



2018

**Tennessee’s Roadmap to Securing the Future of
Our Water Resources**
Water-Based Recreation and Tourism
Executive Summary

TN H₂O - Tennessee's Water-Based Recreation and Tourism

Executive Summary

The importance of water-based recreation and tourism to Tennessee cannot be underestimated. Its more than 60,000 miles of rivers, streams and creeks are the largest and most widely available class of publicly owned recreation resources in the state (TDEC, 2009, p. 88). The more we protect and invest in public land and water infrastructure, the greater and longer-lasting the dividends. Responsibly accessing and enjoying Tennessee's rivers, streams, lakes and reservoirs need not deplete them. Along with the tremendous potential for continued growth of water-related outdoor recreation and tourism in the state, there are also associated thresholds for impacts related to the health and sustainability of the natural resources that support them.

Preserving the integrity of and access to Tennessee's water resources is of paramount importance. Mainstays to the state's economy, Tennessee's water-based assets provide for a high-quality outdoor recreation-oriented lifestyle that is enjoyed by hundreds of thousands of residents and visitors alike. The Tennessee Water Quality Control Act defines these waters as "property of the state...held in public trust for the use of the people of the state." In addition, along with fish and aquatic life, the state recognizes that recreation is one of the main designated uses that Tennessee waters should support (State of Tennessee, 2010).

Across Tennessee, the outdoor recreation industry is booming. Economically, water-based recreation and tourism contributes substantially to Tennessee's state and local economies, especially those in rural areas. Recent data shows that anglers spent \$1.3 billion fishing in Tennessee and supported 17,541 jobs, with total economic output of \$2.1 billion (Southwick Associates, 2017). Tennessee's recreational boating industry has an annual economic impact of more than \$3 Billion (includes direct, indirect and induced spending), supporting 15,817 (direct and indirect) American jobs, and 595 businesses (National Marine Manufacturers Association, 2017). In urban centers like Chattanooga, the redeveloped 13-mile riverfront gets a huge economic boost from the Head of the Hooch, the world's largest rowing regatta, bringing in more than 2,100 boats and an annual economic impact of more than \$5.5 million for the city (Outdoor Industry Association, 2017, p. 13). "Fish Dayton," a brand created in 2012 by community leaders to promote Dayton as a bass fishing destination and stimulate the local economy has resulted in \$15 Million in new private investments and hundreds of full time and construction jobs for the community. In 2019, for the first time in its 49 year

history, the Bassmaster Classic will be held on the Tennessee River in Knoxville. (Bassmaster, 2018). The state is seeing positive reservoir recreation and economic growth with a recent study noting that reservoirs are valued at about \$1M per shoreline mile (University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture (UTIA), 2017). Increasingly, positive cases like these emphasize the positive lifestyle and economic benefits afforded by the state's high quality waters.

As Tennessee's water-based recreational economy continues to thrive and grow, there are a variety of associated challenges and opportunities for consideration. The Tennessee 2020 Vision for Parks, People and Landscapes pointed out the need communities have for more opportunities to enjoy and protect their local rivers, streams and creeks (TDEC, 2009, p. 52). Several years later, this still rings true. There is a critical need to maintain high quality waters in enough quantity to meet multiple competing uses for fish and aquatic life, and recreation provides both associated challenges and opportunities. There is also a need for an integrated management approach that holistically acknowledges and addresses all of the relevant economic, environmental and recreational use considerations.

Maintaining the health and integrity of the streams, rivers, wetlands, lakes and reservoirs is imperative to maintaining and maximizing economic growth and use. As paddling and angling increases so too will impacts to streams and Tennessee needs to identify the rivers that are under extreme pressure from overuse and associated water quality issues marinas, litter, and siltation. Problems associated with exotic invasive species, like Asian carp and non-native aquatic vegetation, must also be proactively addressed to maintain the ecological balance and ensure safe and high quality user experiences.

There are a number of key challenges and opportunities associated with water-based recreation and tourism in Tennessee. The ability to optimize recreational experiences to the fullest may be impacted by such factors as access to the water, overuse/overcrowding (leading to user conflicts), competing uses of the water (both in terms of types of recreation, but also relative to other uses), and a lack of amenities near or on the water. Recreation is also greatly affected by the overall quality (pollution, trash and debris) and quantity of the water (water levels, flow conditions). High-impact forms of water-based recreation can cause resource issues, affecting water quality (boater bathroom issues) and degrading conditions (streambank erosion, litter, etc.).

Access to and on Tennessee waters continues to be an ongoing and increasingly common and complex issue. While Tennessee's public lands, waters, and blueways (water trails) offer safe and rewarding recreational opportunities, many of the state's

rivers and streams run through private lands where access is a limiting factor. This emphasizes the need for both respect for private lands and increased cooperation from landowners. Similarly, quality and types of access are issues and popular rivers may be experiencing excessive recreational use, pushing the limits of capacity to fully support both recreation and aquatic health. Addressing access to waters and capacity on waters, where there is not enough access in certain places and too much access in others resulting in over-crowding, as well as underutilized resources in other parts of the state, is critical.

There is a continued need for effective water resource education and stewardship among Tennessee's recreational community. As the primary users of the state's rivers, lakes and reservoirs, there is tremendous opportunity to identify existing tools and programs, like the TVA Clean Marinas Program and others, and to implement new strategies focused on reducing water quality impacts, litter, and user conflicts. According to polling data referenced in the Tennessee Water Blueprint, 96% of Tennesseans were concerned about water pollution (Various, 2009). Education and stewardship campaigns that directly and proactively address major impacts, like anti-littering education and etiquette on the waterways, can provide long-lasting benefits for years to come.

Overall, the ability to adequately address the recreational potential of Tennessee waters is hampered by several key limiting factors, including insufficient funds to support the existing and growing user base, limited resources for law enforcement and the associated jurisdictional challenges this presents, impacts from new and increased numbers of users, and lack of education to ensure responsible use. There is an ongoing need to address the lack of funds to support amenities, facilities and access on waterways, as well as recreational water user education to promote conservation-minded stewardship.

Moving into the future, there are many ways to continue to grow Tennessee's water-based recreational economy, by beneficially leveraging the state's outstanding natural water resources and maintaining and expanding the recreation and tourism opportunities that they afford, while protecting, and conserving the state's high-quality natural assets for years to come.

Please refer to the complete Recreation and Tourism Report for details.

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