

2003-2008 Tennessee State Recreation Plan

Status Review & Update



In 2008 the TRAC committee conducted a thorough review of the implementation status of the 2003 Tennessee State Recreation Plan. The following section contains their findings of progress to date and proposals for carrying the plan's Action Program forward during the next five years. In several cases, these action items have been incorporated into one of the ten new initiatives presented in this plan.

I. Seamless Recreation System

2003 Proposal: Organize existing Federal, State and local resources into a seamless "Tennessee Recreation System."

GIS data sharing across agency lines, a key component of this proposal, has been implemented in several ways:

- Annual Governor's Land and Water Forums, beginning in 2004, have helped to improve coordination of information and sharing of GIS data among state agencies. Forum III in 2007 concentrated on GIS

sharing among state, federal, and local agencies.

- GIS coordination is now taking place among TDEC, the Department of Agriculture's Division of Forestry and the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT). In addition, TDEC's RES and State Parks divisions now share a common GIS database.
- A large wall map showing the lands of all State and Federal recreation providers in Tennessee was completed by the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA) in 2007.

Interagency cooperation and coordination has been strengthened in the following ways:

- TRAC meetings in 2008 and 2009 have served as interagency forums
- Tennessee's Greenways are a well-integrated statewide system that operates across many jurisdictional lines.
- TDEC-RES developed a revised scoring system for

local grants which places a priority on cooperation, planning and partnerships.

2010-2015 Update:

Implement this plan's **Advocacy and Funding** and **Local Parks and Recreation** initiatives, which support local parks departments in their roles as active partners in a seamless recreation system. Implement the Tennessee Recreation One-Stop website initiative, which involves GIS data sharing at all levels and a seamless recreation information delivery system for the public. Implement the proposal to establish a State Recreation Areas designation to facilitate interagency cooperation in managing state recreation lands with multiple ownership.

2. Multi-use Agreements

2003 Proposal: Facilitate formal multi-use agreements among all levels of government.

PARTAS is implementing this for cities and counties, providing a partnerships booklet outlining the importance of multi-use and school/park agreements and examples of various forms of agreements.

2010-2015 Update:

Continue implementation to assist four of this plan's initiatives: **Local Parks and Recreation, Children in Nature, Environmental Education, and Public Health**. PARTAS should provide more training and initiate more partnerships in this area, pointing out the important role of local school recreation facilities in providing fitness-activity opportunities, especially for underserved and high-risk populations that lack such opportunities close to home.

3. Website

2003 Proposal: Develop a comprehensive one-stop website for recreation information.

The Department of Tourist Development has developed an extensive website, Tennessee Vacations, that provides information about many recreation opportunities in the state. However, the whole spectrum of recreation opportunities provided by Tennessee's

multi-level recreation system is not a primary focus.

A working group of the TRAC met in 2009 to reconsider this proposal of the 2003 plan. The result of those discussions has been incorporated into a new website proposal using new technologies that have emerged since 2003.

2010-2015 Update:

Implement this plan's **Tennessee Recreation One-Stop** website initiative.

4. Printed Information

2003 Proposal: Provide more printed information about State and Federal recreation resources.

TDEC has completed new parks brochures for all parks, and TWRA has published a new State Recreation System wall map.

In considering the status of this proposal, the TRAC concluded that digital online information is increasingly becoming the preferred public information source, and that providing more printed information will not be a state recreation priority in the future.

2010-2015 Update:

Implement this plan's **Tennessee Recreation One-Stop** website initiative.

5. Corridors

2003 Proposal: Organize, brand and market Recreational Development Corridors.

This proposal has resulted in one of the great success stories of the 2003 plan. A movement to implement Heritage Corridors had emerged statewide.

The 21-county Cumberland Plateau region completed a National Heritage Corridor Feasibility Study, with joint funding from TDEC, TDOT, and TWRA.

The North Cumberland project is a model corridor project containing recreation, tourism, economic development and working forest components.

In the 6-county Mississippi River Corridor, a nonprofit grassroots organization has been established and received a \$250,000 direct appropriation from the General Assembly.

The Tennessee Overhill Heritage Area has completed a National Heritage Corridor Feasibility Study and has a self-sustaining, fully operational regional program.

The 9-county Tennessee River Trails corridor has organized and received funding for a National Scenic Byway plan.

TDEC is in the process of developing a framework for a State Heritage Areas program to assist and guide these grassroots efforts.

2010-2015 Update:

Implement this plan's **Regional Economic Development** initiative through TDEC's completing the State Heritage Areas framework and introducing legislation to formally establish that designation in 2010.

6. Growth

2003 Proposal: Mitigate the impact of growth on Tennessee's natural and cultural heritage.

The Governor's office did not appoint the proposed cabinet-level interagency council to develop growth

management policies. A working group of the TRAC committee was organized in 2009 to develop a new approach. That work has produced a new Quality Growth initiative for this plan.

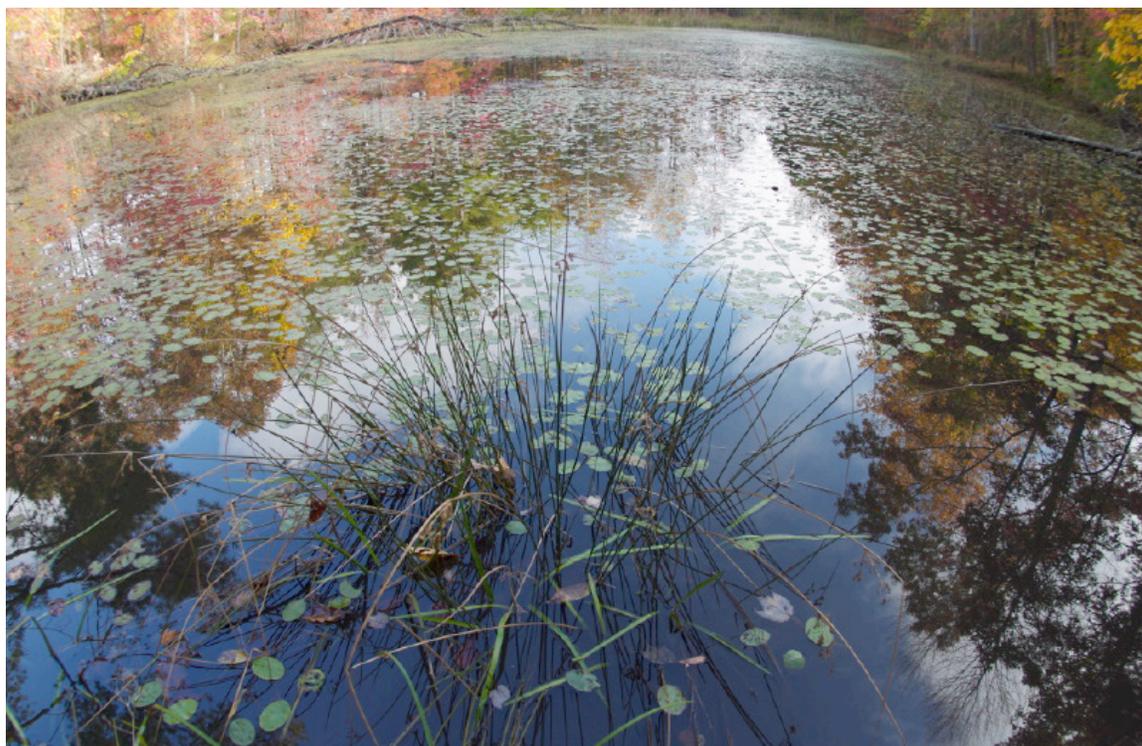
2010-2015 Update:

Implement this plan's **Quality Growth** initiative.

7. Acquisition

2003 Proposal: Develop a comprehensive statewide plan for acquisition of recreation lands.

Tennessee's new land acquisition program has been the most dramatic and far-reaching outcome of the 2003 plan. The Tennessee Heritage Conservation Trust Fund Act was passed in 2005 with a new dedicated funding mechanism. A Preliminary Assessment of Needs was completed in 2006 through an interagency cooperation by the Departments of Agriculture and Environment and Conservation and the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency. This fund seeks to protect significant natural areas in Tennessee by strategically partnering with landowners, government agencies, non-profit organizations,



for-profit companies and others. To date, the fund has awarded 29 grants totaling a little over \$30 million to protect 42,411 acres. Leveraged with matching dollars from the recipients, the lands that have been acquired are valued at close to \$118 million.

The State Lands Acquisition Fund continues to be used for the acquisition of land for any area designated as an historic place as evidenced by its inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places, state historic areas or sites, State Parks, State Forests, State Natural Areas, boundary areas along State Scenic Rivers, the state trails system, and for the acquisition of easements to protect state lands and waters. Such funds may also be used for trail development in the foregoing areas.

2010-2015 Update:

TDEC should continue efforts to establish a sound land acquisition selection process that integrates top priorities from each cooperating agency and an efficient, fully-staffed land management/real property management section within RES.

8. Rivers

2003 Proposal: Restore the State Scenic Rivers Program.

TDEC's former Division of Natural Areas requested an improvement item to establish a State Scenic Rivers Administrator position as part of annual budget improvement process in 2006, but was not successful in getting it funded. Now, in 2009, the new Division of Resource Management has placed a renewed focus on the state Scenic Rivers Program by organizing a new section called Rivers and Trails and appointing a staff person to oversee this program. This Scenic Rivers Administrator will work closely with watershed associations to review and evaluate Tennessee's Scenic Rivers Act and pay close attention to all designated State Scenic Rivers by carefully reviewing and evaluating all relevant environmental permits and grants. TDEC is also working closely with TDOT on transportation projects that might affect a Scenic River.

2010-2015 Update:

TDEC should continue the emphasis placed on the Scenic Rivers Program, ensure permanency of the coordinator/administrator position at TDEC, and implement this plan's **Recreational Waters** initiative.

9. Greenways

2003 Proposal: Continue to implement the Tennessee Greenways and Trails Plan.

This proposal has been implemented to a significant degree.

- The Greenways Coordinator position was reinstated in 2005 via grant from TDOT.
- A new Greenways and Trails Plan was completed in 2007.
- TDEC, TWRA and TDOT are working cooperatively on the GIS database of existing paved greenway trails, with 306 trails identified so far. The next phase will cover natural surface trails.
- TDOT's new Multi-modal Resources Transportation Plan includes provisions for pedestrian and bicycle trails.
- Governor Bredesen and First Lady Andrea Conte are giving a priority to the Trail of Tears.
- A very successful Tennessee Greenways and Trails Council continues to guide and support the program, and was instrumental in selecting a marketing firm to develop the first-ever marketing campaign for greenways and trail in Tennessee: www.connectwithtn.com
- The Southern Appalachian Greenways Alliance (SAGA) has been established and has developed a regional SAGA Plan for Northeast Tennessee in partnership with the NPS-Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance program.
- PARTAS is helping local communities decide where best place to put trails, and beginning in 2008 TDEC began awarding local grants for trail planning.

2010-2015 Update:

Continue to implement the 2003 proposal as part

of this plan's **Quality Growth** initiative in the following ways:

- Coordinate with the Department of Economic and Community Development to identify and pursue opportunities to acquire land for Greenways through the FEMA/TEMA flood hazard mitigation program.
- Continue to place an emphasis through local grant priorities on connectivity to create regional Greenway and trail systems, linking federal, state, and local parklands and schools, and providing alternate transportation.
- Encourage communities to use sidewalks as urban trails, and develop urban trail standards.
- Use TDEC GIS data to assist local governments and others in identifying potential areas for adding Greenway connections.
- Implement proposals of the Governor's Off-highway Vehicle Study
- Consider assigning this plan's **Recreational Waters** initiative to the Greenways and Trails Coordinator or the Scenic Rivers program in State Parks.

10. Wetlands

2003 Proposal: Continue to fund and implement Tennessee's Wetlands Conservation Strategy.

Tennessee has largely accomplished the goal established in 1994 to increase the state's wetland base by 70,000 acres through the Wetland Acquisition Fund administered by the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency.

Wetland mitigation banks have been used to offset unavoidable wetland losses resulting from development projects requiring state and federal water quality permits, resulting in restoration of approximately 3,000 wetland acres.

The state wetlands regulatory program continues to work with local governments to identify opportunities to implement required mitigation for both streams and wetlands in areas such as public parks and greenways where that is consistent with the goals of the local programs.

2010-2015 Update:

Implement the wetlands component of this plan's **Recreational Waters** initiative.

11. Renovation

2003 Proposal: Renovate and maintain state and local recreation facilities.

TDEC's Recreation Educational Services division has established a scoring priority for local grants that encourages "taking care of what you have" by emphasizing the following:

- Renovation and rehabilitation of existing local facilities that are at least 20 years old.
- Planning and benchmarking that details accountability for ongoing maintenance of funded facilities

RES has also established performance standards for grant recipients.

RES requires ADA compliance in all facilities renovations to ensure the ability to serve people of all abilities.

2010-2015 Update:

Continue to apply the maintenance priority scoring in awarding local grants. Continue the priority of accessibility and inclusion of users of all abilities in renovations and in new facility design.

12. Grants

2003 Proposal: Develop an improved system for the most effective use of TDEC recreation grants.

RES revised its local grant scoring to reflect new planning priorities placed on benchmarking of communities and identifying communities with significant recreation opportunity deficits.

2010-2015 Update:

Revise TDEC's grant scoring to incorporate priorities established in this plan.

13. Environmental Education

2003 Proposal: Establish a statewide environmental education program.

Project CENTS was re-established through a partnership with TDEC and the Department of Education in 2005. This partnership resulted in 20 parks implementing year-round classrooms, with Fall Creek Falls State Park conducting a residential environmental education program that serves students statewide.

PARTAS is helping to coordinate school/parks cooperative agreements.

The Outdoor Recreation and Conservation Education section of the Resource Management Division within State Parks has also developed a pilot East Tennessee Teachers Guide to help coordinate and promote program and service cooperation between parks and schools.

2010-2015 Update:

Continue these activities as implementation components of this plan's **Environmental Education** initiative.

14. Advocacy & Funding

2003 Proposal: Increase advocacy and funding for parks and conservation in Tennessee.

Advocacy by conservation organizations and leadership from the Governor resulted in the Tennessee Heritage Conservation Trust Fund Act of 2005, which provided over \$30 million for land acquisition. The General Assembly diverted moneys from the fund in 2008 for budget balancing.

The proposal to research impacts of recreation was not implemented, and the TRAC committee urged that this proposal be continued, with improvements.

2010-2015 Update:

Implement this plan's **Advocacy and Funding** initiative. The General Assembly should restore permanent funding to the Heritage Conservation Trust, the Local Parks and Recreation Fund (LPRF) and the State Lands Acquisition Fund (SLAF) and establish a dedicated funding source for parks and recreation.

15. Continuity

2003 Proposal: Consider dividing TDEC's two basic functions into two separate departments

After some consideration, this proposal was tabled. This plan moves in the opposite direction, linking the environmental regulation and recreation/conservation sides of TDEC for the first time by encouraging a transparent, coordinated regulatory framework with increased public involvement under the umbrella of Watershed Management.

2010-2015 Update:

Use TDEC's expansion of the Watershed Management Approach, as proposed in this plan's **Recreational Waters** initiative, to strengthen the link between the parks and environment sides of TDEC.



16. Volunteers

2003 Proposal: Make greater use of volunteers and Friends groups

The Tennessee State Parks now have 35 active and established Friends groups that provide service through fund raising, opposing development encroachment of park boundaries, contributing over 40,000 volunteer hours in various park projects and providing over \$500,000 of direct funding for the system as a whole. TDEC's staff now includes a Volunteer Services and Friends Coordinator who supports and encourages these groups.

At the local level, PARTAS held a Citizen Board Training Forum in 2006 with over 100 parks and recreation professionals and active advisory/citizen board members in attendance. The goal is to conduct this type of workshop/forum every other year.

2010-2015 Update:

Continue implementation of this proposal with an increased focus on volunteer services and support across all areas of TDEC.

17. Follow-up

2003 Proposal: Follow-up on the 2003-2008 Recreation Plan Action Program.

The Tennessee Recreation Advisory Committee met in 2004, 2006, and three times in 2007 to work on updating the 2003 plan. TDEC provides organizational support and liaison for the TRAC through an Executive Committee of five TDEC employees. The 2009 TRAC members who have worked on developing this plan have expressed interest in continuing to provide follow-up during implementation.

The membership of the TRAC represents a diversity of regions, levels of government, and races.

2010-2015 Update:

Continue implementation of this proposal through TDEC's annual Recreation Summits.

18. Health and Fitness

2003 Proposal: Provide organized health and fitness opportunities for target groups.

RES conducted a Health and Fitness Survey of all local parks and recreation departments and partnered with other agencies to provide workshops and conference sessions on health topics.

PARTAS supports local governments through technical assistance to increase recreation opportunities for underserved Tennesseans, such as inner city youth, rural residents, disabled residents, low income residents, and non-English speaking residents.

An Active Communities Assessments Survey project, begun in 2003 in partnership with the Department of Health, was not been completed due to personnel changes in DOH.

The director of TDEC's RES division serves as an active member of the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness and Health.

PARTAS and State Parks staff can cite many successful programs, events and educational offerings happening across the state where parks and recreation agencies have played a pivotal role in addressing the public health/physical activity connection.

PARTAS places a priority on inclusive programming opportunities for people of all abilities.

2010-2015 Update:

Continue these activities and priorities in implementing this plan's **Public Health** initiative.

19. Local Programming

2003 Proposal: Support the ability of local governments to deliver quality recreation programming.

TDEC's PARTAS continues to provide technical assistance to local parks and recreation departments in recreation programming.

2010-2015 Update:

Continue this item in implementing this plan's **Local Parks and Recreation, Public Health, Children in Nature, and Environmental Education** initiatives.