

Tennessee Sierran

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TENNESSEE CHAPTER

Bimonthly Newsletter of the Tennessee Chapter of the Sierra Club

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**Bill Nickle
and
Narrow Ridge
Earth Literacy Center**
pages 4-5

Masthead photo: Gregory Bald, GSMNP, © Ron Shrieves
Cover photo by Emily Ellis
Cris Corley photo by Vic Bullock



Explore, Enjoy, and Protect

From Tennessee Chair Cris Corley

Early Morning Thoughts: Superman to the Rescue!



In my small hometown of Alexandria, Tennessee, in the 1960s, most of us neighborhood kids were talented in imaginative entertainment. We were required to spend at least 90% of the summer daylight outdoors. In winter, we watched more television. Frequently I was glued to the floor, in front of my grandparents' color TV, watching reruns of *Gilligan's Island* and *Superman*. The in-color reruns of *Superman* (early episodes were black and white) made some of the town's young boys a little squirrely (flying squirrels come to mind). Superman costumes for Christmas and birthdays were commonplace, as in today's Spider-Man costume craze.

"Faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive, and able to leap tall buildings in a single bound," was our creed. "Superman, who can change the course of mighty rivers, bend steel with his bare hands, and who, disguised as Clark Kent, mild-mannered reporter for the Metropolis *Daily Planet*, fights a never-ending battle for truth, justice, and the American way," as the announcer introduced each episode.

We were privileged to have a pay phone booth on the Town Square. Kids would enter the phone booth wearing their Superman costume with a coat over it, dressed as Clark Kent. After ditching the coat, they'd emerge shouting, "Superman to the Rescue!" Kent, a great role model, appeared to have only an ordinary job and was socially awkward around his dear friend Lois Lane. After his phone booth transformation, however, all of his fear disappeared. His supernatural strength never failed to save the Earth from destruction.

My practice of awakening before sunrise and writing "Early Morning Thoughts" did not happen very early today. My sleep deprivation felt like a near-fatal dose of Kryptonite poisoning. I'd just returned from an extended weekend of tent camping in the majestic lands of the Shawnee – on hard ground with a brisk, wet, cold morning fog blowing off the Ohio River, complicated by my being a 60+-year-old with an arthritic right shoulder. But my exhaustion was the price of admission – being twice a witness to Earth's rarest light show, a total solar eclipse, while sitting next to your older brother, is special. Of course this was not our first rodeo. Both times, my brother and I had chosen to be near a majestic river. We witnessed our first eclipse, in 2017, aboard kayaks rowing on the upper Cumberland. This time we picked the Ohio River – only a mile from Metropolis, Superman's hometown. Picking the location required a little planning. The Shawnee Forest was a favorite place of mine to ride trails on my old horse Bumper. After studying maps of the predicted path, the decision became clear: Metropolis, Illinois.

The 2017 eclipse was remarkable, but the totality needed to last just a little bit longer. I had visions of Clark Kent changing in a nearby telephone booth and flying up to hold back the Sun for a few more minutes of totality. Superman to the rescue!

Camping in the hardwood forest provided me a much needed reprieve for reflection. My last few months have been exhausting. I had spent four jam-packed days roaming the halls of Congress lobbying for Sierra Club's directives on what needed to be included in the new Farm Bill. Upon my return from Washington, the Chapter's hiring committee for a new Director kicked into gear. We had received over 30 applications. Of course, we were seeking a superhero.

The Chapter has benefitted greatly from its fair share of heroes. Most recently, Dan Firth's work on water pollution chemicals (PFAS) in East Tennessee made headlines in the renowned *Sierra Magazine*. Dan is also helping the legislature understand serious issues regarding landfill waste reduction. This could result in future landmark legislation and stir a nationwide discussion. Other volunteer heroes are also working tirelessly to save the Earth. Rita Harris, a member of the National Sierra Club's Board of Directors, represents Tennessee's interests. Axel Ringe and Todd Waterman are working alongside an army of volunteers on coal ash, radioactive waste, and more. JoAnn McIntosh and Kent Minault are working on the electrification of the transportation system, helping to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. No good hero news story can be told, though, without a mention of our Conservation Program Director, Scott Banbury. Nearly every environmental NPR story broadcast in Tennessee uses one of his clever quotes.

Our very first Chapter Director, Pat Cupples, may not have supernatural abilities, but the job requirements listed were comprehensive. Of course, I recommended the applicant be faster than a speeding bullet and more powerful than a locomotive, but my efforts failed to garner a majority vote in committee. Pat comes to the table with experience founding and leading a nature conservancy. He enjoys leading youth on trails and maritime environmental protection cruises. I almost forgot to mention his outstanding repertoire of fundraising skills.

To avoid post-traumatic solar eclipse recovery, I suggest you never be in a hurry to return home. My thoughts were clearly focussed on my comfortable bed, but I failed to consult with local officials regarding traffic. We broke camp in the early evening because of a forecast of severe storms, and hit bumper-to-bumper traffic on I-24. The nightmare turned into a 225-mile, 10-hour journey back to Nashville. I commented to my traveling companion Charlie High, "I could have saddled up my old horse Bumper and passed the truckers stuck in this bumper-to-bumper!" We turned up the radio and rolled down the windows, singing our favorite songs.

The Superman craze in Alexandria faded over time. An antique dealer made a sweet deal with the local telephone company and hauled our Superman phone booth away. Parents quit buying Superman costumes for their kids, especially after Spencer's crash. Spencer was a beloved six-year-old boy living next door. He suited up one day in his bright new Superman suit, and with several kids at his side and others holding the ladder, he climbed onto the roof of his dad's garage. Extending his arms skyward, he shouted "Superman to the Rescue," but then froze in place for what seemed like hours. With a massive number of friends assembled, Spencer finally took the leap of faith. The short-lived flight reminded me of a pilot's axiom, "The takeoff is easy, the hard part is the landing." The resulting crash and broken right arm drove parents to burn every Superman costume in town. Superman Spencer's legacy still lives in the hearts of all who were eyewitness to Alexandria's last immortal flight of a superhero.

I am sure our new Chapter Director will occasionally have to find a telephone booth and make a quick change. My suggestion to Pat is to stay firmly attached to *terra firma* and avoid shouting, "Superman to the Rescue!"

Contact Clark, I mean Cris, at chapter.chair@tennessee.sierraclub.org

Tennes-Sierran

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June issue of the Chapter E-Newsletter by May 24

July Issue of the Chapter E-Newsletter by June 21

July/August Issue of The Tennes-Sierran by May 31

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Holston Valley Regional Conservation Committee

Chair: Dan Firth 423-390-0882 dan.firth@sierraclub.org

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A Love Letter to the TVA

Here is a transcript of comments Kent made at the TVA Listening Session in Johnson City, which happened to be on the eve of Valentine's Day.

by Kent Minault, Chair, Transportation Conservation Committee

Happy Valentine's Day! We don't emphasize enough that our relationship here is one of love. Environmentalists and our utility. It's no fling. This is a long-term relationship.

I know. We nag a lot, but we have a strong alignment of interests. Four years ago, the Sierra Club signed a statement with the Natural Resources Defense Council and the Edison Electric Institute establishing common ground between environmentalists and utilities.

We believe in our hearts (and minds) that the quickest way to reverse the climate crisis is to electrify everything, and doing so will be a big benefit to you. In return, as utilities retire more and more polluting resources, you provide more and more victories to us. An example? TVA is improving the EV charging system by eliminating the high demand surcharge for DC fast chargers. Much appreciated.

You may not be feeling the love since what you're hearing from us are complaints about the proposed buildout of methane plants, the disruption to rural communities caused by the pipelines, TVA's failure to properly dispose of its coal ash, and the slow pace of solar and wind deployment. These are all very serious issues, and, my dear, I'm sure you're getting a headache just hearing about them.

But all lovers have issues, and we have an idea how to get help.

Most of our communication happens in your listening sessions. But that's not where your actions are planned. It's in your financial planning — which results in "Integrated Resource Plans (IRPs)" — that we need real communication, and that process diverges from accepted practice. Most IRPs have robust stakeholder engagement far beyond a listening session. And most public utilities hold a lengthy series of technical workshops attended by both stakeholders and third-party electric-planning experts. This creates real transparency, and lets us stakeholders find the best portfolio for our interests. Wouldn't that bring us all closer together?

The end-goal of an IRP process is a roadmap for near-term planning. It requires examining lots of resource mixes, multiple scenarios, various future political and economic circumstances. The result is a preferred portfolio that guides planning until the next IRP. TVA's IRPs differ from the norm in not providing this preferred portfolio. Instead, they present likely ranges (from low to high) for capacity additions and retirements over 20-year planning periods. They consider each resource in isolation rather than showing the relationship between them. This creates confusion, prevents accountability, and undermines the trust between us. That trust is further damaged when IRPs don't describe the actual planning decisions that follow. The 2011 IRP didn't plan for coal retirements, but TVA retired more than half of its fleet over the next decade. We love the retirements, but they didn't grow out of a publicly accessible process.

TVA's 2019 IRP tipped the scale toward methane power, assuming that energy efficiency, demand response, wind, solar and storage weren't viable resources to replace coal. Let's restart the process with an open mind.

We ask for:

- transparency in your modeling assumptions, so the public knows you're accessing the latest information on, say, the cost per megawatt of solar, for example, and also so the public can check the assumptions against published reports and cost estimates;
- an all-source Request for Proposals for new generating resources. This will solicit competitive ideas from a variety of different providers and enable the public and decision makers to compare not just companies but also different types of generation, from solar to demand response to gas and energy storage, to arrive at the genuinely lowest-cost option. The point is to allow the public the opportunity to fairly evaluate both supply-side and demand-side technologies;
- a preferred resource plan, with a near-future roadmap, so the public can follow its progress and assess its results over time
- Aggressive climate goals in line with President Biden's executive order for carbon free electricity by 2035, and
- use of the grants, loans, and tax credits of the Inflation Reduction Act to get there.

We'll save the planet and spend more quality time together.

Contact Kent at kminault@gmail.com

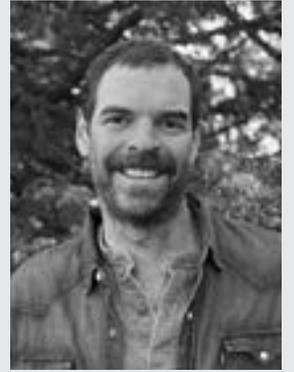
Chapter Hires Its First Director

by Bill Moll, Conservation Co-Chair

The Tennessee Chapter has selected Pat Cupples as its first Chapter Director, with a start date of June 3. Pat is currently Director of Education and Founder of the Mastic Beach Conservancy in Long Island, a leading community group in educational and aquaculture initiatives, along with the protection and thoughtful design of waterfront parkland. Pat has also been a music/media producer and small business owner in Brooklyn. He is married with two children.

After the Sierra Club on-boarding process, he will be meeting this summer with Sierra Club leaders and members across the state.

Contact Bill at whmoll@aol.com



Crypto & Climate Change

by John Nolt, Harvey Broome Group

Cryptocurrencies are gambling schemes that make some people rich at the expense of everyone else — and the global climate. The most popular form of crypto is Bitcoin, and there are two ways to make money with it.

The first — called "mining" in the odd lingo of the game — involves beating all competitors to the solution of a complex mathematical problem. In practice, only the very rich or large pools of people can own or rent enough computer power to do this. The winning team receives a certain number of bitcoins, and a new round of competition begins with a new problem. Bitcoins can be turned into cash at the current market rate (which, as I write this, is about \$70,000 per coin) or used as an actual currency in some venues. But only one pool of competitors wins a given round. The others lose the money they spent on futile computation.

The second, and by far the most common way to make money with Bitcoin, is to buy coins through a cryptocurrency exchange, hoping that their value will increase. This is like investing in corporate stock, except that crypto firms make nothing of material value. What they produce instead is hype, which generates the sheer demand that inflates the market value of the currency. That can happen rapidly. But when investor faith collapses, the currency does as well, and just as rapidly investors lose real money

Bitcoin investments and transactions are tracked by networks of thousands of computers working simultaneously to achieve a kind of consensus bookkeeping. This requires sophisticated security protocols and, again, enormous computer power.

While cryptocurrencies can be used for legitimate transactions, they are also magnets for cybercriminals. On September 16, 2022, the White House issued a statement about this problem, asserting in part that "digital assets ... have been exploited by bad actors to launder illicit proceeds, to finance terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and to conduct a wide array of other crimes. For example, digital assets have facilitated the rise of ransomware cybercriminals; narcotics sales and money laundering for drug trafficking organizations; and the funding of activities of rogue regimes."

Arrays of computers used to make crypto computations are called crypto mines. They are rapidly being built wherever regulations are lax and electricity is relatively cheap — as in Tennessee. Promoters excite communities with bright promises of jobs and economic stimulus, but the promises often go unfulfilled. GRIID Infrastructure LLC, for example, built a bitcoin mine in Maynardville. According to City Commissioner Isaac Collins, "GRIID officials promised good-paying local jobs, but in fact very few, if any, local people have ever been employed." Neighbors complain of the noise of the plant's high-speed cooling fans, of damage done to roads by its trucks, and of a fire that occurred onsite.

No one seems to know how many crypto mines there are now in Tennessee, or how many more are being planned. Local or statewide oversight could ease some of the impact; but instead, some Tennessee legislators are trying to protect crypto mines. A bill introduced into this year's legislative session (HB 2309, SB 2370) sought to preempt local control. It has been taken off the legislative calendar for now, but could return next year.

What do crypto mines have to do with climate change? The connection is indirect but clear. They draw electricity from the grid — huge amounts of it. In much of Tennessee, for example, this electricity is generated by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). TVA produces about 40% of its electricity by burning coal and natural gas, both of which make climate change worse. It has been phasing out coal plants, which have the highest carbon dioxide emissions, but to meet increased energy demand, it is building new natural gas plants — whose emissions are also weighty — and planning more. Once emitted, carbon dioxide lingers in the atmosphere for hundreds or thousands of years, continually trapping heat. Any use of TVA electricity therefore causes some long-term harm. So, to avoid making climate change still worse, all of us who use that electricity — individuals and businesses alike — should do our best not to waste it. Crypto mines waste it flagrantly, to the long-term detriment of Earth's climate, for little or no net social benefit.

Contact John at nolt@utk.edu

Success on the Hill: Conservation Education Day

At least 72 lobbyists from five organizations, led by the Sierra Club, met with 51 or more of Tennessee State legislators in Nashville on February 28 on Conservation Education Day (CED). We focused on three bills we believed lawmakers might concur on if only we could educate them on each bill's substantial environmental impacts. Our efforts — along with those of our lobbyist Scott Banbury — appear influential:

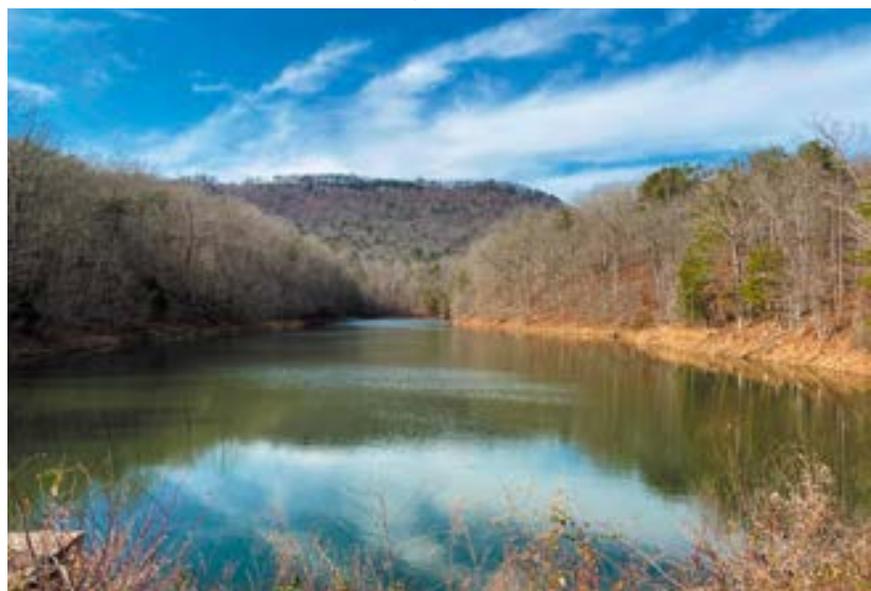
1. SB0573/HR0550: We supported the Tennessee Waste Reduction and Recycling Act (TWRRA). Though unpassed, it received strong bipartisan support, and will be back next year;
2. SB0726/HB1255, a bill to begin monitoring toxic PFAS from industry and wastewater treatment plants, was sent to the Senate Energy General Subcommittee for this year. But we are well positioned to move forward with it next year, especially in the light of the newly-released EPA drinking water standards; and
3. SB0631/HB1054 would have removed protection from about half of Tennessee's vital remaining wetlands. We prevailed, even after dogged attempts to resurrect the bill — at least until next year.

You can help by getting us in to see *your* lawmakers on CED, whose votes could be crucial. Contact organizer Bill Moll at whmoll@aol.com or 404-401-7899.

Scott Banbury will report on these and other impactful bills in our next issue. Support Scott: <https://bit.ly/SCTN-DefendersFund>



Seventy-two activists, including Sierra Club members, turned out on February 28th to lobby at least 51 Tennessee legislators. Photo by Todd Waterman.



A pond on McDonald Farm in Hamilton County. Photo by Jim Stewart.

McDonald Farm Protecting a Resource in Hamilton County

by Jim Stewart, Executive Director, Chattanooga Audubon Society

In the Northwest corner of Hamilton County, the intersection of three currently protected properties forms a haven for wildlife, native vegetation, and anyone who enjoys the outdoors: Cumberland Trail State Park (200 miles long, the length of East Tennessee); Audubon Mountain (460 acres managed by the Chattanooga Audubon Society and Tennessee State Parks); and McDonald Farm (2100 acres purchased by Hamilton County in 2021).

Visitors to the area can see free-flowing streams, forests untouched for generations, mountains, and a farmstead owned by one family since the early 1800s with a rich history stretching back hundreds of years. Hamilton County is growing rapidly and is experiencing pressure to develop a large portion of McDonald Farm. In early 2024, a request was submitted to rezone most of the property for manufacturing and commercial use. Fortunately, a small group of local citizens pushed back. And momentum continued with a town hall meeting where 300 residents told county leaders that they did not want to see the beauty of the farm destroyed.

Due to this public outcry, the county withdrew the rezoning request and authorized the creation of a citizens advisory group to obtain feedback for alternative uses of the farm. That group has met weekly, worked closely with Hamilton County Parks and the Hamilton County Regional Planning Agency, gathered thousands of signatures, and met with archaeologists, Native American representatives, wildlife experts, and many more partners.

The advisory group's goal is to show the recreational, agricultural, tourism and economic value of McDonald Farm. Your input is important.

Comment: mcdonaldfarmcomments@gmail.com

Join the email list: <https://www.chattanoogaaudubon.org/mcdonald.html>

On Facebook: <https://bit.ly/FB-McDonald-Farm>

Questions/Schedule a Speaker: jstewart@chattaudubon.org



One of two natural burial sites at Narrow Ridge Earth Literacy Center.

Natural Burial at Narrow Ridge

See article about Narrow Ridge on facing page.

by Bill Kornrich, Volunteer Writer bkornrich@gmail.com

The Natural Burial Preserve at Narrow Ridge Earth Literacy Center is the first contemporary “green cemetery” in the state of Tennessee. The Preserve is comprised of two five-acre plots of land set aside as a means of honoring the natural life cycle of birth, death, and renewal.

The Narrow Ridge Natural Burial Preserve differs from conventional cemeteries. It is expressly intended to be free of embalming fluids, concrete vaults, non-biodegradable caskets, and chemical fertilizers. Every year in the United States, we use enough embalming fluid to fill an Olympic-size swimming pool; enough concrete to build a two-lane road from Knoxville to Orlando; and enough steel to rebuild the Golden Gate Bridge — and we bury 180,544 million pounds of copper and bronze.

In Narrow Ridge's Natural Burial Preserve, grave markings of native plants and modestly-sized, flat markers of stone native to the area are permitted. One of the five-acre preserve areas will be allowed to return to a natural forest; the other will be a pollinator field.

Because Narrow Ridge feels strongly that the death of a loved one should not result in debt or financial hardship for family members, there is no set fee for a cemetery plot within the burial preserve. However, Narrow Ridge welcomes and encourages donations in appreciation of the Preserve and the time required of staff to maintain and oversee this important initiative.

For more information, contact community@narrowridge.org

Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not every man's greed. — Mahatma Gandhi.

Narrow Ridge Earth Literacy Center

A Road Less Travelled in East Tennessee

by Bill Kornrich, Volunteer Writer bkornrich@gmail.com

Bill Nickle dreamed of a road less travelled. Nickle began his career in the ministry; he served as minister of education, minister of youth, and campus minister at churches in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, Kingsport, and at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville (UTK). But in time he realized that he wanted his energies to move on from the ministry of the church proper and into the direction of environmental education and community involvement. About the work he had been doing, Nickle says, “it seemed as if God was contained within the four walls of the church rather than in the total sum of all creation.”

Born and raised outside Knoxville, Nickle enrolled at UTK, then transferred to and graduated from Emory and Henry College. He went on to receive his Master of Divinity degree from Duke University.

Nickle believed that youth and young adults could better solve their problems by immersing themselves in wilderness settings where they could connect with the sacredness of creation. In 1972, he and his wife purchased 40 acres of steep mountain land in beautiful Hogskin Valley in rural Grainger County. They and their two children lived in an “old shack of a house,” as he describes it, until building their log home in 1977.



Bill Nickle is founder of Narrow Ridge Earth Literacy Center in northeast Tennessee.

Lacking sufficient financial support, Nickle put the dream on hold and left Grainger County in 1980 to spend nine years at the United Methodist-affiliated Camp Wesley Woods in Townsend. As director, Bill expanded Wesley Woods’ traditional summer camp ministry to include the first church-run, year-long environmental education program in the Southeastern United States. But he followed his dream back to Hogskin Valley in 1990. With additional financial support, he chartered Narrow Ridge for the second time, and it received federal nonprofit status in 1991.

Since then, Nickle has pursued his dream of a road less travelled. Today the Center includes six eco-facilities and rentals, dedicated staff, a variety of programs and opportunities for the public,

a natural burial preserve, and 47 eco-residential sites in its community land trusts. With an emphasis on community, sustainability, and spirituality, the Board of Directors of NR and its staff and volunteer leaders have guided this 32-year-old organization as it has grown to over 500 acres of environmentally protected land. Its solar-powered structures, gardens and orchards serve as an outdoor school for college students, interns and visitors, teaching them how to live in more ecologically responsible ways. Friends and neighbors from the north side of Grainger County — as well as committed individuals around the nation — have helped to realize Bill Nickle’s dream.



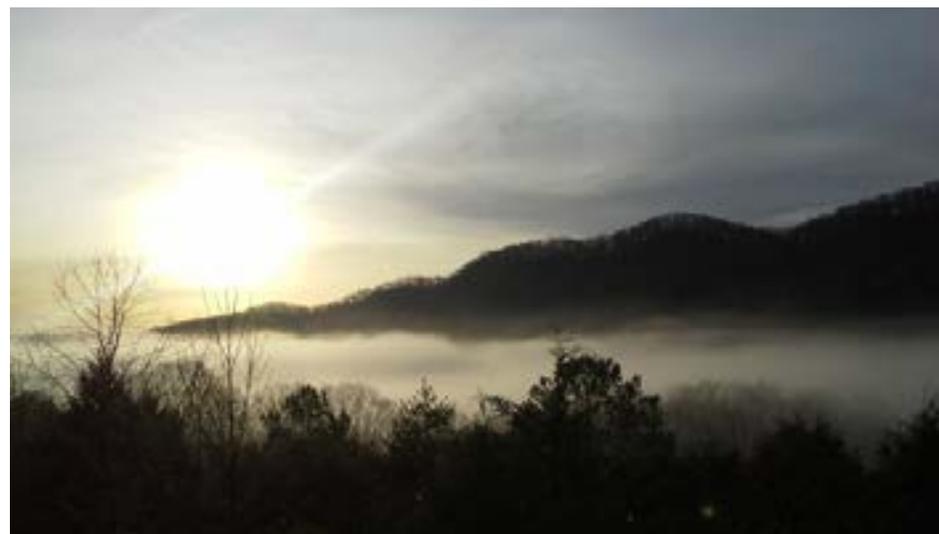
Mitzi Wood-Von Mizener is Director of Narrow Ridge Earth Literacy Center.

“Narrow Ridge has been a central part of my life,” said John Nolt, Professor Emeritus at UTK and Executive Committee member of Sierra Club’s Harvey Broome Group. “I met Bill Nickle in the late 1980s and came quickly to respect him as a practical visionary.”

Mitzi Wood-Von Mizener is the Director of NR. “At the heart of Narrow Ridge are our Earth literacy programs, which promote a sense of wonder of, and commitment to, the natural world and community of life of which we are so privileged to be a part,” she said. Wood-Von Mizener first came to NR to participate in a Vision Fast. “I fell in love with Narrow Ridge, its mission, the land,” she said, “and the concept of a community built around shared values of community, sustainability, and spirituality.” She is now serving in her

15th year as director and lives onsite with her husband Jason, who serves on the buildings and grounds staff.

Narrow Ridge specializes in programs that combine immersion in nature with experiential learning in sustainable living, and range in length from weekend to weeklong. Whether with an Alternative Break, Peace Camp, or Youth or Elder Retreat, Narrow Ridge program participants are given the opportunity to immerse themselves in the natural world, where they experience themselves as part of the community of Earth rather than as outside observers. Activities include touring eco-homes in the land trust community, participating in organic gardening, and natural building. Programs also include delving into environmental issues of the climate crisis, and learning



A beautiful sunrise at Narrow Ridge Earth Literacy Center. Photo by Guy Larry Osborne.

about and experiencing conscious consumerism, bioregionalism, and sustainable agriculture and diet.

The core of the Narrow Ridge mission prioritizes the offering of experiential learning opportunities through its Earth literacy programs and events. “While I was teaching environmental ethics (1990-2022) I regularly sent groups of students there to do service-learning projects,” Nolt said. “Some have stayed on and gotten more involved.”

Narrow Ridge plans to further promote intergenerational collaboration and aging-in-place

initiatives, and will partner with regional community partners and activists to explore how to better promote diversity and inclusion at programmatic, organizational, and community levels.

One recent project is the planting of 300 endangered American chestnut trees, which carry 95% of their original genetic content. Narrow Ridge is also converting five acres of retired pastureland into a pollinator

field as an additional effort to stabilize and regenerate a healthy ecosystem. Throughout the year, Narrow Ridge offers community events including meditation, yoga, solstice and equinox celebrations, film nights, community potlucks, and music gatherings.

In October Bill Nickle will celebrate his 85th birthday and 86th trip around the sun. To honor his legacy of inspiring love and care for the Earth community through nature-based programs, Narrow Ridge will hold a series of events to raise money for the Bill Nickle Scholarship Fund. Plans are underway for their annual fall festival, Hogskin History Day, on September 28, and a birthday bash in October. This fund provides financial assistance to individuals and groups to participate in transformational Narrow Ridge programs.

“A friend once described Narrow Ridge as a miracle hanging by a thread,” Wood-Von Mizener said. “There is some truth in that statement. It seems that Narrow Ridge from start to finish is an unlikely story. Funds have always been lean as has staffing, and aspirations have been described as ‘pie in the sky.’ Still, here we are: 550 acres, four community land trusts, six eco-facilities, a natural burial preserve, and thousands of guests and program participants later. It could be argued that Bill Nickle is the miracle of Narrow Ridge . . . Bill has touched so many lives by living out and working toward an impossible dream.”

Nickle’s dream led him down a different road, one less travelled. For East Tennesseans, that has made all the difference.

Narrow Ridge: <https://narrowridge.org>
Contact: community@narrowridge.org

Walking the Narrow Ridge

“Narrow Ridge” does not refer to a geographical location or a geological structure. Rather, it is a place in the heart. “Narrow Ridge” is a phrase that originated with Jewish philosopher Martin Buber. For Buber, the Narrow Ridge was the place between the “I and the Thou,” as opposed to the “I and the it”. Nickle sees that “in life journeys we encounter many ‘others,’ both human and other-than-human, members of Earth’s community (animals, trees, mountains, streams). When we relate to others as subjects rather than objects, as sacred Thous, we are walking the Narrow Ridge. The spiritual path of the Narrow Ridge is steep and rocky, and we find ourselves slipping over the edge time and time again. A friend or supportive community can help us work our way back to the Narrow Ridge. Likewise, the wisdom and restoration that we often tap into when immersed in the natural world aids us in our efforts to regain our footing on the Narrow Ridge.”

TVA and Climate Change

by Robynne Boyd, Communications Manager, Greenlink Analytics

We are at a crucial moment in history, one in which the climate crisis requires rapid and thoughtful solutions. The world has not yet permanently reached the 1.5 C warming threshold established in the Paris Climate Agreement, but we're rapidly approaching that mark. The people whose lives are harmed first and worst by the climate crisis are those who contribute least to the problem, have the hardest time protecting themselves, and tend to be lower-income and non-white. Climate action is a key goal for the Biden Administration, which recognizes both the urgency and huge sums of funding necessary for driving change. The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), a federally-owned utility serving approximately 10 million people across Tennessee and portions of Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, and Virginia, was created in 1933 to fill important gaps where private companies weren't serving societal needs, including flood management, environmental protection, and affordable electric service. That mandate still exists today, yet TVA lags behind many investor-owned utilities in terms of environmental justice, energy efficiency, and renewable energy.

TVA is also depriving the people of the Tennessee Valley of a crucial opportunity to claim their fair share of the billions in clean-energy funding available through the Inflation Reduction Act. TVA should be a national leader in equitable decarbonization in accordance with the Justice 40 Initiative, which requires federal entities to direct 40 percent of the benefits from clean energy investments to benefit disadvantaged communities.

TVA is currently in the process of developing its next Integrated Resource Plan (IRP), a long-term strategy for how to meet the region's energy needs. When investor-owned utilities develop their IRPs, they must seek approval in quasi-judicial proceedings before state utility commissions. TVA doesn't have the same rules. Instead of a commission, TVA is regulated by its board. Its IRP process doesn't permit formal intervention with rights to data discovery or cross-examination, and there's nothing requiring the TVA Board to consider the evidence included in public comments. In practice, this has often led the Board to rubber-stamp the plans developed by TVA executives, regardless of public opinion.

To model a path toward improving public accountability, a coalition of nonprofits convened a People's Voice IRP hearing in Nashville on January 25 that mimicked the way IRP hearings are conducted before state commissions. Taylor Allred, MPA Energy Analyst with Greenlinks, testified as an expert witness on environmental justice, energy cost burdens, and opportunities to reduce utility bills through energy efficiency and renewable energy. Environmental injustice intersects with other forms of injustice, including economic inequities and systemic racism. In a 2022 report, Greenlinks Analytics found that the Black-majority city of Memphis had one of the highest levels of energy burden — the percentage of gross household income spent on energy costs — in Tennessee and the nation. Allred's testimony included a new analysis utilizing the Greenlinks Equity Map, which showed that Tennessee counties with high energy burdens are more likely to have high asthma rates and larger Black populations. Although TVA's electricity rates are relatively low, underinvestment in energy efficiency and pervasive poverty across the Valley have resulted in drafty homes and unaffordable electric bills. Utility investments in energy efficiency programs are critical for reducing both electric bills and emissions, and they also create a lot of jobs. TVA has had notable successes in the past, for example with its Extreme Energy Makeovers program that helped thousands of low-income families achieve average savings of 36 percent with no out-of-pocket costs. Unfortunately, that program was eliminated in 2018, and TVA's 2019 IRP only included minimal investments in energy efficiency.

The energy savings from TVA's limited efficiency programs have fallen behind those achieved by commission-regulated utilities in the Southeast, which unfortunately themselves trail far behind national leaders themselves. States served by TVA consistently rank as some of the least efficient in the country, according to annual rankings by the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy. With such high energy burdens in the Valley, TVA should be leading the nation in low- and moderate-income energy efficiency programs.

TVA took a positive step recently by announcing \$1.5 billion in demand-side management investments from 2024 through 2028, meant to encourage consumers to modify their energy usage through a variety of programs, including energy efficiency, demand response, and electrification. However, much more is needed to lift all ratepayers out of energy poverty. At the People's IRP hearing, Memphis-area Representative Steve Cohen announced the planned introduction of the TVA Increase Rate of Participation Act into Congress. If approved, the Act would go a long way toward making TVA's IRP process more equitable and inclusive. After the Act was filed on March 8, TVA announced that they would be delaying the IRP to allow additional analysis, review, and stakeholder engagement.

It's encouraging to see the recent work of environmental advocates already having an impact on TVA's IRP process. The climate crisis demands a rapid and equitable clean energy transition, and TVA doesn't have time to kick the can down the road to its next long-term IRP. It must do better and make environmental justice a priority now. Our future depends on it. Contact Robynne at rboyd@greenlinkanalytics.org

Memphis Chemical Company Addresses Legacy of Contamination

by Carl Richards, Chair Chickasaw Group

The Velsicol Chemical Company held a public information presentation and discussion on March 21 at the Hollywood Community Center in North Memphis, a few miles from the company's former manufacturing site. More than 20 local residents and other concerned citizens attended the meeting, the first in a series of steps Velsicol must take to renew their existing Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) permit. The RCRA permits, required for facilities that treat, store, or dispose of hazardous wastes, are intended to control how the facilities are operated to ensure workers and the environment are safe.

TDEC will review Velsicol's permit application, working with the company to produce a draft suitable for public review, and will then issue a public notice with the hearing date.

Velsicol manufactured toxic chemicals at the 83-acre site from the 1950s until production ceased in 2011, leaving a legacy of soil and waterways contaminated with pesticides now banned in the United States. Some chemicals are still stored at the facility. The current permit is largely to address remediation of a large toxic plume below the site that consists mostly of carbon tetrachloride, widely used for industrial and domestic cleaning, until it was banned for consumer products in 1985. The company claims that over 90 percent of the contamination has been removed and wishes to continue their current remediation plan.

At the event, citizens and neighbors of the site expressed frustration with management of the site. Some argued that the RCRA permit does not address pesticides that still exist in the soil. Some spoke of families that had been exposed to toxic pollutants when they lived nearby. Sarah Houston of Protect Our Aquifer distributed graphs illustrating high levels of pesticides in the soil near the site. Almost all expressed an opinion that not enough had been done to address community members' concerns and that they were therefore wary of the current process.

There will be several opportunities for public input as the RCRA permit moves through the system over the next year. Contact Beverly Philpot at TDEC: (615) 795-1188, beverly.philpot@tn.gov

Contact Carl at crich555@gmail.com

Haikai

by Carl Sadakichi Hartmann

I.

White petals afloat

On a winding woodland stream—

What else is life's dream!

II.

Butterflies a-wing—

Are you flowers returning

To your branch in Spring?

III.

At new moon we met!

Two weeks I've waited in vain.

To-night!—Don't forget.

IV.

Oh, red maple leaves,

There seem more of you these eves

Than ever grew on trees.

Carl Sadakichi Hartmann, born in the late 1860s in Japan, was a dramatist, poet, fiction writer, and art critic. This poem is in the public domain.

Chapter's Transportation Committee Connects with UAW Advocates

by Kent Minault, Chair, Transportation Conservation Committee

The Chapter Transportation Team was among the 130 participants on a Climate Reality Check national call on January 31 with United Auto Workers leader Tim Thomas and Labor for Sustainability's Sydney Ghazarian. The purpose of the call was to celebrate the UAW's victory in their strike against the Big Three auto manufacturers and to express appreciation for the broad support the strikers received from the environmental movement. Read the solidarity letter on the Labor for Solidarity website here:

<https://bit.ly/Climate-Letter-UAW>

The Sierra Club joined over 150 allied environmental and social justice organizations in signing the letter. Particularly important to the environmental movement was the provision in the final ratified contract that insured that workers at the factories making electric car batteries would receive pay parity with the workers at the drivetrain factories. The meaning was clear: green jobs would not be left behind when it came to the generous pay increases the strikers had won. The infamous tiered wages were a thing of the past. The victory was important for environmentalists as much as for auto workers; it meant that the workers could embrace the electric vehicle revolution without suffering pay losses.

These contract results were a thorough refutation of the corporate media strike coverage that repeatedly implied that workers' demands were in con-

flict with national climate goals. By connecting workers and environmentalists, we're creating a different narrative and fostering broader support for a transition to clean transportation.

And the victory gives support to the UAW's intention to organize the non-union manufacturers of electric vehicles. UAW is growing in the South, where currently a majority of workers at Volkswagen's Chattanooga plant have signed cards saying they want to join the UAW. This was a worker-led initiative from inside the plant. On the call, I asked, "How can environmental advocates in Tennessee support the unionization of those manufacturers who are not yet unionized? Sierra Club members walked picket lines at the Delco Distribution Warehouse in Memphis during the strike. Now we're interested in the longer-term goal of getting union contracts in battery and charger factories as well as in auto plants owned by Nissan, VW, and others in Tennessee." Thomas replied by offering his email and agreeing to connect us with folks on the ground at the Chattanooga plant and their Volunteer Organizing Committee.

The Transportation Committee wants to bring on more team members, not only to connect with on-the-ground efforts to unionize EV manufacturing in our state, but also to help school districts take advantage of financial support from the EPA's Clean School Bus program.

Contact Kent at kminault@gmail.com

Knox County Growth Plan Advances Over Sierra Club Objections

by Gerald Thornton, Chair, Harvey Broome Group of the Sierra Club

For several months, the Harvey Broome Group (HBG) has been criticizing the proposed Knox County Comprehensive Land Use and Transportation Plan (CLUTP) and the Knox County Growth Policy Plan (GPP) being pushed by County Mayor Glen Jacobs. State law requires that each county have a growth plan and Knox County's has not been amended since 2001. The proposed GPP was presented as amendments to the original. The law also requires that a Growth Plan be approved by the County Commission and the legislative body of any city in the county before it can become law. Despite presentations of testimony by many entities (including HBG) and individuals highlighting multiple deficiencies in the GPP, the Knox County Commission approved it subject to approval of the CLUTP. The Knoxville City Council approved it without reservations. This put the final vote up to the Town of Farragut (TOF).

To our surprise, after testimony by HBG Chair Jerry Thornton and six other opponents, the GPP was voted down by the Farragut Board of Mayor and Aldermen on March 28. We had requested that the BOMA reject the GPP and call upon the GPP Committee to reconvene and create a better plan. We wanted our elected bodies and the appointed GPP Committee to resume the process with the intent to frame a Comprehensive Plan and a GPP that will provide a more sustainable future for our region. But Mayor Jacobs threatened to send the matter to the Attorney General to start a mediation process allowed by law and met privately with some of the Farragut Aldermen to change their minds. Thus, on April 3, when the BOMA reconvened to construct a statement of reasons for its rejection of the GPP, as required by law, one of the Aldermen who had voted against the plan on March 28th announced that he was changing his vote, and moved to put a motion for reconsideration on the agenda of the BOMA's April 11 meeting. At the April 11 meeting, the BOMA voted to rescind its previous vote and then voted 3-2 to approve the GPP. It is also probable that the County Commission will approve the CLUTP at its next meeting on April 22nd, removing its self-imposed condition. So, what are the problems with the CLUTP and GPP? We believe they are deficient because they do not require such things as:

- mature tree preservation and tree replacement measures for developments
- transportation plans that create choices other than private vehicles
- the connection of natural areas through wildlife corridors that enable wildlife migration
- the creation of a natural and cultural features GIS map showing, but not limited to: wetlands, buffer areas, ground and surface water resources, natural habitats, prime farmland soils, threatened and endangered species, geological features, steep slopes and ridgetops, and historic features

- an open space rating system to identify and protect the most valuable natural features
- the protection and maintenance of prime farmland in all rural areas
- incentivizing the modern energy efficiency measures in all new residential, commercial, and industrial development
- identification of specific tracts of land to be acquired for parks in the "park deserts" identified in the CLUTP
- protection of all ridgetops and slopes steeper than 15 percent from destruction by development
- that adequate infrastructure (e.g. improved roads, sewers, water supply, and electricity) be in place before new developments are approved
- that construction in the Rural Areas be limited to one dwelling unit per acre to preserve the character of the Rural Areas

We also belatedly recognized that the GPP did not address the proliferation of crypto mines in Knox County, which are using up inordinate amounts of electricity and becoming a noise nuisance wherever they appear.

Because Tennessee law requires that zoning rules in the County be consistent with the Growth Policy Plan, we believed it essential that the plan be revised with our suggested mandates fulfilled before the County begins its revision of the zoning ordinances, scheduled to take place over the next two years. Otherwise, the zoning ordinances may be amended in ways that ignore the non-mandatory nature of the CLUTP and the GPP.

Knox County is under intense pressure to create more housing and economic opportunities for people moving here. The Sierra Club and most citizens opposing the proposed Growth Policy Plan are not opposed to growth per se. But the GPP, as proposed, would have gutted the protections in earlier plans, particularly for ridgetops and steep slopes, while failing to prescribe new park areas or protection for trees and wildlife habitats. The County does need a new Growth Policy Plan to replace the one in effect since 2001. Irresponsible development is negatively affecting many areas of the county, such as the denuded hillsides by the Watt Road/I-40 interchange and in Hardin Valley (resulting in muddy runoff to Melton Hill Reservoir) and the large new developments in Hardin Valley and the Choto area, resulting in increased traffic into Farragut on inadequate roads. Such activities are occurring all over the County, so better land use controls are truly needed.

Now that it is likely that the GPP and CLUTP will be approved, HBG will need to pay attention to the county's amendments to the zoning code and how the GPP and CLUTP are applied over the next few years. This will be an uphill battle because the developers will be there constantly, trying to make it as easy as possible to get lax zoning decisions allowing them to do whatever they want to do. Please support us in our efforts to keep the growth of Knox County as sustainable as possible.

Contact Gerald at gatwildcat@aol.com

Want to Have More Impact? Join a Committee!

Conservation Committees each focus on one issue and work on it year round. To learn more about what these committees do or to join one, please contact the chair listed.

Land Management: Virginia Dale virginia.dale4@gmail.com
Promotes positive land management processes in Tennessee

Solid Waste and Mining: Dan Firth dwfirth@gmail.com
Focuses on the Extended Producer Responsibility bill & Bristol landfill

Energy: JoAnn McIntosh joann.mcintosh@tennessee.sierraclub.org
Attends TVA listening sessions and meets with staff of the Congressional Energy & Commerce Committee (E&C)

Water: Axel Ringe onyxfarm@bellsouth.net
Addresses water quality issues. Meets with TDEC and OSMRE

Transportation: Kent Minault kminault@gmail.com
Works on decarbonizing all aspects of our transportation system

Forests and Public Lands: Davis Mounger wdmounger@yahoo.com
Works with local officials to prevent clearcutting

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Hike Laurel Snow State Natural Area!

Saturday, May 11, at 7:30 am

With the water flowing, the hike along Richland Creek, including inflow from Laurel Falls, provides awesome scenery. We'll hike up the historic trail that follows Richland Creek through an old mining area before turning to ascend the ridge where the falls are located. We'll also take the spur trail out to Buzzard Point, for great views of the watershed. Round-trip hike distance, 6.6 miles, with an 800-foot elevation gain. Two creek crossings, hopefully with boots on. One-way driving distance, 80 miles. Rated strenuous. Hosted by the Harvey Broome Group.

Contact Ron Shrieves ronshrieves@gmail.com (865) 922-3518

RETREAT SCHEDULE

	LOCATION	DATES
Spring 2024	Fall Creek Falls State Park	May 3-5
Fall 2024	Fall Creek Falls State Park	October 18-20
Winter 2025	Cedars of Lebanon State Park	January 17-19
Spring 2025	Fall Creek Falls State Park	May 2 - 4
Fall 2025	Natchez Trace State Park	October 24 - 26

UPCOMING MEETINGS

Group Program Meetings

Group	Date	Time
Cherokee (Chattanooga)	no May meeting, Mon 6/24, 7/22	6:00 PM
Chickasaw (Memphis)	Tue 5/11, 6/11, 7/1	6:00 PM
Harvey Broome (Knoxville)	Tue 5/9, 6/13, 7/11	7:00 PM
Middle TN (Nashville)	Thu 5/9, 6/13, 7/11	7:00 PM

Group Business Meetings

Group	Date	Time
Cherokee (Chattanooga)	Mon 5/6, 6/3 7/1	7:00 PM
Chickasaw (Memphis)	Wed 5/1, 6/5, 7/3	6:30 PM
Harvey Broome (Knoxville)	Wed 5/22 6/26 7/24	7:00 PM
Middle TN (Nashville)	Mon 5/20 6/17 7/15	6:30 PM

Regional Conservation Committee Business Meetings

Committee	Date	Time
CareNET (Rogersville)	Thu 5/23 6/27 7/25	6:30 PM
Clarksville	Tue 5/14 6/11 7/9	6:30 PM
Holston Valley	Tue 5/21 6/18 7/16	6:00 PM
Watauga (Mountain City)	Tue, 5/14 6/11 7/9	5:00 PM



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Life	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1000	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1250
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Student/Limited Income	<input type="checkbox"/> \$25	<input type="checkbox"/> \$35

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