

PROTECT TN WETLANDS

Safeguarding Tennessee's Future - From Flood Protection to Clean Water for All

AT A GLANCE

Pollution, irresponsible growth, and extreme weather events - longer droughts, heavier rain, more frequent storms - threaten the health and stability of our waterways and the communities who rely on them. Natural ecosystems often provide some of our best solutions to the challenges we face. In fact, Tennessee's wetlands play a critical role in maintaining a healthy and robust way-of-life for all Tennesseans.


Unfortunately, wetlands protections have taken quite a blow over the past few years. Harpeth Conservancy is working with communities and partners across the state to secure statewide protections for wetlands and improve the regulatory/permitting process.

“The notion that the law can't protect a body of water, simply because there's a road between it and another body of water that's unquestionably protected, is absurd and unscientific, and it would defeat the purpose of the Clean Water Act.”

Jon Devine, Natural Resources Defense Council



 @harpethriver

 <https://harpethconservancy.org/tennessee-wetlands>

 Tennessee

CHALLENGES & SOLUTIONS



In May 2023, the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling on Sackett v EPA removed federal safeguards for "isolated wetlands," which are now only regulated at the state level, if at all. The case ruling established that wetlands must have a "continuous surface connection" to a navigable water or a relatively permanent body of water to be subject to federal regulation.

Tennessee's Water Quality Control Act (1971), stable and effective for over fifty years, prohibits the discharge of pollution to all "waters" and defines "waters" broadly to give jurisdiction to the state over waters that are not jurisdictional under federal law. Simply put, the state of Tennessee currently provides broad protections for wetlands, including "isolated wetlands," even though their federal protections have been newly limited by the Sackett v EPA ruling.

In 2025, Representative Kevin Vaughan filed the latest version of his wetlands bill. This bill strips all state-level protections for wetlands not protected by federal law. So, if the bill passes, between 300,000 and 450,000 acres of TN wetlands - namely "isolated wetlands" - will lose all legal protections. We need help from Tennesseans to ensure that our wetlands, and our communities, are protected, now and for future generations.

BENEFITS WETLANDS PROVIDE INCLUDE:



1

Reduce the devastating impacts of flooding

2

Recharge aquifers and rivers, providing drinking water for thousands of residents

3

Filter pollution from our beloved rivers and streams

4

Provide healthy habitat for Tennessee's globally unique biodiversity

5

Ensure beautiful outdoor spaces for recreation and enjoyment

WETLANDS WORKING FOR YOU

Wetlands act as "nature's kidneys" to filter and absorb pollution.



\$1.6 - \$1.8 billion

Wetlands in the Southeast are valued at approx \$7,800 per acre given the benefits

1-1.5 million gallons of water can be stored by one acre of wetlands.

Approximately 80% of geographically isolated wetlands in TN are smaller than

1 acre

but even these "small" wetlands can function as efficiently as large wetlands.

Wetlands improve drought resilience by retaining water and acting like a storage reservoir during times of little to no rain.



Wetlands provide key habitat and nursery grounds for valuable wildlife.

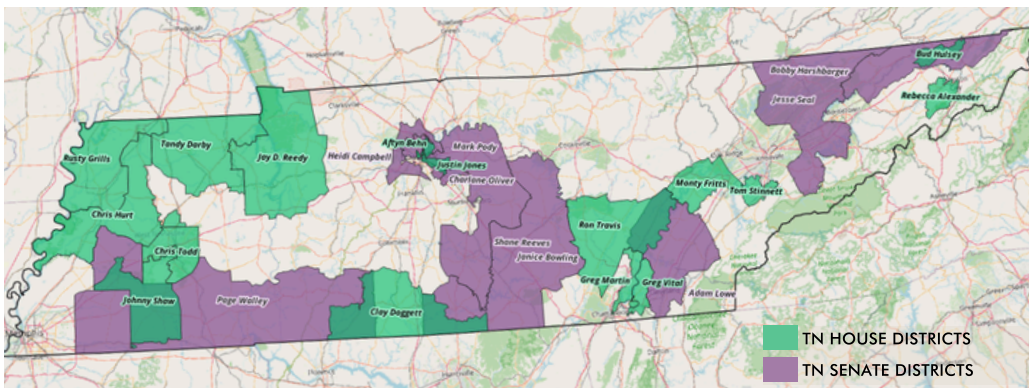
HABITAT AT RISK

In Tennessee, there are more than **1 million acres** of wetlands throughout the state.

More than 320,000 acres

of our state's wetlands are likely "geographically isolated" and could lose protection with changes to the longstanding water protection statute, the Tennessee Water Quality Control Act. T.C.A. 69-3-101 et seq.

2025 HOUSE & SENATE COMMITTEE MEMBERS



In the TN Senate, the Energy, Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee discusses and votes on bills related to wetlands.

In the TN House, the Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee & Subcommittee discuss and vote on bills related to wetlands.

If all committees pass the wetlands-related bills, the bills will eventually end up on the schedule to be discussed and voted on for the final time by the full bodies of both the Senate and the House.

TN SENATE

- 1 - Adam Lowe (R) ^
- 4- Bobby Harshbarger (R) ^
- 8 - Jessie Seal (R) ^
- 14- Shane Reeves (R) +*
- 16 - Janice Bowling (R) +*
- 17- Mark Pody (R)*
- 19 - Charlane Oliver (D)*
- 20 - Heidi Campbell (D)*
- 26 - Page Walley (R) + -

TN HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

- 2 - Bud Hulsey (R) ^
- 7 - Rebecca Alexander (R) ^
- 20 - Tom Stinnett (R) ^
- 26 - Greg Martin (R) ^
- 29 - Greg Vital (R) ^
- 31 - Ron Travis (R) ^
- 32 - Monty Fritts (R) ^
- 51 - Aftyn Behn (D)*
- 52 - Justin Jones (D)*
- 70 - Clay Doggett (R) +
- 73 - Chris Todd (R) + -
- 74 - Jay Reedy (R)*
- 76 - Tandy Darby (R) + -
- 77 - Rusty Grills (R) + -
- 80 - Johnny Shaw (D) + -
- 82 - Chris Hurt (R) + -

+Most Impacted Districts
 -Memphis/West TN
 *Nashville/Middle TN
 ^ Knoxville/Chattanooga/East TN



Your voice matters! Interested in getting involved in legislative advocacy?

Contact Marie at mariecampbell@harpethriver.org.

Follow along during the 2025 TN Legislative Session:



LEARN MORE

