

Anyone CAN Make a Difference!

By Diane Perschbacher

The Middle Tennessee Group of the Sierra Club is active in preserving, exploring, and enjoying the natural environment throughout our state's mid-section. Our national organization, Sierra Club, is the largest grassroots conservation organization in the United States. At the local level, we are active with environmental issues, sponsoring outings and participating in local educational events. As the Sierra group based in Nashville, our state capital, we also have a very active legislative team, which assists in making sound conservation legislation at both the local and state level, often behind the scenes. Legislative activity, along with citizen participation and coalitions of like-minded groups, working towards the same goal, can make a difference in preserving the soil underneath your feet, or the water in your local river.

The McCrory Lane quarry on the Harpeth River is one such example. Starting in 2006, an investor group proposed that the McCrory Lane quarry (located about 500 feet from the river, near the Davidson/Cheatam county line) be turned into a construction waste landfill. The landfill would require an exception to current law, as the Harpeth is a state scenic river, and no landfills can be present less than two miles from the river. (This is to prevent possible pollution leaking into the river.) While a controlled construction waste landfill wouldn't necessarily be a problem, history has shown that they are often abused as illegal dumping grounds. Changing state law, too, would set a dangerous precedent for the health of all our state scenic rivers.

Members of Middle TN Sierra Club's legislative committee met separately with the Harpeth River Watershed Association (HRWA - the conservation organization leading opposition to the landfill), the bill's sponsors, and the developers and their lobbyist, to work behind the scenes in understanding the proposal, concerns and potential solutions. Our working relationship with some of the bill's sponsors facilitated efforts in communication between the environmental community and the legislators.

To gain public input, the bill's sponsors held a meeting, which Sierra (as well as other groups) publicized through websites and email notices. The HRWA in particular was very successful in notifying the public of the issue and raising awareness of the meeting.

Several Sierra members attended this public meeting, while others wrote letters or called the bill's sponsors. Public opinion was mainly against an exception to the state Scenic Rivers Act. Because of the efforts of all citizens and environmental groups, the scenic river exception bill was withdrawn. Groups and individuals had contacted their legislators, the press and governmental regulatory agencies, distributed fliers, attended meetings and signed petitions, to show public concern for the health of our scenic rivers. A difference was made.

Diane Perschbacher was the past conservation chair of the local Sierra Club group. For information about the local chapter contact Diane@Propson.com. This article has been provided courtesy of the Green Living Journal, a project of the Center for Holistic Ecology and the Cumberland Green Bioregional Council.