Daniels was there with him.

TDEC supports Cash’s vision and wants to encourage more young people to enjoy and advocate for the outdoors. **TDEC provides numerous activities for young people interested in the great outdoors, including educational programs with trained staff, school outreach, field trips, overnight learning, and more.** A Junior Ranger program works with children ages 6-14. Kit’s Club is for ages 4-6. TDEC’s Office of Sustainable Practices has resources for kids, from coloring pages to education on composting and pollinators.

The Conservation Kid is an example of how protecting natural resources can be more than a hobby and be a lifelong passion. *TDEC is committed to paving the way for younger generations to learn about and appreciate the natural environment of our state.*

*Representative Ron Gant presents Bill Dance with a House Joint Resolution for his exceptional service as a fisherman and an ambassador for the sport. Mr. Dance paid a special recognition to Cash Daniels and his own conservation work to support healthy rivers, lakes, and streams.*

Cash  
has collected  
2,000  
MILES  
of fishing  
line

and  
created  
108  
fishing  
line  
recycling  
bins

RECYCLE  
YOUR  
LINE  
HERE

BILLDANCESIGNATURELAKES.COM

FISH-4  
TENNESSEE

TENNESSEE  
State Parks

## Empowering the Next Generation of Environmental Professionals

TDEC’s environmental divisions offer numerous trainings and certifications to support ongoing professional expertise.

Division	Class	Profession
Air Pollution Control	Visible Emissions Evaluation (Smoke School)	Permitted businesses
Solid Waste Management	Landfill Operators Certification Training	Landfill operators
Underground Storage Tanks	Tennessee Tank Helper	Gas station tank operators
Underground Storage Tanks	Tank School	Gas station tank operators
Water Resources	Septic System Installer	Septic system installers
Water Resources	Septic Tank Pumping Contractor	Septic tank pumper/haulers
Remediation	Environmental Compliance Training	Dry cleaners
Water Resources - Fleming Training Center	Numerous	Water treatment plant operators
Water Resources - Fleming Training Center	Numerous	Wastewater treatment plant operators







# A TENNESSEE STATE PARKS

## LEGISLATIVE ADVENTURE



The Legislative Tour group ends day one after a lake adventure at Savage Gulf State Park.



TDEC Deputy Commissioner for the Bureau of Conservation, Greer Tidwell welcomes participants and discusses the tremendous economic impact that State Parks and outdoor recreation have on rural communities like Beersheba Springs in Grundy County.



South Cumberland State Park Ranger Jesse DeRight leads Rep. Greg Vital, Leader William Lamberth, Rep. Chris Todd, Rep. Rush Bricken, Rep. Paul Sherrell, and Rep. Mike Sparks on a 1.5 mi hike at Grundy Forest State Natural Area.



TDEC Commissioner David Salyers and Leader William Lamberth practice bouldering at North Chickamauga Creek Gorge State Park.



Leader William Lamberth and Rep. Rush Bricken begin their 1.5 mi hike at Grundy Forest State Natural Area.



State Parks Area Manager Jacob Young gave informative bus talks about current investments and park upgrades.



Sen. Janice Bowling hikes the Historic CCC Loop at Grundy Forest State Natural Area.



Leader William Lamberth gets up close and personal with a rough green snake.

Each year, Tennessee State Parks invites members of the Tennessee General Assembly to participate in an overnight, outdoor adventure. The 2024 Legislative Tour was one of the most popular and consequential yet. Twenty-three legislators and legislative staff members visited two existing State Parks and a State Natural Area on the edge of the South Cumberland Plateau. They also cut the ribbon on Tennessee's 59th State Park.



The group visits the historic coke ovens at Grundy Lake, South Cumberland State Park.



Rep. Chris Todd inspects the coke ovens at Grundy Lakes, an area of South Cumberland State Park.



Sen. Steve Southerland researches the fishing stock at Savage Gulf State Park.



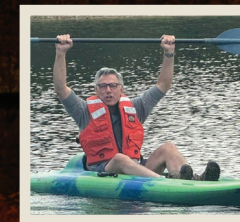
The group fishes, kayaks, canoes, and splashes at Savage Gulf State Park.



South Cumberland State Park Asst. Manager Bill Knapp shares the history of the CCC.



Rep. Chris Todd, Sen. Steve Southerland, Sen. Janice Bowling, Rep. Rush Bricken, Rep. Dan Howell, Rep. Greg Vital, Sen. Bo Watson, Leader William Lamberth, Sen. Brent Taylor, and Rep. Tim Rudd attend the grand opening of North Chickamauga Creek Gorge State Park.



Rep. Greg Vital kayaks at Savage Gulf State Park.



TDEC Deputy Commissioner Greer Tidwell and Rep. Chris Todd



Rep. Paul Sherrell demonstrates his skills on his Jackson Kayak, which was made in his hometown of Sparta.



TDEC Commissioner David Salyers and Rep. Chris Todd canoe and fish at Savage Gulf State Park.





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# Funding for Brownfield Redevelopment Is a Crucial Investment in Tennessee’s Future

TDEC is making the most of a new grant program that enables the state to clean up and redevelop brownfields.

The Division of Remediation issues Brownfield Redevelopment Area Grants (BRAG) thanks to funding that **empowers local governments and development boards with resources needed for identifying, investigating, and remediating contaminated properties.**

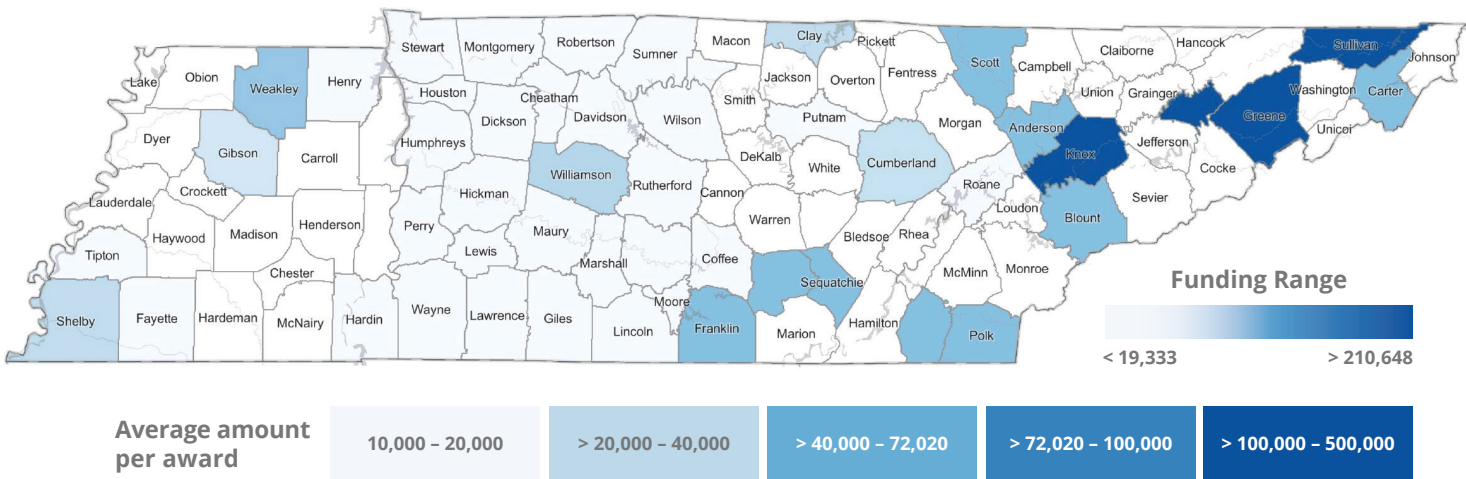
In its inaugural year, TDEC’s BRAG program attracted substantial interest, drawing in numerous compelling proposals with the **full \$5 million** allotted to the fund being awarded to communities across the state. Several robust proposals were submitted, reflecting a high level of engagement and commitment from Tennessee communities.

BRAG grants are not a new concept. These redevelopment programs have long been effective at federal and state levels. BRAG was structured to build upon the successful remediation projects funded by EPA in Tennessee that have led to significant job creation.

In rural communities like LaFollette, transforming an old postal facility into a vibrant arts, culture, and history center has breathed new life into local traditions, celebrated the talents of local artists, and provided free summer camps for children. In contrast, Knoxville has successfully redeveloped Brookside Mills, a 19-acre former industrial site, into office spaces and a gas pumping facility, creating 20 to 30 new jobs and generating \$68,000 in tax revenue in just one year—a remarkable turnaround for a property that had remained dormant for sixteen years.

While the program’s first year was a resounding success, challenges remain, including securing sufficient funding and navigating technical complexities. **Overall, the BRAG program represents a crucial investment in Tennessee’s future, demonstrating a strong commitment to environmental stewardship and economic revitalization.** The continued support and development of this initiative will be essential for fostering resilient and thriving communities across the state.

## BRAG: Brownfield Redevelopment Funding Awarded in 2024



## Cleanup of the American Nuclear Corporation Site in Anderson County

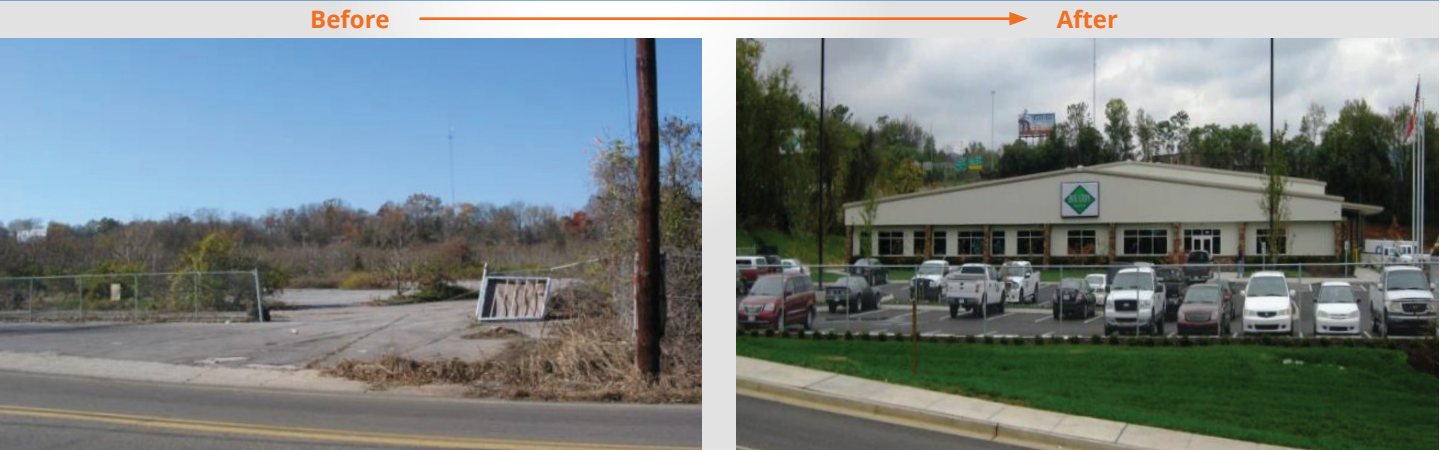


Cleanup activities began in April at the American Nuclear Corporation site in Clinton, Anderson County, a former radioactive source fabricator. A time-critical removal Action Memo was signed by EPA and TDEC in October 2023 to remove the radioactive contamination to protect public health and the environment. EPA will fund the estimated cleanup cost of \$13.5 million through its Superfund program. County Mayor Terry Frank said after the announcement at the county’s intergovernmental meeting, “This is huge for Anderson County!”

**TDEC identified the site as a critical cleanup area exemplifying the need for rural brownfield cleanup funding during the design of the Brownfield Redevelopment Area Grant (BRAG) program.**



## Knoxville’s Brookside Mills Redevelopment



Knoxville’s Brookside Mills redevelopment generated 20-30 new jobs after sitting dormant for 16 years as a brownfield.



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# Significant Momentum in State Parks Bid to Lead the Nation in Accessibility

Tennessee is setting a courageous precedent for accessible outdoors with its transformative “Access 2030” initiative. Born under Governor Lee’s vision for Tennessee’s great outdoors and a strong desire to serve more people, the Access 2030 program is progressing to make Tennessee State Parks the most accessible in the nation -- ensuring every resident, regardless of ability, zip code, or background, can experience the state’s natural beauty.

At the heart of Access 2030 are innovative strategies to reduce physical barriers, enhance educational programs, and leverage technology to create meaningful connections with nature for more people.

Highlights to-date include delivering 39 all-terrain wheelchairs to parks statewide, constructing five accessible boat launches, and installing color-blind viewers at key sites. Additionally, 10 adult-changing tables are already in place, with many more planned, ensuring comfort and dignity for all visitors.

Access 2030 also emphasizes the importance of accessible employment opportunities, supporting individuals with disabilities to find meaningful roles in the parks system. Educational outreach remains a priority, with up to 100,000 students annually participating in programs aligned with academic standards. The new “Explore TN State Parks” app with augmented reality features further enriches visitors’ experiences, making the outdoors more engaging and accessible to all.

Governor Lee’s vision is clear: outdoor recreation should unite Tennesseans and elevate quality of life. As advisory committees and robust community partnerships shape the program, the state’s commitment to accessibility is both forward-thinking and deeply rooted in service to its people.

By pursuing more accessible parks, Tennessee is not only improving public health and fostering stewardship but also creating lasting legacies for future generations. Access 2030 is more than a plan – it’s a movement, inviting all Tennesseans to join in championing accessibility and preserving the state’s natural treasures. Together, we can ensure Tennessee’s outdoors are truly open to everyone.

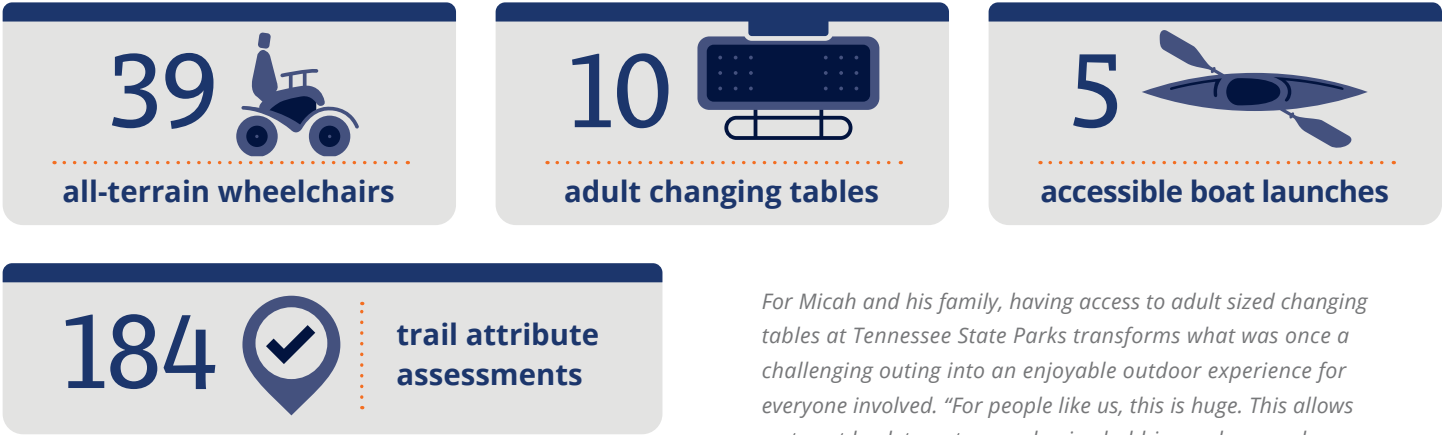


Ray Bloomer, Accessibility Advocate for the National Park Service, recently visited the state to view and assess progress. He declared that Tennessee is well on its way to achieving its accessibility goals due to significant strides this year.



Cummins Falls State Park opened an accessible overlook with breathtaking views for visitors in wheelchairs who would not have had that option otherwise. Ranger Ashley Clark and Bradley Styler take in the power of Cummins Falls after a rainy day.

## Accessibility Features in Place as of December 15, 2024



Tennessee State Parks now have a catalog of VR experiences that visitors can tap into to learn about the fascinating history of some of our state parks and the real people who lived and worked there.

For Micah and his family, having access to adult sized changing tables at Tennessee State Parks transforms what was once a challenging outing into an enjoyable outdoor experience for everyone involved. “For people like us, this is huge. This allows us to get back to nature and enjoy hobbies we love, and we can take Micah with us,” said Micah’s mother, Jessie.





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# Tennessee's Small Business & Environmental Assistance Program is the Best in the Nation

TDEC is not just a regulator but a resource, including providing assistance for small businesses in meeting their environmental responsibilities.

Owners of small businesses may be skilled at their line of work but may not be well-versed in environmental regulations that affect them. They might need help, and they might be reluctant to seek assistance because it could reveal issues that must be addressed. **That's where the Small Business Environmental Assistance Program (SBEAP) can help.** Because SBEAP is a non-regulatory, confidential program within TDEC, small businesses can reach out for the program's assistance without fear of information being used against them.

The SBEAP serves as a liaison between a small business and regulatory agencies. It provides technical assistance with permit applications and compliance, training programs, webinars, brochures and more to help a business understand and meet state and federal environmental regulations. Businesses may contact the SBEAP directly or be referred to the program. The program defines a small business as any business with fewer than 100 employees and is not a major source of air emissions or a large quantity generator of hazardous waste.

The SBEAP has a track record of success. This year it was named the best in the nation by the National Small Business Environmental Assistance Program with its Excellence Award, which recognizes exemplary performance in compliance assistance, sustainability, advocacy, and collaboration.

The overall objective at TDEC is to protect the environment, not punish businesses. TDEC will always apply regulations when needed, but it makes the job easier when issues are addressed in a collaborative manner.

The SBEAP is an example of how TDEC collaborates with Tennesseans to meet our mission of protecting human and environmental health, ultimately making Tennessee a great place to live, work, and play.

In 2023, the **SMALL BUSINESS ENVIRONMENTAL ASSISTANCE TEAM** provided:



**276**  
BUSINESS ASSISTS  
ACROSS  
**35**  
TYPES OF  
INDUSTRIES

**115**  
DIRECT PERMIT  
COMPLIANCE  
ASSISTS

**\$180,000**  
POTENTIAL  
AVOIDED COSTS  
FROM FINES

Small Businesses are defined as:

- < 100 employees
- No major air emissions
- No large quantity hazardous waste



Denise Benjamin-Sirmons, Director of EPA's Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization, and Jerome Greene, Deputy Director of EPA's Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization, present Donovan Grimwood with the award for Outstanding Accomplishments by a State Small Business Environmental Assistance Provider in Providing Technical Environmental Assistance to the Small Business Community.

The SBEAP has a track record of success. This year it was named the best in the nation by the National Small Business Environmental Assistance Program



SBEAP staff Crystal Warren and Donovan Grimwood accept the 2024 Small Business Environmental Assistance Program Excellence Award



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# New Office of Outdoor Recreation Established Without Expanding Government

Through the support of Gov. Bill Lee, the General Assembly, and the public/private Tennessee Outdoor Partnership, TDEC has taken another significant step in advancing conservation in Tennessee by establishing the state’s first Office of Outdoor Recreation.

TDEC established the Office of Outdoor Recreation using existing resources and without expanding government. It will engage stakeholders and execute strategies to improve access to the great outdoors, while bolstering the state’s economic potential.

The office will coordinate outdoor recreation policies and management with federal, state, and local agencies and will expand opportunity for outdoor activities by improving accessibility, promoting safety, and improving stewardship of natural resources.

In collaboration with the Tennessee Outdoor Partnership, the office is launching the Tennessee Blueways program to expand kayaking, canoeing, boating, and fishing opportunities in the state. The office’s Greenways and Trails program preserves greenspaces in communities and promotes the use of regional trails and greenways for recreational purposes. It also provides and administers state and federal recreation grants and technical assistance such as planning and training to community leaders.

Tennessee already offers exceptional outdoor recreation. The support of the governor and the General Assembly strengthens it further. The department’s new Office of Outdoor Recreation will capitalize on this exciting opportunity to advance conservation and enhance the quality of life in Tennessee.



The Tennessee Outdoor Partnership is a public/private partnership that seeks to build on the momentum of outdoor recreation and investments into Tennessee’s great outdoors. The TOP is responsible for setting long-range goals and objectives for conservation and outdoor recreation in the State of Tennessee.

Blueways are water trails or water-based recreational corridors, often designated for activities such as kayaking, canoeing, boating, fishing, and other water-related activities.

Greenways are linear open spaces designed for pedestrian or bicycle use. They connect people with nature as well as socially with each other.

In 2024 Outdoor Recreation  
in Tennessee Generated

\$11.9 BILLION IN GDP & 109,657 JOBS

According to the  
Outdoor Industry Association.





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# Meet Tennessee’s new State Naturalist, Roger McCoy

TDEC’s Bureau of Conservation knows a rare species when it sees one, and it has one in Roger McCoy. McCoy serves as Director of Conservation Programs, leading the Divisions of Natural Areas and Archaeology. This year, TDEC named him as the State Naturalist.

The honor is given to a staff member who displays a wealth of knowledge and a special ability to share an appreciation of Tennessee’s natural resources with the public. He joins Mack Prichard and Randy Hedgepath in serving Tennessee in this special way.

Respected nationally, McCoy has played a pivotal role in advancing conservation strategies. For example, he recently worked with the Tennessee Wildlife Federation and the Southeastern Grassland Institute to add acreage to Barnett’s Woods & Prairie State Natural Area. At this site, the three organizations are collaborating to re-establish a native prairie. Prescribed burning is a crucial maintenance tool for natural habitats like prairies. Under McCoy’s guidance, TDEC’s prescribed fire team acquired its first Type 6 Wildland Fire truck this year.

McCoy likes being in the field working with TDEC colleagues and the public. He thoroughly enjoys leading outreach activities, such as hikes, canoe floats, and “botany by bicycle” trips throughout the 84 State Natural Areas. Join the State Naturalist for a hike and leave with a new appreciation for Tennessee’s natural world.



The Division of Natural Areas prescribed fire team acquired its first Type 6 Wildland Fire truck this year. Prescribed burning is a crucial maintenance tool for natural habitats.



State Naturalist, Roger McCoy

Above Right: State Naturalist Roger McCoy enjoys leading hikes throughout the year on our 84 State Natural Areas. Governor Lee fondly recounts partaking in a hike led by McCoy and how he shared his passion for the paw paw tree.



Barnett’s Woods & Prairie State Natural Area has been expanded this year thanks to a partnership with the Tennessee Wildlife Federation and Southeastern Grasslands Institute.

“I am honored to share this title with those who have come before me and those who will follow,” McCoy said. “Tennessee’s natural features are a part of what makes the state so special, and I am grateful to have the opportunity to share this with the public every day. I have always tried to be a voice for conservation in our state, and I look forward to continuing those efforts with this new designation.”

State Naturalist Roger McCoy



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.



Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation,  
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public document was promulgated at a cost of \$[0.00](#) per copy."



Department of  
**Environment &  
Conservation**