

# *Tennesseans for State Parks*

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(Nashville, TN, December 4, 2001) Joining Mayor Victor Ashe the Tennesseans for State Parks, a coalition representing more than 25,000 concerned citizens in Tennessee, called on the General Assembly to shift one cent from the state gas tax to the beleaguered state park system. Kicking off their *Penny for the Parks* campaign, the group now will make use of its broad base of support from around the state to move the proposal forward in the state legislature.

“There is ample funding in the state road construction budget to shift revenues to other programs in need. This reallocation of funds is supported by Tennesseans and should be a high priority for the Legislature, and the Governor should support the effort as well. The message is simple: Tennesseans would rather enjoy and protect their state parks than build another mile of highway,” said Will Callaway, Executive Director for the Tennessee Environmental Council.

Adding her support to the effort, Kathleen Williams of Tennessee Parks and Greenways Foundation said, “The closure of parks around this state was a mistake. State Parks attract 29 million money-spending, gas-buying tourists. We need more state parks not fewer. Tennessee’s lands are under assault already partly because of road building. This penny could help mitigate some of the lands lost to road building by helping protect more land in state parks and natural areas.”

The group is supporting transferring one cent of the 21.4-cent gas tax for state park operation, maintenance and land acquisition. The reallocation would provide approximately \$30 million for the state parks program, with all the funds being diverted from the state construction budget.

Tourism remains the second largest industry in Tennessee. The top tourist attractions in Tennessee are state parks, which attract 29 million visitors each year. Maintaining an open and expanded park system will keep this steady flow of revenue (gas purchases/hotel stays) and benefit the state in the long run.

Additionally, road building and vehicle miles traveled greatly diminish the natural environment. Using a portion of the gas tax – similar to the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund – is a rational effort to balance economic and environmental interests.

“The closure of parks, maintenance backlogs and the need to protect more open space all provide ample reason for this shift of funds. Additionally, as we have seen from editorials and reports around Tennessee, there is widespread support in the state for such a shift in priorities,” concluded Scott Davis, Director of the Tennessee Chapter of the Nature Conservancy.

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