



TENNESSEE NATURALIST PROGRAM SPRING 2026 NEWSLETTER



Beaman Park; Photo by Kim Cheffins



SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

TNP HONORARY AWARD WINNERS

Last year, TNP announced a series of new honorary awards that celebrate high-achieving Tennessee Naturalists and Chapter Coordinators while honoring some of the most influential individuals in TNP's history.

We are proud to announce the 2025 TNP Honorary Award winners! Congrats to all, and thank you so much for your service and dedication to TNP and the natural world.

Laura Smith - Owl's Hill Coordinator

Margaret Cameron Coordinator Award

The Owl's Hill chapter had the most student certifications in 2025 and always goes above and beyond to ensure student success.



Betty Blanton

Frozen Head Chapter 2024

Nancy Garden Environmental Education Award

David Hill Continuing Education Award

Kristin Hopkins Volunteer Award

"The Tennessee Naturalist Program has opened a whole new understanding of the world around me. I have learned so much and love sharing what I am learning with others who visit our beautiful Tennessee home."



John Henkelman

Bays Mountain Chapter 2021

Pandy Upchurch Stewardship Award

"In every adversity, there is opportunity to learn, grow, and make things better than you found them. Hurricane Helene hit East Tennessee hard - especially around the Nolichucky River. It was my privilege to participate in the cleanup and recovery. I am a much better Naturalist because of the hands-on work called for in this recovery. I have been introduced to more of Natural East Tennessee in the process, and I've met so many like minded people dedicated to good stewardship of our natural world."

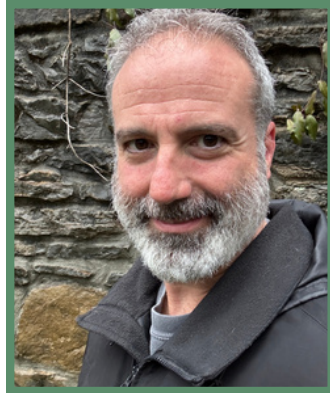
2026 TNP BOARD

We are excited to announce the 2026 board, effective March 1. We welcomed two new board members, Kim Erickson and Tammy Hayes, and we look forward to the new ideas and skills they will bring to TNP.

Thank you to our exiting board member, Shawn Wolfe, for his service to TNP over the years. As always, we are grateful for our board members' dedication and service to TNP!



Margie Hunter
Chair



Dan DeFigio
Vice Chair



Marlee Mitchell
Secretary



Stephanie Durman
Treasurer



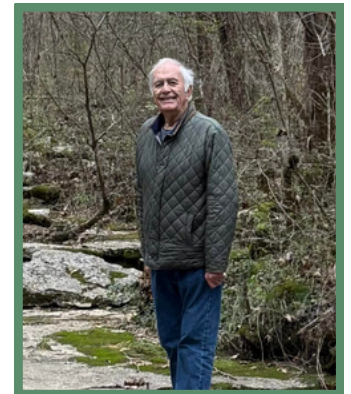
Amy Balentine
Director



Karie Falder-Saeed
Director



Richard Hitt
Director



Richard Hoover
Director

Kim brings a strong background in marketing and nonprofit work, currently serving as the Marketing Manager at the Tennessee Wildlife Federation. Her conservation journey was catalyzed by her experience in the TNP program at the Memphis Pinecrest chapter in 2021, which she found both educational and socially enriching.



Kim Erickson
Director



Tammy Hayes
Director

Tammy feels honored to join the board and to support an organization whose mission has been meaningful to her for many years. Her journey with TNP began as a member of the inaugural class at Ijams Nature Center in 2013, an experience that deepened her appreciation for Tennessee's natural world and passion for conservation.

TNP CORE COURSE

UPCOMING CORE COURSES

If you're available on weekdays and want to finish your TNP classes in just one month, Frozen Head State Park is the chapter for you! April is one of the most beautiful times to explore the park. Don't miss your chance to become a Tennessee Naturalist this spring!



Frozen Head State Park

Wartburg, TN | Weekday classes in April

April 7, 2026 - April 30, 2026

[View full schedule here](#)

Coordinator: George Hawver

hawverg@hotmail.com

Registration open now!

<https://tnnaturalist.org/register/>

We are so excited to announce that our newest chapter, the Wade Bourne Nature Center in Clarksville, will hold their inaugural course this fall! Mark your calendars - registration opens June 15, and we expect spots to fill up quickly.



Wade Bourne Nature Center

Clarksville, TN | Saturday classes

August 1, 2026 - May 1, 2027

[View full schedule here](#)

Coordinator: Katie Netti

knetti@montgomerytn.gov

Registration opens June 16

<https://tnnaturalist.org/register/>

There will be several more courses beginning this fall. Stay up to date with open registrations by watching for TNP announcements via email and social media and checking <https://tnnaturalist.org/register/> regularly.

TN2 - TNP CONTINUING EDUCATION

UPCOMING TN2 WORKSHOPS



TN2: Ecology and Evolution of Wild Bees

Sunday, April 26

Long Hunter State Park

Instructor: Sam Wilhelm

Registration opens March 16

<https://tnnaturalist.org/register/>

Learn about the natural history of wild bee communities in central Tennessee and observe bees up close! Course components will include 1) a lecture on the ecology, evolution, and behavior of wild bees, 2) a lab section on bee anatomy using microscopes and museum specimens, and 3) a field component to observe wild bees interacting with plants and to learn about the methodologies involved in studying these animals. Participants will also learn about the threats facing native bees, the conservation efforts that are currently underway, and ways they can contribute to bee research and conservation.



TN2: Effective Practices for Environmental Learning

Saturday, May 2

Warner Park (Nashville)

Registration opens March 23

<https://tnnaturalist.org/register/>

This workshop introduces Warner Park Nature Center's environmental education approach, focusing on practical skills for engaging learners in meaningful, learner-centered nature exploration. Designed for adults involved in informal education - such as grandparents, volunteers, and community educators - this workshop provides tools for encouraging curiosity, connection, and lifelong learning in people of all ages.



TN2: Swamps Ecology

Sunday, May 16

Reelfoot Lake

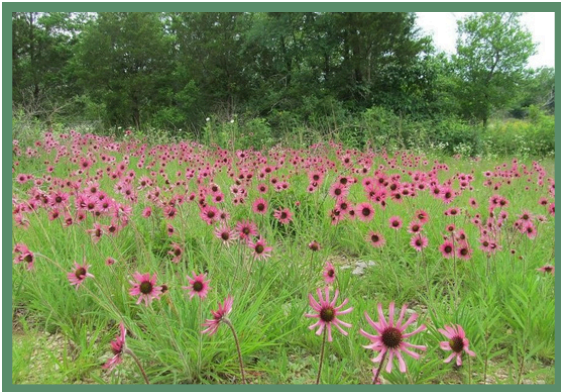
Instructor: Dr. Tom Blanchard

Registration opens April 6

<https://tnnaturalist.org/register/>

Come discover the incredible diversity of the swamps surrounding Reelfoot Lake, the state's largest natural lake! The classroom portion of the course will cover physical and biological features that define swamps, the adaptations of organisms living in this unique environment, and the ecology of select species found solely in the coastal plain region of Tennessee.

The field component of the course will be a canoe float among the cypress trees of Brewers Bar, with a stop along the shoreline where we'll take a short walk to the swamp. There, we will collect and observe a variety of animals and plants characteristic of the swamp habitat. We'll also check previously set traps intended to catch aquatic turtles, Lesser Sirens, Three-toed Amphiuma, Central Newts, and others.



TN2: Communities of the Cedar Glades

Saturday, June 6

Cedars of Lebanon State Park

Registration opens April 27

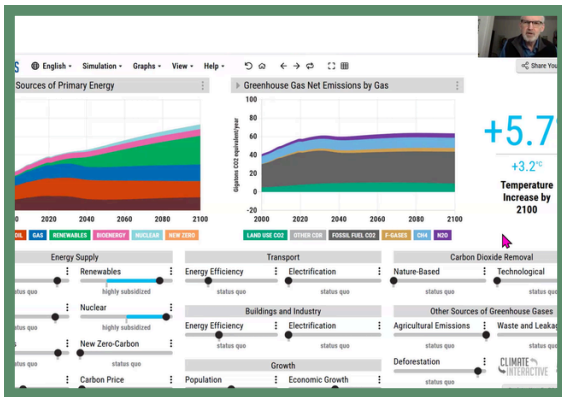
<https://tnnaturalist.org/register/>

The limestone cedar glades in Middle Tennessee are part of a complex group of ecologically distinct communities from exposed rock to oak-hickory forest. This workshop explores the gradient factors that influence the shifting community mosaic and the evolutionary development of plants adapted to the unique and often challenging environmental conditions.

A brief presentation sets the stage for extensive exploration of the 45-acre John & Hester Lane Cedar Glade State Natural Area led by State Botanist Todd Crabtree. Formerly a farm with grazing livestock, the Lane property features a mixture of glades, grasslands (barrens), woodlands, and seasonal washes that are now managed to support both federal and state-listed rare plant species.

TN2 ON-DEMAND WORKSHOPS ALWAYS AVAILABLE!

Did you know TNP offers online on-demand workshops? These workshops are video recordings of past virtual workshops and are always open for registration. Currently there are two offerings, with plans to add more in the future.



TN2 On-Demand: Climate Change

Price: \$20 CE Hours: 1.5

<https://tnnaturalist.org/register/>

Learn about climate change using En-ROADS, a user-friendly model similar to those used by climate scientists. Recorded from the January 2025 virtual workshop.



TN2 On-Demand: Environmental Advocacy

Price: \$20 CE Hours: 1.5

<https://tnnaturalist.org/register/>

Learn effective skills to advocate for environmental issues in the private or public sector at local, state, and federal levels. Recorded from the August 2024 virtual workshop.

TN2 RECAP



Photo Credits: Krista Allen



Photo Credits: Heather Gallagher



Photo Credits: Krista Allen

TN2: WINTER TREE ID

December 6 and 13 - Beaman Park

The brand new workshop TN2: Winter Tree ID was a hit! Winter is a unique season to study trees. Students learned many ID skills and enjoyed a brisk walk through the woods.

VOLUNTEER AND CE OPPORTUNITIES

PRE-APPROVED HOURS

The following events have been pre-approved for TNP volunteer or continuing education hours. You will still need to enter your hours into the database for approval.

Trails & Trilliums - [Click here to register!](#)

April 10-12 Beersheba Springs, TN

Volunteer and CE opportunities:

- Trails & Trilliums is a weekend long naturalist rally put on by the Friends of South Cumberland State Parks. The festival offers a slate of guided hikes and walks as well as nature-themed presentations, workshops, and exhibits. Come meet fellow Tennessee Naturalists from across the state!
- The majority of sessions can be used for TNP CE credit. The Trails & Trilliums website will have more information on recording TNP CE hours.
- Volunteers are needed from Thursday, April 9 - Sunday, April 12. There are many different shifts and tasks to choose from. [Click here for more information.](#)



PRE-APPROVED HOURS CONT.

TN Tree Day Sorting and Distribution - Tennessee Environmental Council (TEC)

March 16-21 Statewide Opportunities

Volunteer opportunities:

- TEC's Tennessee Tree Day is an annual event that engages thousands of volunteers across the state in planting native tree seedlings. Bare-root native trees are distributed to Tennessee residents through a vast network of dedicated volunteers and local businesses. Many sites across Tennessee will need help sorting and distributing trees.
- View Tree Day Prep volunteer opportunities [here](#), and view a map of pick-up sites [here](#). Reach out to your local organizations on the map to see if they need volunteers!
- Log hours under Admin/Other > Event Assistance, sponsoring organization "Tennessee Environmental Council."

SUPPORT OUR NEWEST CHAPTER!

Help us welcome our newest chapter, the Wade Bourne Nature Center in Clarksville, by showing what a Tennessee Naturalist volunteer can do! **Click [here](#) to view more info and sign up.**

TN Tree Day Sorting and Distribution - Wade Bourne Nature Center

March 17-21, 2026 Various time slots available

Volunteer opportunities:

- Volunteers are needed to sort trees according to customer orders and distribute trees to the customer. You can select your own shift.
- Log hours under Admin/Other > Event Assistance, sponsoring organization "Tennessee Environmental Council."

Earth Day Plant Swap - Wade Bourne Nature Center

April 18, 2026 9:00am-12:30pm CT

Volunteer opportunities:

- Volunteers are needed to help set up, assist participants, transfer plants, and clean up.
- Log hours under TNP/Chapter Support > Event Assistance

3rd Annual Cogioba Scout Earth Day Tree Planting - Rotary Park Amphitheater

April 18, 2026 8:00am-12:00pm CT

Volunteer opportunities:

- Plant native trees and learn proper planting techniques
- Log hours under Stewardship > Habitat Improvement/Maintenance

Tea and Trees Arbor Day Celebration Assistance - Rotary Park Nature Adventure Area

April 25, 2026 10:00am-1:30pm CT

Volunteer opportunities:

- Volunteers are needed to assist people outside by showing them where/how to make tea, distributing tree identification maps, and directing them towards the community garden.
- Log hours under TNP/Chapter Support > Event Assistance

PRE-APPROVED HOURS CONT.

Land Between the Lakes Naturalist Surveys

April 25-26 Golden Pond, KY

Volunteer opportunities:

- Join the 2nd annual Land Between the Lakes Volunteer Naturalist Surveys of the Core Areas! Volunteers will explore a selection of the core areas to conduct informal surveys of their flora, fauna, and other characteristics. These habitats are diverse, ranging from wetlands and interior forest to small open lands. Whether your interests are plants, birds, salamanders, or anything else, you are welcome to join!
- To sign up as a volunteer, contact Davis Mounger at wdmounger@gmail.com or 423-877-4616
- Log hours under Community Science > Animal/Plant Count, Survey, Monitoring.

Frontier Fest - Bledsoe Creek State Park

Saturday, June 13 9:00am-3:00pm CT Gallatin, TN

- This event will highlight life on the Tennessee Frontier through Ranger-led programs and volunteer-based living history interactions. Programs include fabric arts, food preservation, long hunter history, medicinal plant hikes, and an interactive hike.
- The park is looking for volunteers to support this event with the following assignments:
 - Parking assistants
 - Historic reenactors
 - Program assistants
 - Create your own program!
- To sign up as a volunteer, email Abigail.Wiseman@tn.gov.
- Log hours under TNP/Chapter Support > Event Assistance

**WANT TO GET YOUR ORGANIZATION'S EVENT
PRE-APPROVED FOR VOLUNTEER OR CONTINUING
EDUCATION HOURS? FILL OUT THE FORM [HERE!](#)**



ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

The organizations listed below frequently have volunteer and/or continuing education opportunities. Visit the linked websites for more information. Remember to check with environmental organizations in your community about opportunities. You can also ask your chapter coordinator and instructors.

TNP Chapters

TNP has 15 chapters across the state that often need volunteers and offer continuing education opportunities. Visit the link for a list of our chapters and contact information. <https://tnnaturalist.org/chapters/>

Tennessee State Parks

There are state parks all over Tennessee that need volunteers and provide continuing education opportunities. Visit the link for up-to-date opportunities and events. <https://tnstateparks.com/get-involved/volunteering>

Friends Groups at Tennessee State Parks

Many state parks in Tennessee have Friends groups that offer volunteer and continuing education opportunities. Visit the link to see a list of Friends groups. <https://tnstateparks.com/get-involved/friends-groups>

Tennessee Environmental Council

The Tennessee Environmental Council has opportunities in a variety of environmental sectors. Visit the link for up-to-date volunteer opportunities and events. <https://www.tectn.org/getinvolved.html>

Wild Ones

There are four Wild Ones chapters in Tennessee. Visit the link to find a chapter near you and view events. <https://wildones.org/events/?state=TN>

Tennessee Native Plant Society

TNPS conserves and celebrates native plants. Visit the link for up-to-date opportunities and events. <https://www.tnps.org/events/category/calendar/>

Cumberland River Compact

The Cumberland River Compact has a variety of hands-on volunteer opportunities dedicated to protecting the waters of the Cumberland River. Visit the link for up-to-date volunteer opportunities. <https://cumberlandrivercompact.org/get-involved/volunteer/>

Harpeth River Conservancy

There are several ongoing volunteer opportunities. Visit the link for more information. <https://harpethconservancy.org/get-involved/volunteer/>

CERTIFICATIONS AND MILESTONES

Congrats to all the TNP students who earned their certification or reached a TNP milestone from December 2025 - February 2026. We appreciate your dedication to TNP!

CERTIFICATION

Breanna Bailey - Cummins Falls

Taylor Young - Audubon Acres

Nathanael Seaman - Beaman Park

Israel Ovalle - Murfreesboro Barfield

Spiky Tully - Friends of South Cumberland

Elizabeth Gentry - Seven Islands

Tammy Peedin - Bays Mountain

Sarah Yankee - Owl's Hill

Sara Macfarlane - Ijams

Scarlett Hanover - Ijams

Caroline Ballinger - Seven Islands

Sage Blom - Audubon Acres

Beth Kirkland - Owl's Hill

MILESTONES

Sarah Tichenor - 200 hours

Marlee Mitchell - 50 hours

Kathy VonArb - 200 hours

Joe Gordon - 200 hours; 300 hours

Carol Elliott - 150 hours

Beth Girard - 400 hours

Anne Padgett - 300 hours

Carol Blickenstorf - 150 hours

Marcus Snyder - 150 hours

Denise Medeiros - 100 hours

John Cousino - 100 hours

Jenny Biggs - 50 hours

Leah Berry - 150 hours

Katy Ginanni - 100 hours

Greg Weaver - 150 hours

Aprele Griffin - 300 hours

Carol Elliott - 200 hours

Loraine Flegal - 50 hours

Katie Netti - 50 hours

HOW CLOSE ARE YOU TO YOUR CERTIFICATION OR NEXT MILESTONE?

[Log in to the TNP database here](#) and click the "Tracks" tab on your homepage to see how many hours you have remaining. **You might be closer than you think!**

CONNECT WITH TNP ON SOCIAL MEDIA!



Facebook

Tennessee Naturalist Program

[Click here to follow TNP on Facebook!](#)



Instagram

@tnnaturalist

[Click here to follow TNP on Instagram!](#)

DONATE TO TNP!

The Tennessee Naturalist Program is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to inspiring the desire to learn and share Tennessee's nature. We do not receive funding from any state or federal sources. All donations are appreciated and go towards furthering our mission. You can donate to TNP by following the link below. Thank you for your support!

[Click here to donate to TNP](#)

TNP MERCH

Shop TNP apparel and accessories on our website! Proceeds help support the Tennessee Naturalist Program. [Click here to shop now!](#)

