



# Tennessee RiverLine Partnership

## 2019 Annual Report



a vision for north america's next great regional trail system

# OUR VISION

for North America's next great regional trail system

The Tennessee RiverLine is a continuous, multi-modal system of trail experiences along the Tennessee River from Knoxville, TN, to Paducah, KY, that:



**Celebrates** the scenic beauty, rich diversity and storied history of the Tennessee River and the Tennessee River Valley



**Connects** people and communities to each other, their river heritage and the Tennessee River landscape, and



**Catalyzes** new investments in economic opportunity, social health and ecological stewardship

While on the 2019 Pilot Community Program tour, our staff enjoyed an early morning paddle on Kentucky Lake off of Eva Beach in Benton County, TN.

# RIVER AS PARK

The 652-mile Tennessee River and its nine scenic reservoirs combined are a continuous 470,000 acre landscape that is accessible to the public - residents and visitors alike - offering opportunities for canoeing, kayaking, fishing, camping and other types of water-based recreation.

Because of this continuity and public accessibility, Tennessee RiverLine is first and foremost a water trail that offers users of all ages and skill levels the opportunity to safely paddle the storied Tennessee River for an afternoon, a day, a weekend, a week, a month or longer.

The river's banks are also home to more than 700,000 acres of National Parks, recreation areas and wildlife refuges, state and local parks, as well as diverse cities and rural communities. Each offer their own unique stories, experiences and river access to RiverLine users while providing opportunities to paddle, hike, bike, climb, enjoy nature as they are immersed in the beauty of the Tennessee River landscape.

When considering the river, these public landscapes and river communities as a whole, a dynamic 1.2 million acre park suddenly comes into focus. This landscape of opportunities and experiences connected by the river is also the vision for the Tennessee RiverLine.



Director, Brad Collett, discusses assets and key areas for Benton County to focus on in its RiverLine planning with David Brewster of TVA at the 652 to YOU community engagement event.

# A LETTER FROM OUR DIRECTOR

The Tennessee River is a celebrated and iconic landscape. It is home to some of our nation's most important histories, modern accomplishments and diverse—yet fragile—ecological treasures. It powers economies and contributes to a quality of life that makes the 70+ cities, counties, towns and rural communities along its banks among the region's most desirable places to live, work and play.

A river of such profound splendor, historical significance and contemporary value deserves to be seen, experienced and stewarded by all. The Tennessee River, as one of North America's great rivers, merits the development of a great river trail. It was University of Tennessee students' recognition of these ideas that motivated the creation of the Tennessee RiverLine vision and a belief in those ideas and vision that catalyzed to the formation of the Tennessee RiverLine Partnership. These same beliefs, ideas and vision inspire our work to this day.

The year 2019 will always be remembered as a momentous year in the history of the Tennessee RiverLine. It was the year that witnessed the launch of the RiverLine vision and a successful Pilot Community Program. With you—our friends and supporters—we've had formative experiences and enlightening conversations both on and off the river, gathering data and insights that will shape the future of the Tennessee RiverLine vision and our Partnership's mission.

The successes we've experienced this year that you will read in this report were made possible by the sustained commitment of UT, TVA, the National Park Service and the many organizations and volunteers that comprise our Partnership, the vision and effort of Tennessee River community leadership and residents, and the enthusiastic support of individuals, organizations and communities across the valley. It lays a critical foundation that we build on in 2020 and beyond.

For your part in these successes, we are grateful. For your role in the future of the Tennessee RiverLine and our Partnership, we are optimistic. We hope to see you and share our gratitude in person in the near future. In the meantime, please keep in touch by following us on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, visit our website and join our email list at [tnriverline.org](http://tnriverline.org) as we continue our effort to realize the vision for North America's next great regional trail system.

Sincerely,

Brad Collett  
Director, Tennessee RiverLine Partnership  
Associate Professor, UT School of Landscape Architecture

Below the beautiful sunset that overlooks the Cumberland Plateau and Tennessee River, you can see the lights of Bridgeport, AL, and South Pittsburg, TN.

## ABOUT THE PARTNERSHIP

This bold vision for the Tennessee RiverLine originated in the UT School of Landscape Architecture's Tennessee River Studio in the fall of 2016. The students' proposal was received by regional stakeholders with such interest and enthusiasm that in fall of 2017, it catalyzed the formation of the Tennessee RiverLine Partnership.

The Tennessee RiverLine Partnership is a diverse volunteer consortium of Tennessee River advocates from across the Tennessee River Valley and beyond. Each advocate individually and the Partnership collectively is committed to building a shared vision for the Tennessee RiverLine and stewarding it toward implementation.

The Partnership is comprised of tourism and recreation professionals, scholars, planners, agency leaders and nonprofit directors, including representatives from these entities and organizations:

National Park Service Rivers, Trails & Conservation Assistance Program  
The Nature Conservancy  
Tennessee Valley Authority  
Tennessee River Valley Stewardship Council  
Southeast Tennessee Tourism Association  
UT College of Architecture + Design  
UT School of Landscape Architecture + Tennessee River Studio  
UT Chattanooga, Interdisciplinary Geospatial Technology Lab  
Tennessee State Parks  
Tennessee Department of Health  
Tennessee Department of Tourism Development  
City of Knoxville  
Lose Design  
River Discovery Center  
Tennessee Aquarium  
SASAKI

## OUR PURPOSE

Our purpose is to advance the Tennessee RiverLine vision toward implementation. We accomplish this by:

**FACILITATING** the development of the Tennessee RiverLine concept for a multi-modal trail and catalytic infrastructure

**ENGAGING** strategic partners and communities in the development process

**COMMUNICATING** the Tennessee RiverLine concept to targeted audiences

**ESTABLISHING** a sustainable organizational structure, partner participation, and sources of funding for the Tennessee RiverLine Partnership

# YEAR AT A GLANCE

**17** PILOT PROGRAM APPLICATIONS received representing

**34** TENNESSEE RIVER COMMUNITIES that are home to

**1.45** MILLION RESIDENTS in TN, KY and AL

 **2,800** MILES DRIVEN by the RiverLine team to visit and engage

**5** SELECTED PILOT COMMUNITIES + **325** COMMUNITY LEADERS & RESIDENTS who shared feedback + ideas that will shape

**1** VISION FOR NORTH AMERICA'S NEXT GREAT REGIONAL TRAIL SYSTEM

Paducah-McCracken County, KY

Benton County, TN

Roane County, TN

The Shoals, AL

Bridgeport, AL

**4** ONLINE PLATFORMS launched in february, attracting **7,458** UNIQUE VISITS to trriverline.org

**940**  fans **360**  followers **81**  followers **1,007**  subscribers



**43** MEDIA PLACEMENTS in **3** STATES: TN, AL, KY up from 1 placement in 2018

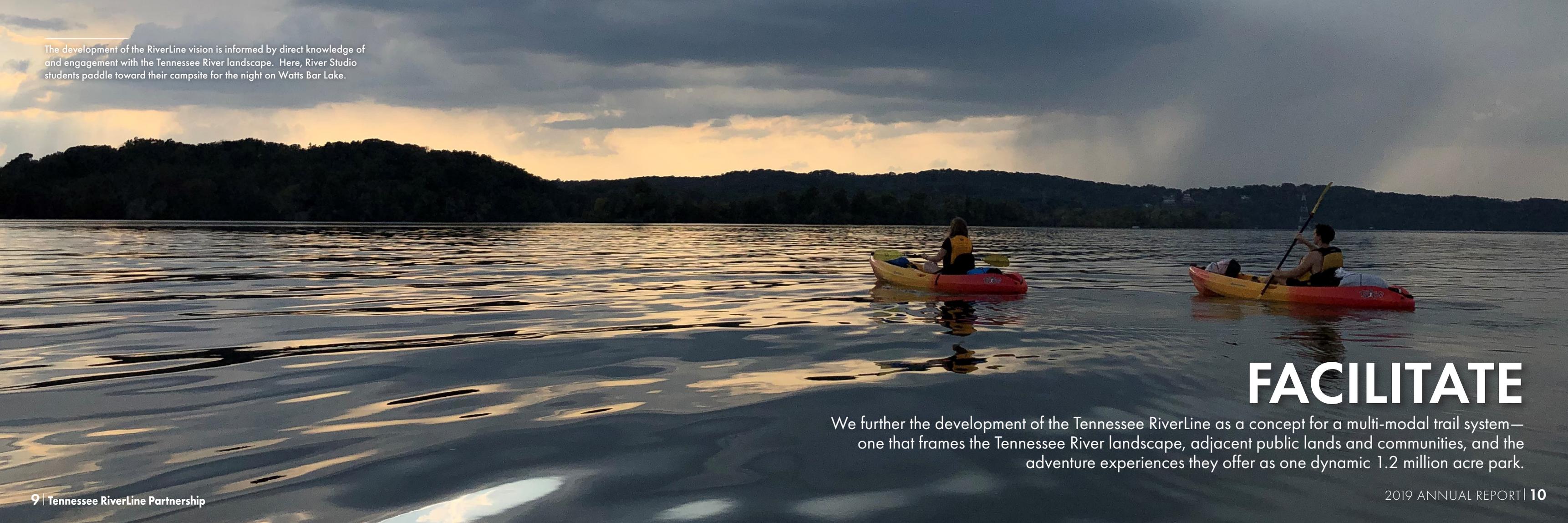
**2,845** RiverGauge MARKERS + ROUTES were placed by

**314** SURVEY PARTICIPANTS



UT Landscape Architecture students enjoy an afternoon on the Tennessee River in Roane County while exploring and researching sites along Watts Bar Lake.

The development of the RiverLine vision is informed by direct knowledge of and engagement with the Tennessee River landscape. Here, River Studio students paddle toward their campsite for the night on Watts Bar Lake.



# FACILITATE

We further the development of the Tennessee RiverLine as a concept for a multi-modal trail system— one that frames the Tennessee River landscape, adjacent public lands and communities, and the adventure experiences they offer as one dynamic 1.2 million acre park.

## TENNESSEE RIVER STUDIO

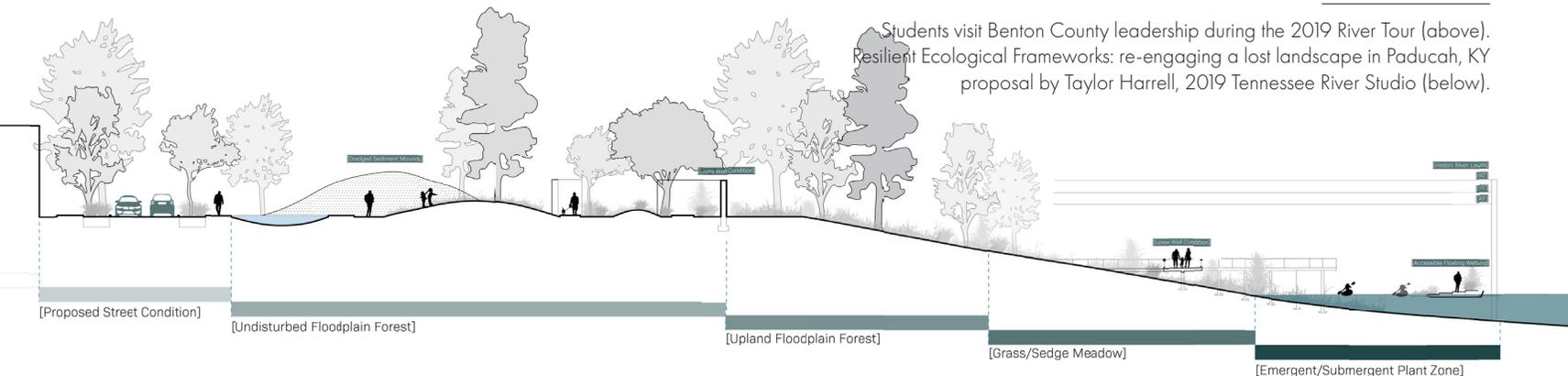
Beginning with the inception of the Tennessee RiverLine vision, in 2016, students in the University of Tennessee College of Architecture and Design have provided creative capacity, innovative ideas and inspired effort that power the Tennessee RiverLine Partnership.

This tradition continued in 2019. Students in the UT School of Landscape Architecture's Tennessee River Studio spent the fall semester exploring opportunities for our 2019 Pilot Communities to appreciate an enhanced relationship with the Tennessee River and articulate a local vision for the RiverLine. Using the RiverLine's guiding principles and data from the summer's 652 to YOU programs, students conducted research and developed conceptual designs for RiverLine elements including multi-functional pavilions, campsites, access docks and ramps, enhanced shoreline habitat, connective greenways and more.

Students will present their proposals to Pilot Community representatives at the Tennessee RiverLine Summit in January 2020.



Students visit Benton County leadership during the 2019 River Tour (above). Resilient Ecological Frameworks: re-engaging a lost landscape in Paducah, KY proposal by Taylor Harrell, 2019 Tennessee River Studio (below).



Paducah/McCracken County, KY, community members investigate points for improvement and highlight existing river assets in their community using the Map It! activity at the 652 to YOU community engagement event.

**“The Tennessee RiverLine will magnify our connection to the Tennessee River by providing exposure to our Tennessee River recreational assets, stimulating public interest and growth in the regional economy.”**

- Chris Gunter,  
Director, Bridgeport Depot Museum

## GAP ANALYSIS

Our team is conducting a gap analysis in order to better understand the existing assets and identify gaps in their distribution along the River. Using data from the Tennessee Valley Authority and The University of Tennessee, Chattanooga's Interdisciplinary Geospatial Technology Lab, early analysis results identify 13 “clusters of concern” where limited access and supporting amenities may affect distance paddlers' safety or comfort. Additional study will evaluate the distribution of other amenities and infrastructures critical to the Tennessee RiverLine experience. An understanding of these gaps will better inform the Partnership, as well as community leaders and city and regional planning teams, as we work toward a continuous trail system.

## 652 to YOU

Our staff conducted five “652 to YOU” programs in summer 2019; one in each of our 2019 Pilot Communities. Each program included mapping exercises, roundtable discussions, and an investment prioritization activity. Designed and delivered in collaboration with our Pilot Community Partners, these programs revealed valuable insights, use patterns, and community needs and aspirations that will shape local and regional RiverLine visions thanks to robust participation from Pilot Community leadership and residents.

## RIVERGAUGE

To enable all Tennessee River communities to offer feedback and ideas, we conducted an online survey, called RiverGauge from July through October, 2019. This interactive survey was designed to help to identify existing assets, river use patterns and areas of need that will guide our next steps in vision development, planning and implementation.

In July 2019, residents of Roane County prioritized potential RiverLine investments, such as pavilions, bike lanes and boat launches, to fulfill their community's needs using "What if?" boards at the 652 to YOU community engagement event.



# ENGAGE

We collaborate with partners, community leaders and residents in the visioning process. Inclusive planning is among our guiding principles, and we want all voices to be heard. Because, together, we can achieve something much greater than any one organization or community by itself.



Shoals community members share current uses and ideas for new investments along the river's edge during the Map It! activity at 652 to YOU.

## PILOT COMMUNITY PROGRAM: 652 to YOU

In the spring, all Tennessee River Communities were invited to apply to participate in the 2019 Pilot Community Program, called 652 to YOU. 17 applications representing 50 percent of all counties, cities and towns along the river were submitted, from which five Pilot Communities were selected: Benton County, TN, Roane County, TN, The Shoals, AL, Bridgeport, AL, and Paducah/McCracken County, KY.

652 to YOU is an outcome-driven program designed to help the Partnership understand opportunities and challenges posed to each community related to river use. The program also offers a platform for community leaders and residents to share feedback about the Tennessee RiverLine vision and their aspirations for an enhanced relationship with the Tennessee River in their community. Each visit included a community tour, river experience, leadership workshop and community engagement event. In all, 350 residents and leaders engaged in 652 to YOU and participated in SWOT analysis, mapping activities, roundtable discussions and investment prioritization.

*In February 2020, applications for 2020 652 to YOU program, as well as a summary report of findings from the 2019 pilot offering, will be shared by email and available at [tnriverline.org](http://tnriverline.org).*

## RIVERGAUGE

To ensure all Tennessee River communities had an opportunity to offer feedback and ideas about the vision, we worked with our partner Sasaki to develop an interactive online mapping tool, called RiverGauge. More than 300 valley residents and visitors used this tool to share their favorite river experiences and helped identify existing assets, as well as opportunities and ideas for access enhancement along the river's 652-mile reach.

## APPLY TO BE A 2020 652 to YOU COMMUNITY

Following this year's overwhelming 652 to YOU success, the program will continue in summer of 2020 to involve more communities along the river's reach. Our team looks to increase diversity of resident participants and provide additional support to communities for event promotion.

*Applications will go live on [tnriverline.org](http://tnriverline.org) in February 2020.*



In September, residents of Roane County experience the Tennessee River during a community paddle event, led by County Executive Ron Woody.

## ROANE COUNTY: COMMUNITY PADDLE

More than 50 community leaders and residents of Roane County and the surrounding area met on a Saturday morning in late September to experience the 4-mile reach of the Tennessee River between Riley Creek Campground and Kingston City Park. Led by County Executive Ron Woody and members of the Roane County leadership team, and accompanied by State Representative Kent Calafee, this group included both experienced and first-time paddlers. Events like this one will allow us to continue breaking down barriers to river access and building a culture of non-motorized recreation on the Tennessee River.

## THE SHOALS: STRATEGIC DOING WORKSHOP

In November, 20 members of The Shoals community gathered to brainstorm ways to strategically position their community as a regional hub for outdoor recreation. The workshop—planned and executed by The Shoals leadership team with support from TVA—focused on feasible opportunities to work toward realizing the community's recreation aspirations and its local vision for the Tennessee RiverLine. Their plans include developing a database of recreational opportunities, establishing annual community events, and creating a network to connect recreation centers.



Director Brad Collett presents the vision for North America's next great regional trail system to community leaders and stakeholders in The Shoals.

# COMMUNICATE

We share the Tennessee RiverLine vision with audiences across the region and beyond. By recognizing its ambition, we celebrate and connect existing recreational, cultural and environmental resources, and catalyze economic development, public health and ecological stewardship.



Director Brad Collett presents the concept of “River as a Park” to members and friends of Benton County at its 652 to YOU community engagement event in June.

## PRESENTATIONS

Throughout the year, our team had the privilege of sharing the Tennessee RiverLine vision 15 times to a range of diverse audiences and groups. These invited presentations included the 2019 Tennessee Greenways and Trails Forum, the Association of Tennessee Valley Governments, the Tennessee River Basin Network, and the Keep Knoxville Beautiful Sustainability Summit.

*Interested in hosting our team for an informational meeting or presentation? Contact [director@tnriverline.org](mailto:director@tnriverline.org).*

## MEDIA PLACEMENTS

Keeping our supporters and the general public up-to-date about the Tennessee RiverLine is critical to realizing its transformative vision. In 2019, the RiverLine earned more than 40 local media placements in Alabama, Kentucky and Tennessee.

*Learn more about the Tennessee RiverLine at [tnriverline.org](http://tnriverline.org), and stay up-to-date with us by following us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.*

## VISION VIDEO

Thanks to the generous support of University of Tennessee Communications and Marketing, our inspirational 4-minute vision video, which showcases the river’s dynamic landscape and “River as Park” concept, was produced and released in May 2019.

*Visit [tnriverline.org](http://tnriverline.org) today to watch the Tennessee RiverLine vision video.*





In July, leaders from Roane County and the Partnership spend the morning touring their reach of the Tennessee River on pontoon boats, courtesy of Bunch Marine.

# ESTABLISH

We are the driving force behind the development of the Tennessee RiverLine, and we strive to be an enduring resource for its communities and partners. As we work toward vision implementation, we aim to create a sustainable platform for stakeholder participation, partner recruitment and funding.

## THE PARTNERSHIP

The advancement of the Tennessee RiverLine toward its next stages of planning, development and implementation would not be possible without the time, effort, expertise, technical assistance and financial support of these organizations and volunteers that comprise the Tennessee RiverLine Partnership.

## LEADERSHIP TEAMS

In each of the 2019 Pilot Communities, a leadership team was established to continue the momentum from the summer's activities. Each community's team consists of 5-9 members who meet to discuss next steps to achieve the Tennessee RiverLine vision in their community.

## STAFF GROWTH

Since the Partnership's formation in 2017, University of Tennessee faculty and students have provided critical staff support to lead the development of North America's next great regional trail system. This year, thanks to the generous support of TVA, five UT graduate research assistants and three interns served as Tennessee RiverLine staff. This staff was anchored by a National Park Service Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Fellow who served as project manager.

Accomplishing our strategic priorities moving forward will require additional organizational capacity and dedicated staff made possible through creative partnerships and diverse funding sources.

## WE SALUTE OUR PARTNERS



Email [director@tnriverline.org](mailto:director@tnriverline.org) to learn how you can make an impact by partnering with us.



Tennessee River Studio students met with our partner, TVA, to learn about river management and development policy.



Benton County residents and the RiverLine staff spend a morning in June cleaning up Tennessee River shoreline at Eva Beach in Nathan Bedford Forrest State Park.

# GET INVOLVED

We need your help. The Tennessee RiverLine is a long-term initiative that will require sustained investment of time, talent and financial resources from a range of stakeholders, as well as engagement and commitment from the states and communities that the river touches.



## TECHNICAL ADVISORY GROUP

Are you an active river user, or would you consider yourself an expert in flat-water paddling? Join our Technical Advisory group! This team will be formed in spring 2020 to help advise RiverLine planners about the preferences and practical needs of both the day- and long-distance user of the Tennessee River.

To join, email [info@tnriverline.org](mailto:info@tnriverline.org).

## PARTNER WITH US

Does your organization's vision, mission and values align with ours? Partner with us in this journey toward bringing the Tennessee RiverLine to our region and your community.

To discuss becoming a partner, contact [director@tnriverline.org](mailto:director@tnriverline.org).

## REP THE RIVERLINE

In February 2020, we will launch an online store in partnership with Nothing Too Fancy, a locally-owned t-shirt boutique in Knoxville, TN. Rep your love for the Tennessee RiverLine (and us!) with branded t-shirts, water bottles and stickers. Proceeds from sales will be used to support RiverLine outreach initiatives around the valley.

Order your gear at [tnriverline.org/store](http://tnriverline.org/store) beginning in February, 2020.



In August, members of the Paducah/ McCracken County, KY, leadership team and Partnership prepare to paddle near the Tennessee's confluence with the Ohio River.

Students in UT's Tennessee River Studio savor the amber sunset over the river near Guntersville, AL.

*"This project...could be one of the greatest legacies we could offer future generations."*

- Marcus Anderson  
President, Friends of Pickwick Landing State Park

# GUIDING PRINCIPLES

for North America's next great regional trail system

The following principles are embraced as a unifying, yet flexible framework of ideas and values that will guide the future development of the Tennessee RiverLine across the dynamics of geography and time.

- Resource Conservation and Stewardship
- River Access, Visibility and Awareness
- Wildlife and Ecology
- Identity and Culture
- Safety, Recreation and Health
- Education and Interpretation
- Social and Community Connections
- Economic Development
- Regionalism
- Equity and Diversity
- Engagement and Inclusivity
- Design and Design Thinking



**Tennessee RiverLine Partnership**

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## OUR PURPOSE

to advance the Tennessee RiverLine vision toward implementation

   [tnRiverLine.org](https://tnRiverLine.org)