



TACIR

The Tennessee Advisory Commission
on Intergovernmental Relations



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MEMORANDUM

TO: Commission Members
FROM: Cliff Lippard 
Executive Director

DATE: 27 January 2017

SUBJECT: Southeast Tennessee Regional Water Supply Study–Information Update

Near the end of October 2016, the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) asked customers of ten southeast Tennessee water utilities to temporarily limit water used for non-essential purposes in the face of extreme drought conditions. Many of the utilities were finding it difficult to meet customer demands despite sharing resources. The US Drought Monitor had classified several counties in the area as experiencing severe, extreme, or even exceptional drought conditions, and the National Weather service had indicated that precipitation in these areas was as much as 16 inches below normal. No significant precipitation was predicted at the time for the remainder of 2016, and both surface and ground water levels in the region were declining. An article in the Chattanooga Times Free Press, [attachment A](#), describes conditions in the area at the time.

Two utilities had to take extreme measures to ensure continued service. The City of Pikeville, which relies on wells and serves the Bledsoe Correctional Facility, laid a line over land to the Sequatchie River. The Fall Creek Falls Utility District, which ordinarily gets its water from a treatment plant at the now-closed state-owned Taft Youth Development Center, resorted to an elaborate temporary treatment facility set up to draw water from the lake at Fall Creek Falls State Park and tied into the distribution system via an existing fire hydrant. (See [attachment B](#) for a news article describing past challenges faced by the utility district.)

This is the second time since the historically worst drought of 2007-08 that parts of Tennessee have experienced severe drought. The 2012 drought was broken by an

unusually wet July, as was the 2016 drought in Middle Tennessee. The Cumberland Plateau, and most especially the Sequatchie Valley region, was not so lucky. In response to the extreme conditions in the region and its continuing water supply challenges, Governor Haslam asked TDEC to help find a long-term solution. To begin the process, Deputy Commissioner Brock Hill invited seven counties and the development districts that serve them to a meeting on December 1, 2016, where they heard from staff of the National Weather Service and made their case for relief. Staff of the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) led the meeting and explained study options available to the group. TACIR's senior public policy consultant and former executive director Lynnisse Roehrich-Patrick served on TDEC's Water Resources Technical Advisory Committee and attended the meeting. Minutes are attached ([attachment C](#)).

TDEC and the USACE hosted a second meeting to further discuss the Cumberland Plateau's water supply on January 13, 2017. In addition to the host agencies and Ms. Roehrich-Patrick, representing TACIR, attendees included representatives from local utilities, local governments, the University of Tennessee's Municipal Technical Advisory Service, the US Department of Agriculture's Rural Development program, the Tennessee Valley Authority, the Southeast Tennessee Development District (SETNDD), and the Tennessee Association of Utility Districts. The attendees agreed that SETNDD will hold a meeting of interested utilities to identify those that will move forward together as a defined study region. The next step for the working group could be to gather preliminary information to determine which of three study processes to pursue.

Concerns about water supply are of course not limited to any one area of Tennessee. The attached fact sheet (attachment D) prepared by Ms. Roehrich-Patrick provides information on those concerns and on various responses in the Memphis area and on the Cumberland Plateau, as well as additional information on issues and responses in Middle Tennessee. Additionally, a collection of several additional news articles and information sheets demonstrating the statewide scope of water supply concerns are provided for your information (attachment E).