



## TENNESSEE WILDLIFE RESOURCES AGENCY

ELLINGTON AGRICULTURAL CENTER  
5107 EDMONDSON PIKE  
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE 37211

February 2, 2022

425 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue North, -  
Nashville, Tennessee 37243-143

The Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA) and our partners have a goal of continued restoration efforts to increase native savanna/grassland/shrublands habitat on Bridgestone-Firestone WMA (BSFS). These efforts were discussed in two Tennessee Fish and Wildlife Commission meetings, one public meeting in Sparta, has been in a TWRA news release, been featured multiple times on all our social media platforms and website. The community feels we have not communicated sufficiently about our plans and have not been transparent. We hear their concern and therefore TWRA will not be moving forward with the proposed cut in the farm unit on BSFS at this time.

This decision is one that is being made in response to the community's opposition only and is not based on the best science or what's best for wildlife. In future management decisions we will continue to engage with the public, and we will continue to be mission-driven, science-driven, and data-driven in our decision making.

The management plans that we have for converting closed canopy forest into other critical and diverse habitats are going to continue in Tennessee. We will move forward with the proposed habitat projects on the southern portion of BSFS. The converting of closed canopy forests back into savanna/grassland/shrubland is one of the most critical needs for species of greatest conservation concern and game species. The best science we have confirms this and we will continue to fulfill our mission through active management on state-owned WMAs. The diversity of habitat we maintain for wildlife is vital.

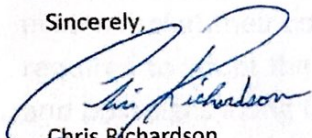
By creating savannas, grasslands, and shrublands, TWRA is:

- Restoring native grasslands, one of the most endangered habitats on the planet and one once common but now almost completely absent in Tennessee. Nearly 99% of all historical native grassland areas in the southeastern U.S have been destroyed, including those on the Cumberland Plateau of TN.
- Benefiting wildlife that depend on this habitat type including game species as well as Species of Greatest Conservation Need, including prairie warbler, field sparrow, loggerhead shrike, yellow-breasted chat, indigo bunting, blue grosbeak, and bobwhite quail. Additionally, many insects and other pollinators, and numerous herbaceous plants will all benefit from these improvements.

- Improving habitat far more critical to the diversity and conservation of all wildlife species than a landscape dominated by a closed canopy forest, which is the status of many of the lands surrounding the WMA.
- Improving and diversifying hiking, birding, and hunting opportunities by increasing plant community and animal diversity.

We look forward to creating more savanna/grassland/shrubland habitat on other parts of BSFS and will strive to improve our communication efforts in the future with the general assembly and the citizens of Tennessee.

Sincerely,



Chris Richardson

The State of Tennessee

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY, EQUAL ACCESS, AFFIRMATIVE ACTION EMPLOYER

## REPLY

Regarding TWRA's letter sent to state legislators dated February 2, 2022 addressing plans to effectively clearcut much of the Bridgestone Centennial Wilderness Area. I am Marvin Bullock, the citizen who initiated the lawsuit against TWRA. Since that time the White County Commission voted unanimously to enable the county to join that lawsuit or file one of their own.

TWRA states in their letter *"The community feels we have not communicated sufficiently about our plans and have not been transparent."* TWRA then implies that there were several forms of public notice. Our community learned about the planned devastation through a map leaked by someone within TWRA. This is evidence that their communications ARE lacking. Perhaps TWRA should be required to adopt the same rules that Tennessee's developers are required to use and post signs along the roads in an area, as-well-as publish in local newspapers for a period of three months prior to advancing projects.

TWRA continues in the first paragraph *"TWRA will not be moving forward with the proposed cut in the farm unit (1.) at this time."* (2.) Deputy director Chris Richardson told me on the phone that he could not guaranty that TWRA would not move forward with the plan in the future. (3.) On February 9<sup>th</sup>, the chair of the fish and wildlife commission, Jim Ripley, described the project as "paused." These are three pretty good indicators that TWRA is simply trying to placate legislators after ¼ of our state senators and representatives endorsed the upcoming lawsuit. What will TWRA do at Bridgestone when this session is over?

TWRA's letter quotes much about their science but says nothing about the promises made when the land was gifted. The letter does not address the 23-pages of restrictions filed in the White County Courthouse, or the 120-page book written by former US Senator Howard Baker detailing how the property was to be preserved. TWRA should be expected to comply in perpetuity with the intent of those restrictions as filed in the White County Courthouse and as evidenced by promises made by Governor Don Sundquist, and Bridgestone President Masatoshi Ono in the preface of that book.

TWRA's letter boasts the "science" behind their grasslands initiatives.

When lands transfer to the state, communities lose the ability to levy property taxes against those lands in the future. These wilderness areas are predominantly in rural, at risk and impoverished counties. In September 2021, Tennessee announced that state-owned lands were going to be leveraged to increase

tourism in rural counties. TWRA manages more state-owned land than Parks and Forestry combined. Communities should have input into how state-owned lands are managed. Communities need to carefully weigh how planned changes will affect their hopes for tourism, and the wishes of their local hunters. TWRA's plans appear to ignore the cultural loss and well-being of the communities where wildlife management areas exist. There is more to be considered than "science."

**Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency maintains that they are not state-funded.**

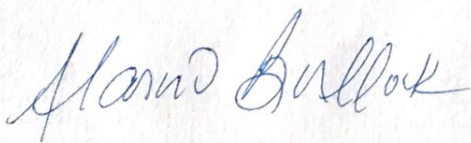
**When an agency can sell natural resources and add the proceeds to their budget, they ARE state funded; they just don't have to go through the legislators to receive the funding.** This is not good governance. Many believe that the proceeds from the sale of state-owned trees is a major factor influencing TWRA's decision to use closed canopy and old-growth hardwood forests rather than the tens-of-thousands of acres of nonindigenous pine lands or abandoned strip-mine land that they also manage.

Lastly, apparently a lobbyist is trying to drum-up business by telling forestry trade groups that our effort to curb TWRA's deforestation at Bridgestone is actually an attempt to stop all clearcuts even on privately owned lands. This is simply not true. I should also point out that the hunters are the largest group driving this protest. Several hunters have told me that they have written every wildlife commissioner and only one hunter got one reply from a single commissioner.

Please take action this legislative session to stop TWRA from their savanna conversion at Bridgestone and assure other rural communities won't fall victim to TWRA's lack of consideration in the future.

The 23-pages of restrictions and excerpts from the 120-page book written about the preservation of the Bridgestone property that I have referenced in this letter are available to download on [SaveTheHardwoods.com](http://SaveTheHardwoods.com).

Sincerely,



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