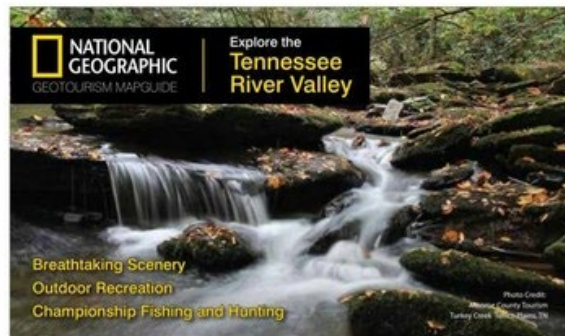


# July Partner Spotlight

The Tennessee River Valley Geotourism Stewardship Council serves as the steering committee and editorial board for the Tennessee River Valley Geotourism MapGuide. It is comprised of volunteers from across the 7 State region. Julie Graham answered some questions below to share more information about TRV Stewardship Council's efforts and why her organization participates in the TRBN. Thanks for sitting at the table with us TRV Geotourism Stewardship Council!



## Tennessee River Valley Geotourism Stewardship Council

Julie Graham

**What part of our freshwater aquatic ecosystem do you really admire?** *I love the grasslands and birding habitats in the river watershed, especially on the Clinch. Each season brings different migrating birds and a changing tapestry of blooming plants. I travel frequently in the region, and find that I stop to take so many pictures. Some of my best photos come from the birding trails in North Alabama and around Rankins Bottom in East Tennessee. But the Clinch is where I spend the most time on the waterways exploring and appreciating the beauty that makes up the watershed.*

**What is your role with TRV Stewardship Council?** *I served on the original coalition that launched the guide in 2011 and later facilitated the expansion of the mapguide. I continue to*

serve as a volunteer facilitating meetings and educating partners. I also represent the group on the National Geotourism Stewardship Council, a 501 c3 non-profit.

**What is the mission of TRV Stewardship Council?** *The mission of [TRV Stewardship Council](#) ([ExploreTRV](#)) is to further the goals of geotourism which is tourism that sustains and enhances the geographical character of local and regional communities, and related public lands in the Tennessee River Valley Watershed. The primary activities of the Council will be to:*

- (1) Educate and advise public, private, and governmental organizations on the principles of geotourism*
- (2) Facilitate the networking and collaboration of individual and regional geotourism projects and councils*
- (3) Serve as an information and training resource for geotourism projects, businesses, site managers, and other councils*

**How did your organization come about?** *In 2010, the Southeast Watershed Forum brought together 75 partner organizations from two states and 35 counties to develop a Geotourism Mapguide, a National Geographic partner project. The project did not fully serve the region, so in 2016; the mapguide was expanded to include the full Tennessee River Valley watershed which is comprised of 125 counties in 7 states. By August of 2018, the TRV Stewardship Council incorporated as a non-profit, organizational documents were adopted, and the first Board was seated as the Council. Non-profit status has been applied for and the determination letter is pending.*

**How can people get involved or connected with TRV Stewardship Council?** *People can get involved by 1. Nominating their favorite places or conservation projects on the site; 2. Getting engaged with our social media by submitting Instagram photos, YouTube videos of the region, or on Pinterest.*

**What type of assistance could they provide to you?** *There are opportunities for Ambassadors to write blogs about events, conservation, heritage, or “stories from Valley” that can be posted with credit to the blogger on the website. Help is needed to develop trip plans for the region that inherently speak to geotourism.*

**What has been your favorite project?** *Partnering with the Conservation Fund on several rural focused “Appalachian Gateway” workshops to present the importance of geotourism. These communities have rich place based assets but are often unsure of how to*

*promote the assets. There is a niche tourism market for travel that is authentic and is sensitive to the environmental impact on that place. The opportunity to message to small rural communities that are the gate keepers of these environmentally sensitive places is game changing for public lands and for the community who embraces their unique assets.*

**What has been your proudest moment for your organization?** *Recently I spoke at the TNEC on behalf of the TRV project in Kingsport. I presented economic impact stories of communities that were embracing geotourism as an economic development tool. After the presentation, I had several individuals that identified with the presentation and wanted to tell me their stories. They commented that so many communities are fragmented in their approaches to community and economic development and this presentation opened their eyes to what place based assets their community had that could strengthen their community and economic development opportunities.*

**Anything special happening this year?** *A partnership with Kayak Bassin' to promote the Tennessee River Valley' rich bio-diversity and good conservation practices on the river will be launched in August 2019. These will begin airing in August 2018 through June 2019. A partnership with Keep the Tennessee River Beautiful to do a series of stewardship promotional pieces for keeping litter out of the water ways is underway. Also underway is a series of "My Tennessee River Valley" story contests. Submissions are used to promote the mapguide.*

**How did you hear about the Tennessee River Basin Network?** *Tiffany Foster, TVA, asked that I attend a workshop in Chattanooga. She believed that the mapguide project aligned nicely with the work of the Tennessee River Basin network for information sharing.*

**Why do you participate in the Tennessee River Basin Network?** *The guiding principles include working collaboratively with other organizations that are stewards of the watershed. The Tennessee River Basin network has hosted forums which have been beneficial in connecting to the work of other groups and of the TRBN. The TRV Stewardship Council seeks to build a community of practice to benefit the watershed.*

**How could TRV Stewardship Council support others in our Network?** *The TRV Council can assist the TRBN as a resource for connecting to other groups and for information sharing. The Board is represented by all seven states in the watershed. Partnerships include local grass root organizations such as Friends of Land between the Lakes, Alabama Scenic*

*Blueways, Keep the Tennessee River Beautiful, Trail of Tears, Norris Lake Project, etc., tourism partners such as the Blue Ridge Parkway, Tennessee River Trails Association, and many businesses in the watershed. The organization has the capacity to reach out to many groups and to message across a broad range of practices. Issues such as protecting the riparian buffers on the shorelines, Asian carp, milfoil in waterways, and conserving public lands for recreation and wildlife are all topics that have been brought to the attention of our group for discussion, action, or assistance.*