

## **River Heritage: An Integrated Economic Development Program of the Tennessee Valley Authority**

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# River Heritage: An Integrated Economic Development Program of the Tennessee Valley Authority

Nancy Benziger Brown\*

The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) was created in 1933 by United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt as a part of his New Deal. The authority was designed as a new type of organization with the power of government and the flexibility of private enterprise. Its chief goals were to tame the Tennessee River, which yearly brought massive destruction of life and property; to develop navigation; to promote the *economic and social well-being* of the residents of the Tennessee Valley; and, almost as an aside, to provide power.

The region of the Tennessee Valley Authority includes 201 mainstream and tributary counties of the Tennessee River, and counties where TVA sells power. The Tennessee River winds a 650-mile course in an arc southwest from Knoxville to Chattanooga through northern Alabama, the tip of northeast Mississippi, western Tennessee and southwest Kentucky. TVA serves seven states - all of Tennessee and parts of Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina and Virginia (Figure 1).

Today TVA is the largest power producer in the United States. Power activities are funded by the rate payers of the Tennessee Valley. Today TVA also serves as a national demonstration agency. Economic development activities, a part of TVA's demonstration programs, are funded by the Congressional appropriations. Each year TVA professionals examine problems and propose new approaches to be tested in the primarily rural areas of the region.

In 1990 TVA Board member John Waters began focusing the attention of various TVA staff on the potential and problems of the Tennessee River. His June 1990 *Voyage for the Valley* highlighted these and provided a unique opportunity for both citizens and TVA staff to gain first hand knowledge of the mainstream of the Tennessee from Knoxville, Tennessee, to Paducah, Kentucky.

Once a river of destruction, the Tennessee now provides a wealth of opportunities for industry, tourism, and navigation. TVA has

tapped its power for electricity, smoothed its treacherous shoals, and provided locks for boats and barges. Industry has been built along much of its shoreline. States and agencies have provided access sites, and some cities - notably Chattanooga and Knoxville - have pursued waterfront development. Private individuals have developed marinas and other businesses.

However, the opportunities provided by the Tennessee River, particularly tourism opportunities, have never been fully realized. Many TVA staff have participated in single purpose, and some multipurpose, river development projects. TVA has pursued integrated natural resource development of the river and reservoir planning, but has not developed an integrated plan for the economic development of the river.

Several initiatives were developed as a result of Mr. Waters' trip. A Task Force led by John Stewart, Vice-President for Valley Resources, took the responsibility for developing a new TVA program focused on promoting economic development along the Tennessee River. As with any new program at TVA, the staff first tried to gain some perspective on the situation at both the national and regional levels.

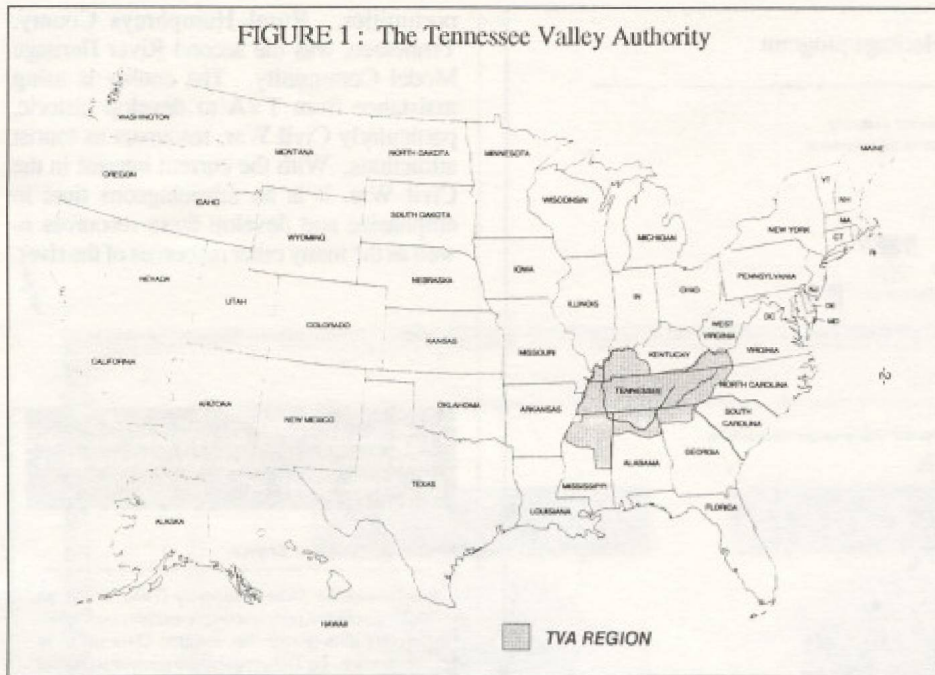
## The National Perspective

The status of national efforts is reflected in an article in the August 1990 issue of *Planning* magazine. *You Call This a National Park?*, demonstrates the significant shift of the National Park Service (NPS) away from saving the massive wilderness regions to the preservation of a variety of sites and landscapes, many with ties to river development.

The Illinois and Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor, Cape Cod National Seashore, Indiana Dune National Lakeshore, and an Alabama swamp, are included in a total of 10 seashores, four lakeshores, 10 scenic rivers/riverways, and four rivers protected to some degree by the NPS. The Land & Water Conservation Act provides funds for the NPS which are realized from offshore

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FIGURE 1 : The Tennessee Valley Authority



royalties, providing a continuing source of income.

This focus on river resources is reflected in the economic development programs and goals of many communities, including cities such as Knoxville, Memphis, and Chattanooga, in the TVA region. Successful projects such as Harborplace in Baltimore, the Seaport in New York, and even the mill town of Lowell, Massachusetts, have focused attention on the river and its potential to support economic development. While retail development is popular, little has been actually linked to the increased use of the river. The river is used as a backdrop for development more often than a tool.

### The Valley Perspective

TVA has helped transform the Tennessee Valley region during the past 58 years. However, the United States and the world did not stand still during that time. Other regions and nations developed heavy industry, as well as headquarters of businesses and high technology. Without TVA, the Tennessee Valley region may have continued to fall farther and farther behind the American dream.

There is still a continuing struggle to maintain and increase the region's status in the South and in the United States. The production of power, and control of flood waters, have become commonplace. Everyone expects TVA to perform its major tasks unaided.

TVA has *owned* the river for so long that few feel an interest, or perceive an opportunity, when they think of the river.

Despite these positive accomplishments, the Tennessee River remains a major resource for the Tennessee Valley region, especially in terms of economic development. The miles of farms and forests are only occasionally broken by waterfront development on any scale. Some communities, including Chattanooga and Knoxville, are realizing that they must take the initiative to realize the economic benefits of waterfront development.

Many smaller communities, especially in the rural areas, have few resources to realize the opportunities. An outside developer is not going to find the kind of market to build a Harborplace apart from a concentration of population. Demand is consistent in many of these areas for river-oriented facilities and services, yet a lack of facilities along the river discourages tourists.

### The TVA Response

TVA has heard about and seen these problems and opportunities. In the 1990s, TVA is making a concerted effort to realize the economic development potential of the river in an environmentally sound and culturally sensitive manner through the River Heritage program. TVA has the expertise to launch an integrated effort focusing on development of commercial business, recreation, tourism,

historical and cultural heritage, and environmental education, in river communities.

The River Heritage program has three major components: regional development, including an integrated strategy for economic development of the river as a region; development of a river network, and development of Model Communities. These components are illustrated in Figure 2. One statement summarizes the goal for River Heritage: promote, etc.

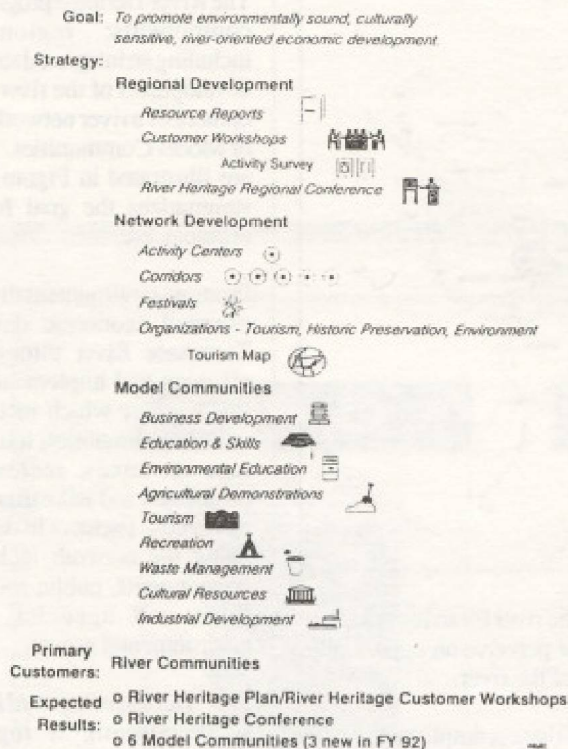
Promote environmentally sound, customer-oriented economic development of the Tennessee River through the cooperative planning and implementation of a strategy for the river which includes a network of model communities, tourism projects, heritage resources, recreational resources, businesses and industries, waste and natural resources. Partners in designing and developing the network include citizens, local governments, public and private organizations and agencies, river use, and environmental groups.

*River Heritage Regional Development.* TVA is developing a regional economic development strategy for the Tennessee River, with the help of both its customers and partners. During 1992 TVA staff from nine resource areas - air & water, agriculture, cultural & historic, economic development, forestry/fisheries/wildlife, navigation, recreation, tourism and waste - began the development of strategic goals.

TVA could not - and did not want to - develop a strategy alone. During the first two weeks of March 1992, TVA staff held a series of seven workshops from Knoxville to Paducah aboard the *Star of Knoxville* riverboat. Workshop participants, ranging from local government officials to representatives of nonprofit groups, discussed their vision for the river, participated in resource network exercises and in a river-oriented activities analysis. The results of the workshops will be utilized in preparing a draft strategic plan to be reviewed at the first River Heritage Regional Conference in Chattanooga in September 1992.

*River Heritage Network.* The TVA River Heritage program is not a single project or community - but a network of projects which support the total development of the Tennessee River. The goal is to turn the spotlight on the river, and allow it to become an exceptional attraction, as well as resource

FIGURE 2 : The River Heritage program



for development. From the headwaters in Virginia to the mouth in Kentucky, and all along the tributaries, environmentally sound development will entice tourists to spend a week boating down the river, stopping at points of development; encourage businesses to be river-oriented; focus local community groups to explore the history of their community and the impact of the river; and foster preservation of local historical buildings and archaeological artifacts.

**River Heritage Model Communities.** In Model River Heritage Communities, local leaders develop a river economic development plan with assistance from TVA and cooperating organizations. Local committees, assisted by TVA technical experts, work toward the final development of a plan in a community workshop/charette. The plan will include both design elements and proposals for such activities as festivals and tourism literature. Each planning phase for river heritage will last approximately one year, and will culminate in a ribbon-cutting, groundbreaking ceremony for a river heritage project.

Local river heritage efforts will be monitored and additional assistance provided, as

necessary. The network of projects will be mapped, and communities all along the river will be encouraged to provide information about local activities and sites, plus lodging, marinas, and other river-oriented development. The end result will go beyond the taming of the river to the activation of the river.

### The TVA Role

Since October 1990, TVA has initiated a regional development plan, supported the development of a river network, and provided assistance to six Model Communities. The role of TVA in River Heritage is as much a catalyst as a leader or developer. In Paducah, Kentucky, public and private funds in significant amounts have already been attracted to riverfront development. From the state of Kentucky's \$5 million commitment to a variety of improvements, including a floating dock and marina, to the American Quilters' National Headquarters and Museum development, Paducah has reached a critical mass in their projects.

Smaller and less affluent counties see the potential in the river but have few resources to pursue related economic development op-

portunities. Rural Humphreys County, Tennessee, was the second River Heritage Model Community. The county is using assistance from TVA to develop historic, particularly Civil War, resources as tourist attractions. With the current interest in the Civil War, it is an advantageous time to emphasize and develop these resources as well as the many other resources of the river.

### Le patrimoine d'un fleuve: programme de développement économique intégré de la Tennessee Valley Authority

#### Nancy Benziger Brown

La Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), créée en 1933, a pour but principal de conserver et contrôler l'un des plus grands fleuves des États-Unis: le Tennessee. Le TVA, organisme gouvernemental travaillant avec l'entreprise privée, fut d'abord chargée de contrôler le débit du fleuve, de développer la navigation, de promouvoir le bien-être économique et social des résidents de la Vallée et, presque secondairement, de produire de l'électricité. De ce fait, jusqu'à présent, les autres aspects du développement économique, et plus précisément le tourisme, n'ont pas été exploités de façon systématique.

Afin de pallier à cet inconvénient, la TVA a mis en place, il y a deux ans, le programme de patrimoine du fleuve. Ce dernier possède deux aspects: l'assistance technique à la mise en valeur du patrimoine du fleuve (par une approche intégrée) et le développement d'un plan régional pour le développement économique du fleuve.

Au niveau de l'assistance technique, parmi l'ensemble des communautés de la région, certaines ont été choisies pour le programme (model communities) et bénéficient d'une assistance dans des domaines très divers (affaires commerciales, ressources culturelles, développement touristique, protection et développement de ressources naturelles, etc.). Les autres communautés reçoivent un encadrement dans des projets de développement touristiques bien déterminés.

Dans le plan de développement du patrimoine du fleuve, la TVA cherche surtout à ce qu'une variété de spécialistes et de citoyens se concertent pour produire un plan dont le rôle serait important autant au niveau local qu'auprès des gouvernements ou des entreprises privées.

Le plan de mise en valeur du patrimoine poursuit un grand objectif: promouvoir un développement économique à partir du fleuve, culturellement significatif et soucieux de la protection de l'environnement.

Au niveau de la stratégie, le plan envisage des actions régionales de concertation (conférences, enquêtes, consultations de clients, etc.), la création de réseaux (des corridors, des organisations d'événements, des centres d'activités, etc.) et l'aide au développement de communautés modèles qui deviendront des pôles du grand réseau patrimonial de la TVA.