

The Tennessee Wilderness Act

Senate - S.973 Sponsor: Senator Lamar Alexander (R) Co-sponsor: Senator Bob Corker (R)

S.973 protects an additional 19,556 acres in the Cherokee National Forest in East Tennessee by designating one new Wilderness Area (Upper Bald River), and including expansions to five existing Wilderness Areas.

- Upper Bald River Wilderness Area - 9,038 acres, Monroe County
- Joyce Kilmer/Slickrock Wilderness Addition - 1,836 acres, Monroe County
- Big Frog Wilderness Addition - 348 acres, Polk County
- Little Frog Wilderness Addition - 966 acres, Polk County
- Big Laurel Branch Wilderness Addition - 4,446 acres, Carter and Johnson counties
- Sampson Mountain Wilderness Addition - 2,922 acres, Washington and Unicoi counties

First District, Rep. Phil Roe - 7,368 acres Third District, Rep. Chuck Fleischmann - 12,188 acres

Timeline: Senate

- June 9, 2010 - First introduced in the 111th Congress S. 3470. Assigned to Senate Agriculture Committee. Congress adjourned without action.
- May 26, 2011 - Reintroduced in the 112th Congress as S.1090. Passed Energy and Natural Resources Committee on January 13, 2012. Congress adjourned without action.
- July 15, 2013 - Reintroduced in the 113th Congress as S.1294. Passed out of Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee April 8, 2014. Congress adjourned without action.
- March 17, 2015 - Reintroduced in the 114th Congress as [S.755](#). Assigned to Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee.
- April 27, 2017 - Reintroduced in 115th Congress as S.973. Assigned to Energy and Natural Resources Committee.

House of Representatives - H.R.2218 Sponsor: Congressman Phil Roe (R)

Introduced April 27, 2017, the House companion to S.973 will designate 7,368 acres as wilderness by expanding the Big Laurel Branch and Sampson Mountain Wilderness Areas in Tennessee's First Congressional District. Assigned to Committee on Agriculture and to Committee on Natural Resources.

What to Know:

Current Status: S.973 and H.R.2218 await committee hearings.

Public lands - All 19,558 acres to be designated as Wilderness by the Tennessee Wilderness Act are in federal ownership in the Cherokee National Forest. No private lands are within the proposed wilderness boundaries.

- **Recommended by the US Forest Service** for wilderness designation in the 2004 Forest Plan.
- **About 10%** of the Cherokee National Forest is designated wilderness. Upon passage of the TWA, 13% will be wilderness; this is significantly less than the national average (18%) in other states.

- **Already public land** - No land acquisition is required. According to the Congressional Budget Office, “S. 1294 contains no intergovernmental or private-sector mandates as defined in the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act and would impose no costs on state, local, or tribal governments.”
- **Current uses will NOT change** - the land is **open and will remain open** to hunting, fishing, horseback riding, hiking, camping, paddling and many other forms of non-mechanized recreation. There are no mountain bike/ OHV trails and no roads in the recommended areas. No trails, roads or facilities will close because of this legislation. The areas recommended for wilderness are inventoried as ‘roadless’ by the US Forest Service, and therefore would not be eligible for logging, mining, road building and development in the future.

Strong, bipartisan, public support from businesses, organizations, faith groups, and individuals

- Over 100 local business owners, organizations and over a thousand individuals, actively support this legislation.
- All major regional media outlets have editorialized in support.

Economic Benefits - Wilderness designation ensures quality life amenities that local communities depend on to attract individuals and businesses to locate there (clean water, scenic mountain views, abundant wildlife); provides recreation opportunities, and supports the travel and tourism industry.

- Small gateway forest towns rely almost solely on the recreation and tourist economy to thrive and grow as industry jobs like logging, textiles and other manufacturing are near non-existent in rural East Tennessee.
- According to the Outdoor Industry Association’s 2012 economic report, the TN outdoor recreation industry generates \$8.2 billion in consumer spending each year and creates 83,000 in direct jobs.
- National forest boundary and wilderness areas nearby are places where people want to live, work and play.

Local drinking water will be protected - The Tennessee Wilderness Act will protect all but 200 acres of the entire headwaters of the Bald River, which in turn ensures clean water in the Watauga, Nolichucky, Little Tennessee, Tellico, and Ocoee River Watersheds; good for communities that rely on the Tennessee River for clean drinking water. We all live downstream.

Forest life - The southern Appalachian region is known for its abundant species of plants and animals. Wilderness areas help to sustain vibrant populations of fish and game including brook trout, black bear, turkey, white tailed deer and other forest dwellers - as well as migratory, breeding, and wintering areas for numerous bird species. Cool, clear water is essential for sport fish as well as the hundreds of species of amphibians and reptiles that thrive in the Appalachian wilderness.

Summary:

The Tennessee Wilderness Act is a common sense piece of legislation that is a ‘win-win’ for the citizens of Tennessee, as well as for the legislators that represent them. It permanently protects some of the most significant ecosystems on Earth for future generations, while at the same time safeguards the recreational opportunities and lifestyle amenities that generate billions of dollars in revenue to Tennessee each year.



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; contact: Laura Hodge, Campaign Coordinator, laurahodge@tnwild.org, (423) 807-3456