



STATE OF TENNESSEE
Ned McWherter
Governor

DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION
J. W. Luna
Commissioner
615/742-6747

Michael L. Countess
Deputy Commissioner
615/742-6636

Roy C. Ashley
Assistant Commissioner/State Forester
615/742-6615

H. Gerald McKinney
Assistant Commissioner/Director of
Parks
615/742-6745

Eugene F. Naifeh
Administrative Services
615/742-6574

Frances R. Wallas
General Counsel
615/742-6751

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Memphis

Erlewood Barden
Memphis

Dr. Wallace Bigbee
McMinnville

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For The **B E N E F I T**

As I write my first column for *The Tennessee Conservationist*, a number of changes are taking place in the Department of Conservation's structure.

Many of you know that I have served, for the past 2 1/2 years, as commissioner of the Department of Health and Environment. It was a huge, often unwieldy department with programs ranging from Medicaid to solid waste management. For many years, conservationists and environmentalists had lobbied for the department to be split into two separate agencies. Many felt that the state's environmental regulatory programs had not received the attention they deserved because Tennessee's public health service programs were such a challenge to administer.

Well, Governor McWherter felt the same way. As part of his emphasis on the three E's — education, economic development and the environment — he ordered the reorganization of state programs for environmental regulation and natural resource protection.

We're now in the transition period. I was sworn in as the commissioner of Conservation in mid-January. Shortly thereafter, all of the state's environmental regulatory programs were transferred to the Department of Conservation by executive order of the governor. Come July 1, we will officially be called the Department of Environment and Conservation, upon the Legislature's approval. There will also be a separate Department of Health.

As you may have read, the governor has also signed an executive order transferring the Forestry Division to the Department of Agriculture on July 1. Originally, plans also called for the July 1, 1991, transfer of the Division of State Parks to the Department of Tourist Development. However, a number of questions and concerns were raised about such a move. The administration concluded that these concerns had merit and deserved further attention.

Should the State Parks Division transfer take place, it will be made no earlier than July 1, 1992. In the meantime, this part of the reorganization will be reviewed and, should the executive branch decide to make a change, there will be significant opportunity for public input, and the General Assembly will have an opportunity to review the matter next year.

Of course, most of the Department of Conservation's divisions are certain to be a part of the new department. The Abandoned Mine Reclamation Program is a natural fit. So is the Division of Ecological Services, which manages comprehensive data bases about critical natural resources. The Division of Geology is a mostly research-oriented unit, with much of its staff occupied with geologic mapping. They also work to protect the environment by regulating oil and gas drilling and production practices in the state. And it looks as if the Division of Archaeology and *The Conservationist* magazine will be a part of the Environment and Conservation Department.

The largest component of the new department will be the environment section of the old Department of Health and Environment. These programs include Radiological Health, Air Pollution Control, Water Management, Solid and Hazardous Waste Management, the state Superfund Program and Underground Petroleum Storage Tanks. We're going to take a hard look at all of these programs to identify where improvements need to be made. In the coming months, we will be seeking advice from folks like you on needed changes in our environmental regulatory programs. We will also get out in the state's communities to gather ideas.

I am excited about the future and what this reorganization will mean for the people of Tennessee. A department whose only mission is the protection of our natural resources will truly work for the benefit of Tennessee's citizens.

J.W. Luna, Commissioner