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Tennessee Conservation Voters

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# 2019 LEGISLATIVE REPORT

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## TENNESSEE CONSERVATION VOTERS: THE ENVIRONMENTAL VOICE

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Tennessee Conservation Voters (TCV) is the only statewide, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated solely to protecting Tennessee's environment and preserving our natural resources through effective legislative and administrative advocacy. TCV turns conservation values into Tennessee priorities by advocating for strong environmental protection policies and holding elected officials accountable.

In the past, TCV has produced a detailed scorecard providing information about legislators' actions on a range of conservation and environmental issues. Our new approach and format this year focuses more on major bills with the goal of keeping citizens informed about legislation that impacts Tennessee's environment. **We urge you to remain informed and to act by contacting legislators and other policy makers. Legislators care about what is valued by their own constituents.**

Developing good relationships with decision-makers, contacting them in an appropriate and timely fashion, and holding them accountable for how they vote are key to moving forward. Our advocacy efforts are essential to guarantee that legislators are well-informed on the importance and value of safeguarding our clean air, clean water, biodiversity, and open spaces. The more they hear from representatives of TCV, our member groups, and especially from citizens and voters like you, the more we can successfully support clean water, clean air and our wild and scenic areas!

### Three Actions You Can Take Today

- Commit to asking at least 3 people to join our TCV Legislative Email Updates list at [www.tnconservationvoters.org](http://www.tnconservationvoters.org). When we are well-organized and informed on conservation issues, our message and impact on legislation is more successful.
- Send a polite and professional email to your legislators today and when they arrive back in session in January 2020 to let them know you are a constituent and that you care about the environment. No matter how good or how bad your legislators' past votes have been on our issues, they need to know that their constituents care.
- Continue working and planning together to make sure we stand unified in the face of unprecedented threats to our environment.

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## 2019 LEGISLATIVE ACTIONS

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**TN General Assembly pre-empts local government regulation of local waste (motivated by fear of plastic bag and container regulation). TCV opposed this bill pushed by self-interested trade groups.** These Senators voted for our position against this bill: **Akbari, Dickerson, Gilmore, Kurita, Kyle, Robinson** and **Yarbro** while **Akbari, Kurita** and **Yarbro** spoke strongly against the bill. Special thanks to **Rep. Freeman** who opposed the bill and to Nashville and Memphis City Council members who pushed to enact positive legislation on single use plastics. These Senators voted for this bad bill: **Bell, Bowling, Briggs, Crowe, Gardenhire, Gresham, Haile, Hensley, Jackson, Johnson, Lundberg, Massey, McNally, Niceley, Pody, Reeves, Rose, Southerland, Stevens, Swann, Watson, White, and Yager.**

**TN General Assembly moves backwards on degradation of our waters.** TN Department of Environment and Conservation and TN Board of Water Quality, Oil and Gas enacted damaging rules that allow continuing pollution and degradation of our waters. TDEC developed these rules in consultation with TN Dept. of Transportation, but without consulting anyone representing the public interest. The legislature approved these dangerous new rules.

**TN General Assembly restricts ability of local utilities and local government efforts to facilitate energy conservation.** A new law makes it harder for consumers, local utilities, and local governments to promote conservation by low income residential energy consumers. The law stops new “opt-out” programs, which benefit low income consumers of energy. Under “opt-out” a consumer is informed that a small part of their utility payment would go to conservation efforts. This usurpation of the authority of local governments and utilities does not impact current “opt-out” programs and was amended to make it less harmful by allowing new “opt-out” programs to be established up until January 1, 2021. These Senators deserve recognition for leading efforts opposing the bill or supporting the less harmful alternative: **Kyle, Southerland, Lundberg, Briggs,** and **Yarbro.** On the House side, special thanks go to **Representatives Hicks, Calfee,** and **Staples.**

**TN General Assembly establishes a paddlecraft advisory committee.** Sponsors **Senator Haile** and **Representative Keisling** deserve positive recognition for this bill, which gave advocates the chance to educate legislators on why requiring paddlers to have a license is not a good idea; the bill also establishes a paddlecraft advisory committee, although the committee is not broadly representative.

**TN General Assembly requires a study on off-highway motor vehicles on habitat and environment.** Sponsors **Senator Southerland** and **Representative Reedy** deserve credit for establishing a committee to study and document impacts of off-highway motor vehicles on surrounding habitat, including habitat loss, resource damage, noise, and vehicle emissions.

**TN General Assembly makes it a felony to interfere with “critical infrastructure” such as gas pipelines and also prohibits use of drones in connection with critical infrastructure.** This newly enacted legislation is part of a national effort from ALEC, an anti-environment think tank. It is likely meant to inhibit the efforts of environmental advocates. We do not support sabotage, but this bill has the potential to suppress legitimate citizen engagement. These House members voted no or abstained in light of these concerns: **Clemmons, Freeman and Lamar.**

**TN General Assembly moves forward on community resilience.** **Senator Yarbrow** and **Representative Freeman** initiated an important effort to assess the historical, present, and projected occurrence of natural catastrophes and extreme weather events in the state. The committee will examine present and projected losses associated with the occurrence of extreme weather events and other natural catastrophes in Tennessee. The initiative also calls for developing recommendations regarding this subject. This idea is currently being studied by the TN Advisory Council on Intergovernmental Relations.

**TN General Assembly begins to focus on illegal waste tire dumps.** **Senator Dickerson** filed a resolution regarding the overall effects of illegal waste tire dumps in Tennessee. State officials have pledged to study the situation with a view toward improved enforcement and whether there is a need for new laws or regulations.

**TN General Assembly promotes outdoor education and recreation.** Successful legislation sponsored by **Senator Gilmore** and **Representative Halford** creates a task force to study and report on the feasibility and benefits of creating the Tennessee Outdoor Education and Recreation Grant Program.

For more information about legislation mentioned in this report, word-search [www.capitol.tn.gov/legislation](http://www.capitol.tn.gov/legislation). To find legislators in your district, visit [www.capitol.tn.gov](http://www.capitol.tn.gov)

You may also contact us by email at [admin@tnconservationvoters.org](mailto:admin@tnconservationvoters.org) and describe what information you need regarding legislation

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