

## Little Tennessee River Native Fish Conservation Area

### Coalition Building Meeting

August 21, 2013

Franklin, NC at the Old Cowee School

### REPORT

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#### Overview

On August 21<sup>st</sup> in Franklin, NC at the Old Cowee School, representatives from 13 agencies, all of whom are invested in and committed to the conservation of the Little Tennessee River, met for a full day to discuss the possibilities of forming a coalition to maximize their efforts. The following agencies were represented and a full roster with contact information on participants accompanies this report.

- Coweetta LTER
- Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians
- GA Department of Natural Resources
- Land Trust of the Little Tennessee
- NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources
- NC Wildlife Federation
- Trout Unlimited
- Tennessee Valley Authority
- US Department of Agriculture (Jackson Cty Soil and Water)
- US Forestry Service
- US Fish and Wildlife Service
- Watershed Association for the Tuckasegee River
- NC Wildlife Resources Commission

The group spent the day connecting to the draft vision for the Little Tennessee River as a possible Native Fish Conservation Area, which would make it the first in the country. They explored why this is important from the perspective of each of their agencies and discussed work that is already happening to realize this vision- either by independent agencies alone or in collaboration with one another. We learned about the concept of collective impact and how a group may accomplish it and discussed the adaptive challenges that they individually and collectively face in creating a coalition for the LTR. Further, they explored group norms that will make this a successful coalition and qualities that could seriously hinder their work to increase effectiveness and reduce redundancies. It is our sense that the group understands that true collaboration is difficult, has a slow pace of change and necessitates diligence in communication, common goals and more. It is our sense that the members of this group are approaching the possibility of a coalition with a realistic and healthy understanding of possibilities and limitations ahead of them.

## **Vision**

The following draft vision for the Little Tennessee River was vetted with the group and informed their work on exploring the possibility of a coalition. Ultimately, the group indicated that further work to focus and tighten the vision statement would be pursued. However, this was the statement the group worked with during the day.

*Our vision is that the upper Little Tennessee River watershed and its tributaries are protected or restored to the level that native fishes thrive. Native fishes and other aquatic organisms are stable components of diverse biological communities that provide critical ecological services and support various human activities. Our citizens and elected officials are aware of this biodiversity and its multiple values and consistently work to protect and enhance it. We have built upon an active partnership comprising agencies, organizations and individuals sharing community-based science to achieve common goals. We further envision educational, leadership and cooperative efforts that foster a strong ethic of stewardship and sustainability, we work to protect and restore the upper Little Tennessee watershed and its native biological communities.*

## **Accomplishments**

The group had two major accomplishments coming out of the day:

1. identifying one common goal on which they are able and intend to collaborate, and
2. forming a steering committee to ensure that the work on their common goal moves forward.

## ***The Goal:***

Working in five small groups that each had representatives of a variety of agencies, the participants explored what was possible in terms of common goals. The focus was on the outcome of the goal, not the action steps or strategies to get there. Simply, what they wanted to accomplish, why, whether it is attainable and how they would know if they accomplished it.

As each group wrestled with what was possible, all came up with various ways in which they could maximize their effectiveness and reduce redundancies, work together to define the concept of what a native fish conservation area is (as this would be the first in the country and it is a self-declaration), leverage a coalition to increase funding opportunities for their conservation efforts, etc. The attached meeting notes outline the results of each group's ideas.

After spending the day exploring the possibilities and difficulties of collaboration and discussing how a successful coalition would need considerable resources, time and committed energy to work, we were pleased that the group essentially coalesced around one manageable goal. It is:

- Form the Little Tennessee River Native Fish Conservation Partnership with a steering committee, main body, and working groups.

Most of the groups had the spirit of this overall goal as a part of their suggestions and we submit that these ideas from their good work should become actionable items as the group begins its planning. They are:

- Create a central definition of terms
- Create criteria for “Native Fish Conservation Area”
- Develop and implement an outreach/communication plan
- Create a messaging statement
- Seek funding
- Develop online workspace
- Catalog: Species, Threats/potential projects, Ongoing/completed projects.

### ***Steering Committee***

The following individuals have agreed to work together as a Steering Committee to actualize the above goal.

- Fred Harris- NCWF
- Janet Mizzi- USFWS
- Mike LeVoie- Cherokee
- Damon Hearne- Trout U
- Steve Fraley- WRC
- Ken Brown- WRTR
- Andrea Leslie- NHP- NC DENR
- Ben Lassiter- LTLT
- Jason Farmer- Forest Service

As Fred Harris was the initiator and convener of this first effort, he will serve as the Chair of the Steering Committee and is the primary contact for the group at this time.

We were pleased to see such ready enthusiasm for serving on this committee and commend these individuals for volunteering to shepherd the effort into its immediate next steps.

### **Next Steps**

This was a productive and effective first step toward catalyzing a coalition to support the Little Tennessee River and potentially designate it as the country’s first Native Fish Conservation Area. It is our opinion that many positive outcomes of this meeting occurred.

- Participants who are connected to the same mission and even similar efforts were able to connect and either build new or strengthen existing relationships. Relationships and communication are the bedrock of an effective coalition and we urge you to continue to take the time to engage in person periodically so that these relationships may be strengthened.
- The group spent considerable time learning about the process of coalition building and being thoughtful about the adaptive challenges that such a coalition will likely face. We urge the

Steering Committee to keep these concepts top of mind and continually evaluate if and how the partnership is working, what can be improved and how to ensure transparency and effective communication in its leadership.

- The many overlapping and complimentary efforts that are happening to conserve the Little Tennessee River watershed are beginning to emerge. It is our hope that this information gathering and sharing will deepen and continue. The more that coalition members can focus on particular objectives that compliment but do not overwhelm or overshadow the individual contributions of agencies the better moving forward.

The natural next step is for the Steering Committee to convene, under the direction and leadership of Fred Harris. As a subset of this full coalition, they will determine their plans for accomplishing the goal outlined above.

### **Our Thanks**

It was a privilege to be with you as you begin this collaboration. We both learned much about the region, your conservation efforts, the multiple forms your work takes and more. We wish you great success as you move forward and ask that if we can be helpful in any way, you will call on us.

We respectfully submit this report on your good work with warm regards.



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### **Attachments:**

- Power Point Presentation
- Meeting Notes
- Final Roster of Participants
- SMART Goals Worksheet
- Collective Impact in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*