A Time for Tennessee’s Great Outdoors

The Need for a Long View Vision for Tennessee’s Wildlife and Natural Resources

Michael Butler, CEO, Tennessee Wildlife Federation

Executive Summary

In Tennessee, the great outdoors is big business and a long-standing part of our heritage. Tennessee’s mountains, rivers, plains and wildlife have shaped who we are as a people and a culture, and have supported our rural and industrial economies for generations.

Outdoor-based recreation contributes billions of dollars to Tennessee’s economy, produces tens of thousands of jobs, and generates hundreds of millions more dollars in local, state and federal tax revenue. In addition to these direct economic benefits, these activities also provide critical and significant health and quality of life benefits.

However, to protect and grow the outdoor recreation industry, we must have a well-managed and healthy natural resource base. Today, there are significant pressures placed upon our state’s land, streams, rivers, wildlife, forests, fields, air and lakes by multiple, often competing, uses. These uses—if not planned, executed and managed wisely—can and do negatively impact the outdoor recreation economic sector. Furthermore, unexpected threats to our natural resources and a demand by our citizens for quality outdoor experiences are rapidly and steadily increasing.

For Tennessee to maintain and expand the benefits that its great outdoors provides, we must:

1. Assess the current status of our state’s natural resources
2. Identify critical challenges facing the management and conservation of these resources
3. Develop strategic solutions to ensure that these renewable and sustainable resources persist well into the future.
In doing this, we will help prevent degradation of our natural resources and ensure that the economic, health and quality of life benefits derived from Tennessee’s great outdoors persist into the future and provide future generations with better opportunities than we have today.

Supporting and Growing Tennessee’s Economy and Jobs

Tennessee’s natural resources are the backbone of our state’s economy and Tennessean’s quality of life and health. This simple fact should place natural resources’ proper management and conservation as a priority for any administration.

Because the great outdoors are big business in Tennessee, investments therein provide remarkable economic returns.

Take for example recent research from the University of Georgia that shows the economic value of public access trout fishing in North Georgia to be more than $200 million annually.

### ANNUAL ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF SELECT OUTDOOR RECREATION ACTIVITIES BASED UPON TENNESSEE’S GREAT OUTDOORS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Number of people who participate</th>
<th>Total Direct Expenditures</th>
<th>Total Economic Multiplier Effect</th>
<th>Salaries and Wages</th>
<th>Jobs</th>
<th>State &amp; Local Taxes</th>
<th>Federal Taxes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wildlife Watching</td>
<td>1,955,000</td>
<td>$942,573,000</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishing</td>
<td>826,000</td>
<td>$1,279,223,286</td>
<td>$2,051,674,603</td>
<td>$690,098,985</td>
<td>17,542</td>
<td>$112,094,480</td>
<td>$149,376,195</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hunting</td>
<td>375,000</td>
<td>$505,208,456</td>
<td>$835,585,578</td>
<td>$281,406,658</td>
<td>8,847</td>
<td>$54,841,175</td>
<td>$64,885,376</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boating</td>
<td>265,306 boats</td>
<td>$1,200,000,000</td>
<td>$2,970,000,000</td>
<td>$978,100,000</td>
<td>23,512</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<tr>
<td>TN State Parks</td>
<td>8,450,000*</td>
<td>$725,000,000</td>
<td>$1,600,000,000</td>
<td>$909,100,000</td>
<td>18,678</td>
<td>$106,300,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Forestry</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>$21,010,000,000</td>
<td>$5,163,000,000</td>
<td>101,768</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>11,871,306</strong></td>
<td><strong>$4,652,004,742</strong></td>
<td><strong>$30,234,742,481</strong></td>
<td><strong>$8,692,565,720</strong></td>
<td><strong>193,603</strong></td>
<td><strong>$405,061,258</strong></td>
<td><strong>$348,428,921</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Sources: National Marine Manufacturers Association, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, University of Tennessee

*State Parks participation number reflects the number of visitors, not individuals and forestry figures are conservative estimations. Total figures underestimate actual impacts.
Similarly, specific analyses of investments made at federal fish hatcheries and the positive impacts to surrounding economies show that Tennessee’s Dale Hollow Federal Fish Hatchery has an annual economic impact in Tennessee of $150 million.

The Chattahoochee Federal Fish Hatchery in Georgia supports 333 jobs, $8.6 million in salary and wages, retail sales of more than $16 million and a total economic output of $30.3 million. For every $1 spent on the hatchery, $40 in economic output is generated.

These economic realities are why Bass Pro Shops and Gander Mountain will soon have a total of seven (7) outdoor megastores in Tennessee. Additionally, many of Tennessee’s most productive economic sectors rely heavily upon our state’s natural resources. Recently completed state strategic plans for agriculture and tourism focus strongly on jobs and economic development, but rely heavily on Tennessee maintaining healthy natural resources.

**Improving Tennessean’s Health, Well-being and Quality of Life**

In 2014, Governor Haslam publicly recognized the critical importance the great outdoors plays in the mental and physical health of Tennessee’s citizens when he joined 41 other governors to proclaim June as “Great Outdoors Month.”

Numerous research studies clearly show the mental and physical health benefits of the great outdoors to adults and children, the latter of which also reap developmental benefits. In children, spending time playing in the great outdoors improves both fine and gross motors skills, attention span, visual skills, auditory processing, social-emotional development and creativity.

For adults, benefits of an active lifestyle are well documented and widely known. Recently, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention pointed to activity in the great outdoors as important to chronic disease prevention. Beyond obvious physical benefits to exercise, exposure to the great outdoors benefit mental health, social cohesion and a general sense of well-being.

What is less known and understood by many families and adults is where they can recreate. And even less so, where they can recreate that provides a quality experience. Ensuring that Tennesseans, and visitors to our great state, have adequate access to our great outdoors in a way that keeps them coming back is a critical need to our people and our economy.

*A Time for Tennessee’s Great Outdoors*
The Challenge
In managing Tennessee’s natural resources, there is a “golden rule” that states: If you take care of the resource, it will always produce a sustainable and renewable bounty that Tennesseans can enjoy for generations upon generations.

There exist modern day threats that require new approaches and innovative solutions to prevent them from negatively impacting our state’s natural resources. In some cases, the scale of the problem is too large for our current capacities. In other cases, the complexity of the threat overwhelms a single solution. These responses require cross-disciplinary collaborative approaches that cannot be developed successfully in a silo or vacuum.

For example, the Asian-longhorned beetle is close to Tennessee—its infestation is in Ohio. This beetle feeds on maple and 29 other species of trees, many of which occur in Tennessee. If we are not properly prepared, this beetle could have a devastating economic impact on our tourism and forest industries by destroying maple trees that provide Tennessee’s signature fall colors, and other trees that support our timber products. This would also produce a destructive domino effect by destroying wildlife habitat; that in turn negatively impacts the hunting and wildlife-watching industries.

Additionally, water quantity and quality are two major challenges facing the entire Southeast for the foreseeable future. With Middle Tennessee projected to add an additional one million residents during the next 20 years, the demand for water will increase exponentially, placing great pressure upon our streams, rivers and reservoirs. If not properly planned for and managed, this demand will deleteriously impact the waters that Tennesseans use for fishing, boating and recreation and subsequently the rural economies that rely upon these uses.

These are just two of several large and complex challenges facing Tennessee's great outdoors. And while these challenges are demanding attention, more Tennesseans are looking to recreate outdoors, and have a high quality experience doing so. Several of our public spaces are being overused, and as a result the experience is greatly diminished. To sustain quality outdoor tourism and recreation, access to the necessary, well-managed natural resources is a critical problem.

These impacts lower the quality of life Tennesseans, and negatively impact rural economies. Given these realities, the time is right for—and circumstances require—a renewed strategic examination of the challenges and needs facing Tennessee's natural resources and the development of solutions to meet those challenges and needs. Only then can our natural resources be used wisely and sustainably to support outdoor recreation, tourism and other needs for the benefit of our state and its citizens.
Tennessee's lands, water and wildlife are the foundation upon which many of our state's economic engines are built. It is therefore proper and important that we provide leadership to facilitate a long view process to address these challenges.

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**About Michael Butler**

Michael Butler has served as Tennessee Wildlife Federation's CEO since 2002. Butler works with elected officials, state and federal agencies, and civic leaders to implement sound natural resources policy. He joined the Federation as technical advisor to the executive director in 1996, working with the organization's Conservation Policy Advisory Council and board of directors to develop natural resource policy.

**About Tennessee Wildlife Federation**

Since 1946, the Tennessee Wildlife Federation leads the conservation, sound management and wise use of Tennessee's great outdoors. Over the course of 70 years, the Federation has led the development of the state's wildlife policy, advanced landmark legislation on air and water quality and other conservation initiatives, helped restore numerous species, and introduced thousands of kids to the great outdoors. More information at [tnwf.org](http://tnwf.org).