



a vision for north america's next great regional trail system



a publication by the  
**Tennessee RiverLine Partnership**

# THE TENNESSEE RIVER

From Knoxville, TN, to Paducah, KY, the Tennessee River stretches 652 miles and touches four states: Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi and Kentucky. Its 41,000 square mile watershed is home to more than 4.5 million residents, over half of which live in communities along its banks.

The Tennessee River, its tributary system and its contributing watershed form a diverse territory defined by celebrated and iconic landscapes. High mountains, rolling hills and gentle valleys, highland rims and coastal plains bid the river passage from its origin in East Tennessee to its confluence with the Ohio River in Western Kentucky.

A river of such splendor deserves to be seen and experienced by all. The Tennessee River, as one of North America's great rivers, merits the development of a great river trail.



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# STORIES WORTH TELLING

The Tennessee River Valley is home to some of our nation's most important histories, modern accomplishments and ecological treasures.

For centuries, the banks of the Tennessee River were home to thriving communities of Native Americans. Tragically, the same river that sustained their towns and trading posts later carried Native Peoples from their homelands on the Trail of Tears water route.

The Tennessee River was a major actor in the American Civil War. An artery of the southern economy, the river later bade federal armies passage to the heart of the Confederacy, and its shores were host to some of the war's pivotal and bloodiest battles.

The landscape of the Tennessee River is also home the iconic, multi-functional infrastructures of the Tennessee Valley Authority. The initiatives of the TVA changed the course of world history and still today serve as a global model for integrated natural resource management that continues to shape the development and prosperity of an entire region.

There are more fish, insects, mussels, snails and other forms of life in the Tennessee River and its tributary waterways than there are in any other river system in North America. More than 100 species of freshwater mussels and 270 species of fish call the Tennessee River system home, including threatened and endangered species, as well as species not found anywhere else in the world.

The stories of the Tennessee River are stories worth telling.

# A RIVER AT RISK

Rivers are the foundations of our communities, sustaining populations and economies that have sought to tame and harness them over time. The Tennessee River Valley has become one of the most desirable places to live, work and play in the country. However, the demands that communities place on the river threatens its future health and resiliency, and in turn, our own.

The Tennessee River is separated from the communities it sustains by physical and psychological barriers. These barriers limit the public's ability to experience the river and witness its beauty. As a result, the degradation of the river's banks and pollution from diverse sources goes unnoticed, compromising fragile wildlife habitats and the health of the ecosystems they support.

As our society and economy drift from their river origins, communities once intimately linked by the Tennessee River stand to lose their sense of connection to one another, to the river landscape and its heritage, and to their identity as part of something much larger: the Tennessee River Valley.

The great challenges of the Tennessee River's present offer great opportunities for its future. The Tennessee RiverLine inspires new thinking amongst generations of committed river stewards to unlock the river's latent potentials and renew our relationship with this valuable natural resource.





# IMAGINE A PROJECT THAT...

**Provides** unprecedented and equitable public access to the Tennessee River

**Connects** existing river experiences

**Enhances** the visibility of Tennessee River communities and destinations

**Reveals** the rich history of the river system, its watershed and the peoples who have called it home

**Reforges** relationships between communities and the river

**Increases** river use by residents and visitors, promoting healthy lifestyles and economic development

**Stimulates** new interest and investment in the river's future

**Protects** threatened resources and aquatic biodiversity

**Heals** degraded landscapes and ecosystems



PADUCAH, KY

on water



on wheels



on foot

652  
miles long

# THE TENNESSEE RIVERLINE

KNOXVILLE, TN

A continuous system of paddling, hiking and biking experiences along the Tennessee River's 652-mile reach from Knoxville, TN, to Paducah, KY, that...



**celebrates** the beauty, diversity, and history of the Tennessee River and the broader Tennessee River Valley



**connects** the people and communities of the valley to each other, to our river heritage, and to the Tennessee River landscape



**catalyzes** new investments, economic opportunities, social health, and ecological stewardship

# A VISION

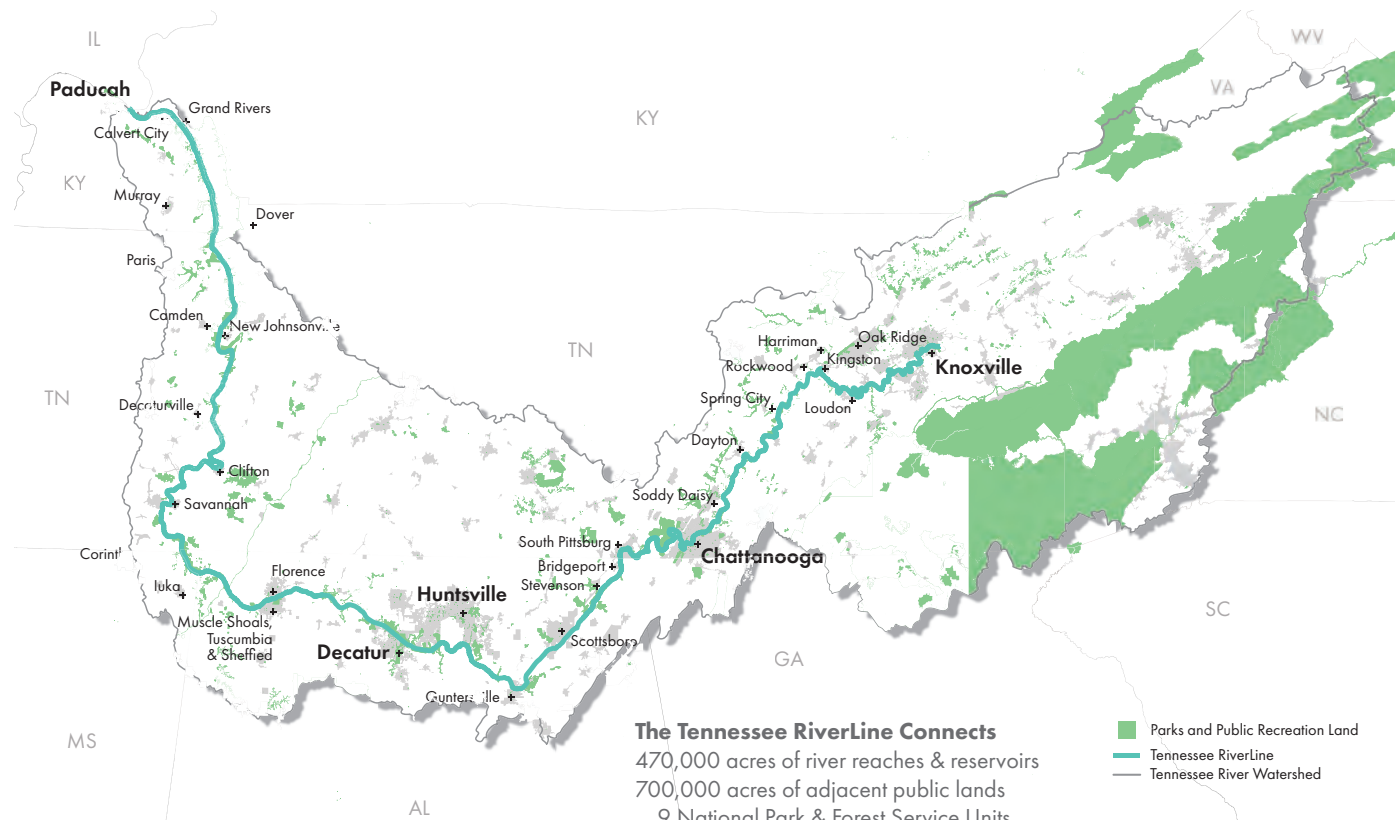
The Tennessee RiverLine is a continuous system of hiking, biking, and on-water experiences along the 652-mile reach of the Tennessee River from Knoxville, TN, to Paducah, KY.

The system will serve as a catalyst for economic, social and environmental impact in the four states and dozens of cities, towns and rural communities along the Tennessee River, as well as the more than 4.5 million residents who call the Tennessee River Valley home.

Beyond recreational, environmental and economic potential, the project embodies the spirit of innovation and regional collaboration that is our legacy in the Tennessee River Valley.

The Tennessee RiverLine seeks to reconnect people and communities in the Tennessee River Valley by initiating regional and watershed-wide partnerships, reestablishing upriver and downriver relationships and reclaiming the river's edge across urbanized, rural and natural landscapes to provide for an unprecedented level of public access.





**1.2 Million Acres**  
of connected Tennessee River experiences

**The Tennessee RiverLine Connects**  
 470,000 acres of river reaches & reservoirs  
 700,000 acres of adjacent public lands  
 9 National Park & Forest Service Units  
 7 National Wildlife Refuges  
 12 TN, AL, MS, KY State Parks  
 14 State Wildlife Refuges  
 290,000 acres TVA Recreation Land  
 73 Counties, Cities & Towns

■ Parks and Public Recreation Land  
 — Tennessee RiverLine  
 — Tennessee River Watershed

# RIVER AS PARK

The 652-mile Tennessee River and its nine scenic reservoirs combined are a continuous 470,000 acre landscape that is accessible to the public - residents and visitors alike - offering opportunities for canoeing, kayaking, fishing, camping and other types of water-based recreation.

Because of this continuity and public accessibility, Tennessee RiverLine is first and foremost a water trail that offers users of all ages and skill levels the opportunity to safely paddle the storied Tennessee River for an afternoon, a day, a weekend, a week, a month or longer.

The river's banks are also home to more than 700,000 acres of National Parks, recreation areas and wildlife refuges, state and local parks, as well as diverse cities and rural communities. Each offer their own unique stories, experiences and river access to RiverLine users while providing opportunities to paddle, hike, bike, climb and enjoy nature as they are immersed in the beauty of the Tennessee River landscape.

When considering the river, these public landscapes and river communities as a whole, a dynamic 1.2 million acre park suddenly comes into focus. This landscape of opportunities and experiences connected by the river is also the vision for the Tennessee RiverLine.



# A TRAIL UNLIKE ANY OTHER

The Tennessee RiverLine is unlike any other trail system of similar length. It reframes the Tennessee River landscape, adjacent public lands and communities, and the adventure experiences that each offer, as a dynamic 1.2 million acre park. The Tennessee River Valley's scenic public lands include those managed by the Tennessee Valley Authority, the National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, State Parks and local governments.

By providing a framework of opportunities for all Tennessee River communities and land owners to enhance their relationship with the river, the Tennessee RiverLine is positioned as a strategic infrastructure of local and regional economic development, a quality of life amenity for enhanced public health and a strategy to build a multi-generational constituency of users advocating for and participating in the stewardship of the river's fragile ecosystems and biodiversity.

Initial reaches of the Tennessee RiverLine will be comprised of existing water trails, access points and other supporting amenities whose stakeholders agree to be identified as a part of the larger trail system. Over time, local investments in new infrastructures of public access, information and experience, as well as reinvestments in existing amenities, connect to provide a continuous and safe Tennessee RiverLine experience.





# TRAIL USERS

From adventure enthusiasts to casual bike-riders, there is a trail experience on the Tennessee RiverLine for everyone.

For a local user, the experience might become an integral part of a daily commute or exercise routine. As a result of the Tennessee RiverLine's pedestrian orientation and the supporting networks of multi-modal infrastructures and lifestyle amenities it catalyzes, residents of trail communities benefit daily from enhanced mobility, social connectivity and increased physical activity.

Week[end] warriors may spend a weekend or longer on the Tennessee River, experiencing an extended section of the trail during a single trip. The RiverLine enables these adventurers to discover remote river reaches and unique destinations to which access has previously been limited.

Trail heroes seek the ultimate adventure of conquering the entire Tennessee RiverLine in one continuous trip. Recreation enthusiasts from around the world will be invited to travel to the valley and conquer North America's next great regional trail, one that provides an east-west connection between other regional trails, such as the Cumberland Trail and the Natchez Trace.

# PAVILIONS

Ranging from basic shelters in remote campgrounds to architectural icons in Tennessee River communities, RiverLine pavilions will provide shelter, river access and experiences, and provisions for trail users, while also serving as multi-purpose economic drivers and tourism destinations for host communities.

Pavilions are programmed and designed to suit the needs and contexts of the trail communities in which they are located, serving the trail users and residents that visit them. It is at a trail pavilion where a local user rents a kayak for an afternoon paddle or attends a gallery opening of river-inspired art; where a week[en]d warrior soaks in a panoramic view or beds down for an evening's rest; and where a trail hero replenishes supplies or learns about an important cultural landmark. Pavilions can function as:

- observatories and scenic overlooks
- overnight shelters and hostels
- bathroom/restroom facilities with potable water
- bike and kayak staging, storage and rental
- trail mode (hike, bike, paddle) transition points
- multi-use exhibition and event spaces
- classrooms and laboratories
- interpretive visitor centers on water or land
- retail centers for trail provisions and gear



*Kayak Pavilion at Long Dock Park  
by Architecture Research Office*

# A CATALYST FOR...

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



+

## QUALITY OF LIFE



+

## CONNECTIVITY



+

## ENVIRONMENT



TAX REVENUE & BUSINESS PROFIT



ENTREPRENEURSHIP & JOB CREATION



LOCAL INVESTMENT



PROPERTY VALUE



PUBLIC HEALTH



PUBLIC SAFETY



EDUCATION & INTERPRETATION



ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION



COMMUNITY



SOCIAL



CULTURE AND HERITAGE



URBAN TO RURAL



LAND PROTECTION



HABITAT RESTORATION



RIVER STEWARDSHIP



GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE



# MORE THAN A TRAIL

The Tennessee RiverLine is much more than a recreational trail; it is a strategic investment in economic, social and environmental infrastructure that has the potential to transform communities and the river landscape.

Investments in local trails and regional systems will stimulate new economies, businesses and amenities that benefit the project's diverse user groups and communities. Large cities and small towns alike will benefit from tourists who come to enjoy river, its diverse communities and unique cultural resources. Residents will appreciate enhanced transportation and recreation systems that promote social connectivity and healthy lifestyles.

As access to and enjoyment of the river is enhanced, trail users gain a heightened recognition of the contemporary challenges it faces. The Tennessee RiverLine ushers in an era of renewed awareness, ownership and stewardship of the Tennessee River, its threatened landscapes and cultural resources, and unrivaled aquatic biodiversity.

# TRAIL BLAZERS

The Tennessee RiverLine Partnership is a diverse volunteer consortium of Tennessee River advocates from across the Tennessee River Valley and beyond. Each advocate individually and the Partnership collectively are committed to building a shared vision for the Tennessee RiverLine and stewarding it toward implementation:

- University of Tennessee, Knoxville
- Tennessee Valley Authority
- The Nature Conservancy
- Tennessee River Valley Stewardship Council
- Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area
- Southeast Tennessee Tourism Association
- University of Tennessee School of Landscape Architecture
- University of Tennessee College of Architecture + Design
- UT Chattanooga Interdisciplinary Geospatial Technology Lab
- Tennessee Department of Health
- Tennessee Department of Tourist Development
- Tennessee State Parks
- City of Knoxville
- Benesch
- Tribal Connections Consulting
- River Discovery Center (Paducah, KY)
- Tennessee Aquarium

The initial phase of trail planning and organizational development is being conducted with the assistance of the National Park Service through the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) program.



# THE PATH FORWARD

The Tennessee RiverLine is an initiative in early developmental stages that will be shaped by communities, individuals and organizations across the river valley. Realizing its transformative vision will require time, talent and financial backing from a range of stakeholders, as well as engagement and commitment from the states and communities it will benefit.

The Tennessee RiverLine Partnership welcomes your support to:

- Share** the Tennessee RiverLine vision with others
- Offer** your own ideas, insights and suggestions
- Connect** us with allied initiatives & potential partners
- Encourage** your community to become a **Tennessee RiverTown**
- Participate** in outreach programs in your community
- Contribute** financially to this historic initiative

Want to keep up to date about the Tennessee RiverLine and the Partnership, or is your community interested in becoming a part of the **Tennessee RiverTowns** Program? Email us at [info@tnriverline.org](mailto:info@tnriverline.org), or visit [tnriverline.org](http://tnriverline.org).

Find us on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter @tnriverline, or show your support by wearing official Tennessee RiverLine gear, available at [tnriverline.org/store](http://tnriverline.org/store).





## A SYMBOL

The Tennessee RiverLine is a symbol of what is possible as we renew the spirit of innovation and regional collaboration that is our legacy in the Tennessee River Valley. This vision inspires us to reconnect with that legacy as stewards for one of North America's great rivers into the 21st century.



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KNOXVILLE LOUISVILLE FARRAGUT LENOIR CITY LOUDON KINGSTON ROCKWOOD  
SPRING CITY DAYTON SODDY DAISY CHATTANOOGA SIGNAL MOUNTAIN JASPER  
KIMBALL SOUTH PITTSBURG • **ALABAMA** • BRIDGEPORT STEVENSON SCOTTSBORO  
LANGSTON GUNTERSVILLE HUNTSVILLE TRIANA MOORESVILLE DECATUR  
ROGERSVILLE KILLEN FLORENCE MUSCLE SHOALS SHEFFIELD TUSCUMBIA WATERLOO  
• **MISSISSIPPI** • EASTPORT IUKA • **TENNESSEE** • RED SULPHUR SPRINGS COUNCE  
CRUMP SAVANNAH SALTILLO CLIFTON DECATURVILLE NEW JOHNSONVILLE CAMDEN  
BIG SANDY PARIS • **KENTUCKY** • MURRAY GRAND RIVERS CALVERT CITY PADUCAH

the Tennessee RiverLine is a collaboration between:

