

TENNESSEE VOICES

Sustainability summit to set course for TN

By John McFadden

Natural resources are the backbone of our economy, our quality of life and our Tennessee heritage. Without question, Tennesseans deserve clean water for drinking and pure air to breathe, both of which are supported by natural resources including healthy greenway parks and urban and rural forests. In addition, it's time we looked at our own lifestyle and our dependence on fossil fuels, foreign oil and coal. The Kingston coal ash disaster has brought this into focus for many Tennesseans.

Our reliance on foreign oil and coal has many consequences. For example, some Tennessee cities

continue to lead the country in childhood asthma as a result of air pollution. Many of our urban streams are polluted, not from big factories, but from how we have allowed the land to be developed. Because of the asphalt and concrete, rooftops, sidewalks and other hard surfaces that no longer allow storm water to be absorbed into the ground, many urban streams flood our neighborhoods and continue to be polluted.

As an optimist, I clearly see the benefits of making Tennessee a leader in environmental sustainability. Sustainability is using natural resources in a way that does not degrade them, so our children and grandchildren have a better quality of life than our generation. Clean energy, like wind and solar power, will create jobs, reduce health-care costs, enhance national security, restore our

environment and make our state a leader in climate change solutions. Gov. Phil Bredesen's solar initiative already has put Tennessee in a leadership position among the Southeastern states and perhaps the nation!

Your input is needed

On Nov. 13-14, the Summit for a Sustainable Tennessee will be held at Ward Agricultural Center in Lebanon. The summit will provide Tennesseans the opportunity to participate in developing the road map to sustainability. The 2010 Sustainability Agenda is the guidance we must have to get out of the economic recession and air and water pollution and into an enhanced public health, quality of life and a much better future for our children. The Sustainability Agenda is about opportunity for

creating a healthy economy, livable communities, with healthy greenway parks and urban forests that filter pollution out of the air and water as well as enhance property values.

On Friday the summit will feature workshops on topics including land conservation, environmental economics, water policy and practice, economic stimulus opportunities and more. On Saturday, attendees will identify and prioritize issues facing Tennessee and outline strategies for addressing them as a collective body. Rather than duplicating efforts and competing for limited resources, organizations from across the state will work toward a shared agenda. This collaborative process will enable organizations to share expertise, replicate successful models and pool resources.

The draft 2010 Sustainability Agenda is a result of work by the Sustainable Tennessee coalition and includes the contributions and support of more than 200 individuals and 130 organizations statewide. This year the coalition will focus on issues related to land, air, water, energy and quality growth and development. The Sustainable Tennessee Coalition wants and needs your input on and support for Tennessee's Sustainability Agenda. The draft 2010 Tennessee Sustainability Agenda is available at www.SustainableTn.org so all Tennesseans have an opportunity to provide input and support. Won't you join us?

John McFadden is executive director of the Tennessee Environmental Council. The council's mission is to educate and advocate for the conservation and improvement of Tennessee's environment, communities and public health. To learn more visit www.tectn.org.



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