

**Executive Committee Meeting
West Tennessee River Basin Authority
November 19, 2024**

The Executive Committee Meeting of the West Tennessee River Basin Authority was held at 9:30a.m. on Tuesday, November 19, 2024, via in-person at the WTRBA office. Executive Committee members in attendance were, Mayor Nelson Cunningham, Dr. Jim Byford, and Mr. Joe McKinnon. Others attending in person were Executive Director David Blackwood, Paige Keith, Dustin Bennett, and Alison Franklin. Commission David Salyers joined via TEAMS. In Chairman Massey absence Vice Chairman Byford verified a quorum and called the meeting to order.

The following agenda items were discussed:

WET Center Update

- Program Development
Director Blackwood presented updated schematic designs for the WET Center, highlighting the facility's scale and its planned location on the property. He explained that the north wing will feature an open exhibit space, while the southeast section will house water treatment components, material dry storage, and control rooms. The west and southwest wings will include classrooms, restrooms, and office spaces. Additionally, Director Blackwood noted that he and WET Center Executive Director Alison Franklin have engaged with several groups over the past month to support curriculum development. He concluded by confirming that the design development phase remains on schedule for completion by January 2025 and anticipates presenting updated design and cost information at the January Board meeting.

Working Groups Update

- Blueways
Blackwood reported that the Tennessee Blueways initiative, developed through the Tennessee Outdoor Partnership, is progressing. During the most recent West Tennessee steering committee meeting, the focus was directed toward available resources related to the Hatchie and South Fork Forked Deer rivers. Additionally, Blackwood noted that a public meeting was convened to discuss the Hatchie River, centering on the balance between recreational paddling and fishing activities.
- Floodplains
Director Blackwood explained that the Flood Plains Task Force was established as a strategic tool to address and prioritize various factors impacting floodplains, including water quality, water quantity, and related flood concerns. The task force is working to consolidate this information into a GIS-based system designed to rank and score these factors effectively. The most recent meeting, held in Murfreesboro, brought together representatives from federal, state, and local agencies, with an emphasis on floodplain restoration and conservation efforts across the state.
- West TN H2O
Director Blackwood provided an update on the West TN H2O group, explaining that it focuses on the groundwater component of the Tennessee H2O statewide water plan, specifically for West Tennessee. Blackwood noted that the group meets several times a week and includes many of the same conservation resources as the Blueways and Floodplains groups, while also placing a strong emphasis on utility districts. The group's primary objective is to facilitate discussions on development and emerging issues that should be prioritized by stakeholders.

- Wetlands

Blackwood discussed the Wetlands Working Group and its summer study initiatives. He highlighted a recent field trip to the Middle Fork Bottoms in West Tennessee, where participants visited various locations to engage in discussions about wetlands. The focus was on fostering a shared understanding of wetland issues and terminology. Blackwood also provided the committee with copies of Commissioner Salyers' recommendations for the final report from the summer study of wetlands, which will be presented to the Senate's Natural Resources Committee. The report includes 18 topics and corresponding recommendations, which Blackwood reviewed in detail as follows:

1. Add a definition for geographically isolated wetlands (GIS) to the Water Quality Control Act of 1977 (WQCA).
2. Amend the WQCA to address wetland quality tiers and modify rules to define these qualities.
3. Revise the WQCA and the ARAP rules regarding mitigation.
4. Amend the WQCA to authorize the creation of a voluntary wetland conservation fund.
5. Modify the WQCA to allow qualified wetland professionals to submit wetland resource reports with a presumption of correctness and appeal rights.
6. Amend the WQCA to include exceptions to ARAP requirements, similar to those in Section 404(f) of the Clean Water Act.
7. Revise the ARAP rules to clarify how cumulative impacts are considered in permitting determinations.
8. Modify ARAP rules to eliminate the requirement to publish public notices in newspapers.
9. Broaden the scope of general permits for geographically isolated wetlands (GIW).
10. Ensure appropriate organization, staffing, and management of the Natural Resources Unit (NRU).
11. Account for the full range of societal benefits when determining mitigation requirements.
12. Leverage technology to improve permitting efficiency and data analysis.
13. Update and refine the Tennessee Rapid Assessment Methodology (T-RAM).
14. Refine and maintain GIS mapping to enhance its use as a screening and planning tool for wetlands in Tennessee.
15. Develop and provide training for qualified wetland professionals, department staff, and other wetland practitioners.
16. Recommend that TACIR study and report on the economic impacts and societal benefits of wetland regulation in Tennessee.
17. Explore a voluntary wetland conservation incentive program.
18. Investigate options to incentivize permanent stormwater detention facilities in non-MSA communities.

Grant Update

- EPA Community Change Grant

Blackwood reminded the committee of the EPA Community Change Grant, emphasizing the partnership between the WTRBA and UT Martin, with UT Martin serving as the lead, alongside the UT Institute of Agriculture and three development districts in West Tennessee. Blackwood noted that the grant application is scheduled for submission by November 21, 2024, and all parties involved are expected to receive a response shortly regarding whether the grant has been awarded. If successful, the grant will be implemented over a three-year period, with \$20 million allocated to the region. The project will also create 75 student jobs or positions through UT Martin over the three years, in addition to funding construction at three to four site locations to serve as models for similar projects. The grant aims to support disadvantaged communities, focusing on stormwater management and watersheds affecting these areas. A total of 380 census tracts have been identified

for this initiative, with the goal of informing public officials and residents about their potential inclusion in special flood hazard areas.

Nominating Committee

- Executive Committee

Blackwood informed the Nominating Committee that it is time to reconvene to discuss the selection of officers for the 2025 calendar year. He emphasized that recommendations must be finalized during the December Executive Committee meeting to ensure the Board can proceed with voting at the January meeting.

2025 Proposed Meeting Schedule

Director Blackwood presented the proposed meeting schedules for the 2025 Executive Committee and Board of Directors, requesting the committee's approval of the dates. With no further discussion, Vice Chairman Byford called for a motion to approve the schedule. Mr. Joe McKinnon made the motion, which was seconded by Mayor Cunningham. The motion was unanimously approved.

Other Business/Adjourn

With no further business, Vice Chairman Byford asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Joe McKinnon made the motion with Mayor Cunningham seconding.

Mayor AJ Massey, Chairman

Joe McKinnon, Secretary

Upcoming meeting:
Executive Committee Meeting on December 17th, 2024, at 9:30am