

Tennessee Waters: Shaping Our Land, Our Lives and Our Future
Project Discussion Topics

People, Parks, and Water

Hobart Akin, Cultural Resources and Exhibits Specialist, Tennessee State Parks

The history of Tennessee State Parks is tied to the conservation both of the state's natural resources and its people. Born out of the New Deal and the harnessing of the Tennessee River, State Parks has always had a close relationship with water. In fact, the Tennessee Valley Authority created many of the first parks along its reservoirs. The relationship between people and water continues through recreation. Plans for the establishment of parks sought to conserve the human resources of the state. As a result, park planners sought locations for parks within a short drive from population centers. This thinking guided planners for a generation. Today, Tennessee State Parks preserves 56 different areas with natural and cultural significance. Yet, the story of Tennessee State Parks and the development of Tennessee's waterways still influence much of the agency's mission.

Folklife of Tennessee Waterways

Dr. Robert Cogswell, Director, TN Arts Commission, Folklife Program, 1984-2014

With a variety of historic images and more recent photography, a focus on material culture and on exemplary folk artisans active in recent time, this talk explores the role of waterways in defining the cultural history and landscape of Tennessee. From earliest settlement, informal folk culture thrived along the state's rivers, influencing regional evolution of travel and economic activity. In the 19th century groups of people along our rivers—shantyboaters, fishermen, mussellers, and boatworkers—shared unique ways of life and traditions that have had continued presence into modern times.

Visionary by Design: Contemplating a New Century of Innovation in the Tennessee River Valley,

Dr. Brad Collett, UTK Dept. of Plant Science + UT River Project Students (as available)

As the communities that rely upon the Tennessee River system for energy, commerce, water supply and recreation look ahead to the 21st century, new and increasingly complex challenges present themselves. These challenges require new collaborations across disciplines to identify solutions to short-term problems and to explore possibilities for bold, long-term visions--the mission of the Tennessee River Project, a UT-based teaching, research, and outreach initiative. Discussion participants consider speculative, visionary, and collaborative stewardship of the Valley's resources and its legacy of leadership and innovation into the next century. Audiences will also consider their own community's interaction with its water features and provide input regarding priorities for the future.

Water and the Law, Southern Environmental Law Center, TBD

For thirty years, the Southern Environmental Law Center has utilized the power of the law to champion the environment of the Southeast. As our state's resource on the legal perspectives and issues surrounding water, two SELC attorneys will debate answers to fundamental questions such as: to whom does the water belong – the landowner or the public? How are decisions made about withdrawals from waters or about discharges into the waters? What is the balance between economic development and protection of water resources? The SELC will also address any controversial water issues in the community from a legal perspective.

“Waters Ever Flowing:” Tennessee Rivers and the Shaping of a Region

Dan Eagar, Tennessee Stream Mitigation Program, and Ann Toplovich, Tennessee Historical Society

Diverse and abundant, the waters of Tennessee fall from the 6,643' height of Clingman's Dome in the Smokies, and flow in the great Mississippi River past Memphis at 178 feet above sea level. Five major watersheds in Tennessee contain over 60,000 miles of streams, more than 600,000 acres of lakes, and originally almost 2 million acres of wetlands. Using science and the humanities, this talk looks at how water has shaped the biological and human history of TN and examines how past and present uses of, and impacts on, water are shaping our state today while affecting the future.