

## LAND BETWEEN THE LAKES ADVISORY BOARD SUMMARY OF MEETING

April 9, 2025

The Land Between the Lakes (LBL) Advisory Board (Board) convened at 9:00 A.M. April 9, 2025, at the Forest Service Administrative Office Building, 100 Van Morgan Drive, Golden Pond, Kentucky, 42211.

In accordance with the provisions of Public Law 92-463, the meeting was open to the public, and it was also made available through a virtual USDA approved meeting tool. To view the recording of the meeting visit: <https://landbetweenthelakes.us/advisoryboard>

### Board Members Present:

Walter Battle  
Mark Turner  
Abigale “Abby” Smith  
Susan “Ski” Witzofsky  
John Zimmer  
Patrick Lemons  
De’Etra Young  
Johnny Wall  
Nancy Dawson  
Lori Oakley  
David Nickell

### Board Staff Present:

Mary Moore, Chairperson  
Jim McCoy, Designated Federal Officer  
Christine Bombard, Administrative Liaison

### Facilitators:

Jordan Crain  
Chris Thornock

### Forest Service Staff Present:

Jared Baker, Strategic Administrative Services Staff Officer  
John Westbrook, Special Project Manager  
Scott Raymond, Public Affairs Officer  
Jamey Thweatt, Recreation & Engineering Staff Officer  
Russell Harris, Fire Management Staff Officer  
Greg Barnes, Business Performance Specialist  
Andy Mowrey, Area Planner  
Shane Brady, Partnership Coordinator  
Chip Littrell, Safety & Occupational Health Officer  
Kathy Coursey, Financial Specialist  
Emily Cleaver, Visitor Information Specialist  
Abigail Wright, Public Affairs Apprentice

Others in Attendance (In Person or Virtual) for all or a Portion of the Meeting:

Donnie Holland

James Oakley

Della Oliver

Jaime Smith, Lyon County Judge Executive

Edward Marlowe, WKDZ/WHVO

Stan Humphries, Trigg County Judge Executive

Randal Kot

Elaine Jackson, LBLA

Steve Nolen, LBLA

Andy Anderson, Tipton

Morgan Alvey

A brief overview of designated exit routes, meeting places, and proper safety protocols was provided at the beginning of the meeting.

Jim McCoy, Designated Federal Officer, thanked everyone for their participation in the meeting. He shared that the agenda would primarily focus on roads, which was timely, and that he was looking forward to a great conversation and the input of the Board.

As this was Chairperson Mary Moore's first meeting in this role, she provided a brief biography to the Board. Moore is the new Deputy Regional Forester over Natural Resources and Information Management and has been with the Forest Service for 24 years. She shared she was hoping to foster a collaborative and forward-thinking day.

Each Board member also provided a brief introduction of themselves.

### **Old Business and Updates - Jim McCoy, Line & Staff**

A motion was made and passed to approve the minutes from the last meeting.

#### **Golden Pond Overlook:**

There is work being done to construct a road going up to Golden Pond Overlook. Kentucky Transportation Cabinet is in the design phase for this road, which is expected to be completed in a few months. The project will be funded utilizing a grant and is anticipated to be completed or nearly completed by the next Board meeting.

#### **Endowment:**

The LBL Protection Act (Act) of 1998 established two funds for the Forest Service. One is the LBL Management Fund, where fees from recreation and resource use get deposited. The second is the LBL Trust Fund, which was mandated to be an interest-bearing fund in Treasury. Its funding came from a \$5 million legislative endowment from Tennessee Valley Authority to the U.S. Forest Service during the 5 five years after the transfer. Interest rates vary with the U.S. Treasury market, and interest is paid every 6 months.

Until recently, this fund was managed like an appropriation, as staff recommended projects in line with language in the Act. However, spending the interest on projects, and not actively reinvesting unspent interest, led to the funds not growing in a way that offset inflation. Strategic Administrative Services staff recommended we enter a period of focused growth to try to rebuild the purchasing power of the fund. Two-thirds of the money was invested in a 20-year treasury bond earning 4.5% interest. The other one-third was placed in a short-term investment, making it more liquid and available if projects are approved. Both investments pay out interest every 6 months. If no projects are assigned, interest will be actively reinvested. This focused reinvestment of interest generates the same effect as compounding interest, helping shield the fund from the effects of inflation.

#### Burning:

Prescribed fires on the unit held several goals this season:

- Ecosystem sustainability
- Burning 90% of grasses in open areas
- Burning 50% or greater of woody stems

Fifteen burns were planned this year, but due to rainfall and the fires in the Southern Region, the burns had to be prioritized. In total, roughly 2,000 combined acres were burned. The plan is to increase the acreage of the prescribed fire program 50% over 10 years.

Part of the burn near the Nature Station did contain core areas. It was asked why staff burned in a core area. Originally, core areas were set aside from active management. The core area program was terminated years ago, but it is still a prescription area in the Forest Plan.

Core areas are all being evaluated with questions such as how were they designated, why is one favored over another, etc. Some contain nonnative species planted for erosion control, such as loblolly pines. A commitment was made to not burn core areas “just because,” and to try to meet the intent of the idea as best as possible.

#### Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR):

The LiDAR data collection is going to be done in two phases: imagery and LiDAR data. Staff are hoping to get some of the imagery in June or July, which will be multispectral energy meaning staff will be able to look at vegetation in different wavelengths.

One of the benefits of this data is that it will be used in a forest health assessment. The data will be able to assist with preparation for assessments, marking, etc. Data is anticipated sometime this fall.

#### New Budget Tracking Tool:

LBL recently switched to Smartsheets as a budget management tool. This software allows detailed tracking of budgets through expenditures, contracts and the way that expenses relate to

different projects. The Smartsheets program cost \$38,000 to develop and costs \$2,000 per year. Budget staff estimate the program will save \$100,000 a year in tracking.

#### Feral Hogs:

This year, 1,046 hogs were taken through aerial operations, and 94 hogs were taken using ground traps. Staff are still trying to determine if the higher number is because of more efficient operations or an increased hog population.

There is no current estimate as to the number of hogs on property. Last year, efforts took out 780 hogs compared to roughly 1,200 this year. According to staff, one of the best barometers is farming effectiveness. Last year, farmers on the South end planted 800 acres of crops and were able to harvest roughly 200.

It was asked if other areas are seeing a similar hog population as to LBL. Kentucky Department of Fish & Wildlife shared that they have decent control, and Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency said that the best comparison they have is what they see in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

#### Special Projects:

Staff are focusing on trying to find a way to make LiDAR available to other institutions to be used as a learning tool. Beginning conversations with high schools are being held with the goal of getting this information into the hands of young students. Once the program begins, staff hope to be able to update the data every 3-5 years and are even looking for opportunities to engage with postsecondary students.

It was asked if LiDAR was a potential avenue to help with the feral hog population by showing disturbances in topography. Staff shared that while the technology was sensitive enough, the issue is that the data is received 9 months after imaging. However, it was also shared that another Forest Service area is working on programs with LiDAR data and significant decreases in the 9-month timeline are being seen.

#### Invasive Species:

Staff are starting a nonnative invasive species environmental assessment that will cover the entire recreation area. The inspiration is to do an all-encompassing environmental assessment and utilize any activity that can be used to attack them.

There will be a public notice going out soliciting ideas and a 30-day comment period. However, staff wants to have an early public scoping period. The plan is for the Environmental Analysis to be adaptive and not contain a detailed analysis up front. Staff will create a work plan at intervals for the public to review specific areas.

It was also clarified that the whole Board has been placed on the Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) list and an email is sent out with a link to the website, which is the most up to date listing, when necessary. Notifications will go out when scoping for the project starts.

#### Special Events Coordinator:

Steve Nolen, new Special Events Coordinator for the Friends of Land Between the Lakes, introduced himself to the Board. He shared that his primary goal is to create events that will allow people to use the public land. The hope is to reach a broad and diverse audience. The events should be about good stewardship and bring more people than ever to LBL. Funds raised will go directly back into the property.

#### New Projects:

Last year, LBL received \$500,000 from Congress earmarked as “Phase One Nature Station.” We have been told we will be receiving a phase two designation of \$4.5 million this year. LBL hired C&C, a landscape architecture and public scoping company to draw up a strategic plan for what the Nature Station can look like. C&C also subcontracted with a company that focuses on cultural and historical landscape architecture. The plan should be completed by the end of the calendar year.

LBL has also contracted Canopy to work on a planned Children’s Forest. The current vision is to have three different locations across the property. The Northern location will be the 8,000-acre Nature Watch area, which the Nature Station is a part of. The middle will encompass the South Bison Range and the Homeplace, and the third will be Brandon Spring Group Center. This project is still in the preliminary stages. Staff also assured that activities for children with disabilities will be incorporated.

#### American Chestnuts:

By the latest count, 30-35 chestnut trees are still surviving. Our silviculturist is beginning to take off the cages and snip off the Chinese chestnut portions.

#### Great American Outdoors Act:

LBL applied for projects through this act a few years ago and has been tentatively approved with funding expected to arrive in the next budget. Staff shared they expect to receive \$1.5 million for the reconstruction of Jones Creek Bridge, and that once funds arrive, they can begin soliciting bids. The second project encompasses updating intern housing at Brandon Spring as well as updating the sewer lagoon at Jenny Ridge and redeveloping the sewer treatment plant at Hillman Ferry. The total sum of this project is roughly \$5.96 million. According to staff, because of the heavy design, the design phase will not begin until funds arrive. It is estimated that design, development and implementation will take 3 years.

#### Turkey Population:

Staff do not have data for the turkey population, but they do for turkey harvest and have noticed a significant decline. As such, the following actions were taken:

- A 30% reduction in the number of quota hunt permits issued
- An addition of one day to the quota hunt

- Days removed from the open hunt
- Plans to create a “turkey roundtable” to discuss the issue

Staff also shared that they had to change vendors for the quota hunt last year, and when migrating the data, found 800 fraudulent entries such as people using multiple names to create multiple accounts for one person. There were also 3,216 applicants for the quota hunt this year, which is 400 more than in 2024.

#### Bat Conservation Strategy:

This strategy came about as a culmination of a partnership between Fish & Wildlife and Forest Service Regions 8 and 9. According to staff, bats have very unique requirements when it comes to protection and this strategy is meant to streamline the process for checking impacts on them before starting projects. It is still being learned, but the hope is that it will streamline the process. The intent was to take a range-wide view of the species to get more conservation information in a big picture format.

It was asked if there is a master list of endangered species on LBL. Staff do have this, and it can be made available to the public.

#### **Transportation System Presentation – Jordan Crain**

Engineering staff shared that when Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) took over the area, it acquired all roads except 68/80. The agreement made was that the roads would be maintained to the level they were when acquired or better if needed for programs. TVA performed all maintenance in house and had a budget to do so.

When LBL transferred to the Forest Service, the Agency had to implement its own operational maintenance level. There are 5 levels of roads:

- Level one roads: roads placed in “storage” for intermittent use
- Level two roads: roads maintained for high-clearance (i.e., 4-wheel drive) vehicle access only
- Level three roads: roads maintained for passenger cars, but comfort is low priority
- Level four roads: roads maintained to a moderate degree of user comfort
- Level five roads: roads designed for a high degree of user comfort (paved roads)

When LBL was transferred to the Forest Service from TVA, all paved roads were labeled as forest highways and maintenance was designated to the States. The Secretary of Transportation was supposed to reimburse some or all of these costs to States. In 2012, Moving Ahead for Progress stopped forest highway maintenance funds, so there was a gap in funding. The Federal Land Access Program was created for special projects on roads that accessed federal lands, but could only be used for special projects, so not routine maintenance. Also, funding is not guaranteed as it is competitive. The pot of money that States have to pull from is getting smaller and smaller, and each state has less than \$100,000 remaining for reimbursement.

It was raised that the map roads use the TVA levels (100, 200, 300 etc.) but these roads have nothing to do with the condition of the road. However, the public perception is that they do. Board members asked if there was a way for the public to identify road conditions, and staff referenced the Motor Vehicle Use Map.

Road maintenance is funded through appropriated dollars and revenue. There is also the option of off-unit sources of awarded funding for specific designated projects. There is also grant funding.

The road grading plan follows the following order:

- High priority urgent needs (funerals, storms, major damage)
- Reunions (scheduled by date)
- Recreation roads (Open by Memorial Day)
- Other needs by proximity

Last year, \$2.6 million was spent on road maintenance. The State received no funding and LBL received \$225,000. That is a \$9,250,000 gap in necessary funding.

It was asked how poorly maintained roads affect visitation and total revenue, but staff are unsure at this time.

Environmental Education Coordinator:

Laura Caudill is the new Environmental Education Coordinator for Friends of Land Between the Lakes. She will be working on both the Nature Station and Children's Forest as well as hoping to revamp the Junior Ranger program.

### **Transportation System Brainstorming Session: Jordan Crain**

It was brought up that some people that visit LBL like to ride on roads that are in bad shape sometimes causing more damage. Law Enforcement has stopped vehicles for this in the past.

It was also asked if the families that use roads for funerals make any contributions. Staff explained that when TVA took over, it was expected that this access be maintained.

- Closing roads
- Gating roads
- Seasonal closures
- Firewood sales along roads of the cut debris
- Routine ditch work and culvert clean outs
- Adding road maintenance to timber sale contracts
- Education through signage
- Using meat from feral hogs for money (it was explained this can't be done due to USDA regulations)
- Adopt the Road programs

- Donations from local businesses i.e. rock quarries
- Issue vehicle permits/stickering program (LBL is not allowed to charge an entrance fee)
- Applying for National Scenic Byway and Bikeway grants
- Creating bike trails
- Gating cemeteries with keypad access
- Training programs with trade schools, military programs, high schools, vocational schools
- Utilizing Job Corps centers
- Inmate labor
- Renting equipment for training on property
- Partner with Trade and Operators Unions
- A tourism tax
- Christmas tree farms and pumpkin patches

### **Recreation, Environmental Education & Heritage:**

The fee at the Elk and Bison Prairie has not been raised for over 20 years. If the cost had increased with inflation, it would now be \$11.00. The Board suggested raising the entry price from \$5.00 to \$10.00 and adding an annual pass for \$25.00. It was decided to do public sensing regarding the potential fee increase and share that data at the next Board meeting.

The main objective for trails currently is for them to be open and safe. Trails crews are currently working on:

- The Moss Creek area of the North South Trail
- 221 South to South Welcome and 230 on the North South Trail
- Connectors from 230 to South Welcome and a section south of 221
- Fort Henry Picket Loop is planned for the fall

It was asked if there could be two separate trails created for horses and people near Wranglers. Staff said they would investigate this.

Discussion was had regarding the Cleo Griffin House, which is falling into disrepair and subject to vandalism. Members agreed it seemed disrespectful to let the house fall down and that something should have been done sooner, but they can only do something now. A memorial was discussed that would also tie in the experiences of veterans that used to live in LBL that went through the buyout. The decision was made to get in touch with the surviving family and ask for their input, which would be brought to the Board at the next meeting.

### **Public Forum Member(s) of the Public**

In response to the Federal Register Notice, Jim McCoy addressed the Board regarding a letter from the Smith Cemetery Board of Trustees. They expressed concern over the road conditions at LBL. Specifically, access roads that lead to cemeteries.



**Closing Statement - Mary Moore, Chairperson**

Members were thanked for their conversation and insight as well as being educational and welcoming. A summary of important topics highlighted over the meeting was provided.

**Schedule Next Meeting/Adjourn - Jim McCoy, Designated Federal Officer**

The next Advisory Board meeting will be held on October 15 with a field trip on October 16.

At the end of the meeting, a moment was taken to acknowledge the service of departing Board member Johnny Wall.

The meeting adjourned at 4:03 P.M.

I hereby certify that, to the best of my knowledge, the foregoing minutes are accurate and complete.

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Mary Moore, Chairperson

These minutes will be formally considered by the Board at the next meeting, and any corrections or notations will be incorporated in the minutes of that meeting.