

Why is a Forum on Tennessee's Great Outdoors needed?

It has been 30 years since a comprehensive review of the challenges and opportunities facing Tennessee natural resources and related outdoor recreation has been conducted. Many of the challenges and opportunities facing our state's natural resources are either large enough in scope or in complexity to require a focused process to provide them the attention they deserve.

The Forum on Tennessee's Great Outdoors provides the attention to these matters at the level of importance they deserve.

Will the Forum duplicate efforts already being conducted by ECD and Tourist Development through the Tennessee Rural Development Task Force or the Tennessee Tourism Committee?

The Forum on Tennessee's Great Outdoors does not duplicate existing efforts and will be complimentary to these efforts and vice-versa.

The mission of the Tennessee Rural Development Task Force is *"To build a stronger rural Tennessee by driving local, state and federal partnerships and stakeholders to continuously improve education, health, entrepreneurial opportunities, economic and workforce development, and digital infrastructure"*.

The Task Force's mission does not mention natural resources. It is arguable that outdoor recreation could be included in some of the broad categories listed, but that appears unlikely given the make-up of the membership of the Task Force and the sectors mentioned. Further, there are no members of the Task Force well versed in natural resources or the natural-resource based recreation. Additionally, the sectors of education, health, and digital infrastructure do not align directly with natural resources.

This is certainly not offered as a criticism or deficiency of the Task Force, but simply as a matter of the facts and as to how the Task Force's focus and efforts are notably different from those of Forum (i.e., no duplication of effort). The focus of the Task Force is certainly appropriate and what would be expected of an initiative driven by the Department of Economic and Community Development. It reflects their expertise and understanding.

Much is the same with the Tennessee Tourism Committee being undertaken by the Department of Tourist Development.

It is important to note that the vision of the strategic plan developed by the committee is *"To be the global music destination of choice; an authentic American experience rooted in blues, bluegrass, country, gospel, soul and rock and roll at the crossroads of American history and renowned scenic beauty"*.

Additionally, the mission of the strategic effort is *"to make Tennessee one of the top 10 U.S. destinations in terms of total travel expenditures that will enhance the state's economic vitality through job creation, increased tax revenues and new investments"*.

What is self-evident is that this process, like the Rural Development Task Force, does not include in its focus an assessment of the challenges and opportunities facing Tennessee's natural resources, and the recreation associated with those natural resources. The membership of the committee further reinforces the purpose of the committee and its plan. As one would expect, the committee contains no members whose expertise or focus are natural resources or their associated recreation types.

Undoubtedly the plan recognizes that some tourism in Tennessee is tied to the great outdoors and it does what is expected of a tourism strategic plan, it focuses on tourism development. However, the types of recreation associated with natural resources are not typical of tourism in general, and are managed and promoted by state agencies with different statutory mandates and missions from that of the Department of Tourist Development. Most importantly the committee and plan, by design, do not focus on the needs of natural resources and their associated outdoor recreation pursuits.

Again, this is not a criticism or a deficiency, it is the reality of the effort and consequently the reason why the Forum on Tennessee Great Outdoors is not duplicative of this effort.

Other efforts like the Discover Trails initiative have done a great job of cataloging different amenities associated with existing tourism related businesses. This cataloging and marketing is surely helpful to the public, and will be valuable to the Forum, but its purpose is different from the above state purpose of the Forum.

This leads to the reality that Tennessee natural resources, and those parts of outdoor recreation which rely upon them for their success, are important enough and large enough to warrant their own focus and discussion, which is the aim of the Forum on Tennessee's Great Outdoors. Further, the Forum will benefit from the Rural Development Task Force and the Tennessee Tourism Committee's work, as they will the Forum's work.

Isn't TDEC already doing this?

We are unaware of any comprehensive process assessing the challenges, opportunities and solutions facing Tennessee natural resources and related outdoor recreation being conducted by TDEC or any other state agency for that matter. Further, given the scope and complexity of this topic, it is unreasonable to think that one state agency would be able to undertake such an effort as a single agency initiative.

Is this an unfunded mandate for the agencies listed as members of the technical advisory committee to the Forum?

No, the intent of the technical advisory committee and the agencies provided membership on the committee, is to establish a point of contact and expectation that the Forum, when it has questions, can direct those questions to these agencies. The expectation is that the agencies will not be required to staff each and every meeting of the Forum, but rather will make themselves available to answer the Forum's questions and provide data and reports to the Forum on an as needed basis. As each agency listed has existing personnel who, as a function of their employment, produce data and reports relative the mission of their agency, it is expected that the agencies on the committee will simply make available information they already have and would otherwise be producing. As such, we cannot envision that the needs of the Forum will create additional expenses for the agencies listed on the technical advisory membership list.