Tennessee Wilderness Act:
The truth about hunting in Cherokee National Forest Wilderness

**MYTH:** You can’t hunt in wilderness.

**FACT:** Hunting, with or without dogs, is absolutely allowed in the Cherokee National Forest wilderness areas - as is fishing, hiking, camping, horseback riding, paddling, and many, other forms of non-mechanized recreation.

In southeast Tennessee, it is a common misconception that you cannot hunt in wilderness because the Tennessee Wildlife Resource Agency (TWRA), the organization that sets the rules and regulations about hunting, uses the footprint of the Citico Creek Wilderness as a ‘bear sanctuary’, a place where no bear hunting is allowed.

To clarify, let’s start with the basics:

- The entire Cherokee National Forest is a Wildlife Management Area, co-managed by TWRA and the U.S. Forest Service. TWRA sets fish and game regulations. The Forest Service manages the lands/wildlife habitat.

- In 2004, TWRA participated in the forest plan revision, and recommended six bear reserves in Tennessee where bear hunting is not allowed - Andrew Johnson, Kettlefoot, Laurel Fork, Unicoi, Ocoee and Tellico Bear Reserves. **This has nothing to do with wilderness designations,** and other types of hunting are allowed in the bear reserves, including deer, turkey, squirrel and raccoon. The TWRA Hunting Guide spells it all out, as rules and regulations are different for each area.

The Tellico Bear Reserve - TWRA established the Tellico Bear Reserve within the boundary of the Citico Creek Wilderness Area as one of two places in the southern forest where bear hunting is not allowed. Therefore, hunters presume that they cannot hunt bear because the area is 'wilderness'; when in fact, bear hunting is not allowed there because of Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency’s rules - not because it is designated wilderness. Game (other than bears) can be hunted in Citico Creek Wilderness/Tellico Bear Reserve, and bear hunting (with or without dogs) is absolutely allowed in other Cherokee National Forest wilderness areas, within the rules and regulations set by TWRA.

From the 2014-2015 TWRA Hunting Guide - Effective August 1, 2014 - July 31, 2015:

**Bear (Gun - Dogs Permitted)** - Four hunts, Oct. 4-12, Nov. 3-7, Dec. 1-14, Dec. 30 - Jan. 2. One bear, either sex. Hunting confined to that area outside the Ocoee and Tellico Bear Reserves.

**Bear Party-Dog Hunts (Gun - Dogs Permitted)** - Four hunts. Oct. 4-5, Oct. 11-12, Nov. 3-4, Dec 1-2. Quota party dog hunts, 75 permits per party. One party permitted in each of the following areas: Upper Tellico, Lower Tellico, *Upper Bald River, and *Lower Bald River. One bear, either sex. Party-Dog Area closed during scheduled quota party-dog hunts.
This map shows the Tellico Bear Reserve/Citico Creek Wilderness and other designated wilderness areas.

The Upper Bald River and Lower Bald River mentioned above are designated as or managed as Wilderness today.

Clearly, hunting is allowed in those areas.

A larger map may be found at: http://www.state.tn.us/twra/gis/wmapdf/SCherokee.pdf

In summary:

- **Hunting (with or without dogs) is absolutely allowed in the CNF wilderness areas** and subject to TWRA rules and regulations.
- Bear hunting is not allowed in the Tellico Bear Reserve/Citico Creek Wilderness because it is a Bear Reserve, not because it is designated wilderness. Other types of hunting are allowed there, like deer, hog, squirrel, turkey, raccoon and other game species.
- Designated wilderness actually makes hunting better by securing large intact areas of habitat that bears and other animals need for the populations to thrive.
- From the **TWRA Black Bear Management** - "... bear populations benefited from the maturation and increased productivity of key oak forest species in protected areas. With careful management and enforcement by the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA) and ecological conditions in their favor, their populations have responded dramatically."
- Generations of Americans have been hunting in Cherokee National Forest wilderness areas for and will continue to do so upon passage of the Tennessee Wilderness Act.

_Tennessee Wild_ is a coalition of organizations seeking wilderness designation for parts of the Cherokee National Forest. If you have questions or would like additional information; Laura Hodge, TN Wild Campaign Coordinator, laurahodge@tnwild.org, (423) 807-3456