

February 2019 Partner Spotlight

“We are all connected by water” Mary Beth Sutton, Executive Director of CaribbeanSEA/TennSEA shared with me during a recent interview. Sutton launched Caribbean Student Environmental Alliance fifteen years ago and since then the organization has expanded to include programs in the Tennessee River Basin (referred to as TennSEA). Sutton gives a lot of credit to the communities and partners her organization works with. **“We are now seeing hard work pay off. Otters are back on Mountain Creek. That creek was deemed dead ten years ago”**. And not only are we seeing benefits to our natural resources, Sutton has been told by many that the kids that hang with her organization take a different path and head in a good direction. You can learn more about Mary Beth and CaribbeanSEA/TennSEA below. Thanks for sitting at the table with us, TennSEA!



What part of our freshwater aquatic ecosystem do you really admire? I really admire our freshwater biodiversity. Being In a creek that has low biodiversity and finding a new macro invert makes me nerd out.

What is your role with TennSEA? I am the Founder and Executive Director

What is the mission of TennSEA? Our mission has always been to empower kids to lead their community to clean water.

How did your organization come about? We had a serendipitous beginning. Someone opened a door and ask for my help and advice and a non-profit came out of it.

How can people get involved or connected with TennSEA? What type of assistance could they provide to you? You can email me (marybeth@caribbean-sea.org) or our Watershed Coordinator, Melissa Fitzpatrick (Melissa@caribbean-sea.org). You also can become connected on our [website](#) or [Facebook](#) page. Things folks could assist with is help take kids to the creek and help with camps. It is great to have experts come in and teach what they love, or partner on restoration projects.

What has been your favorite project? I have to say one of our first Caribbean projects we did. Kids started water monitoring around the bay (lots of tourist businesses around the bay) and a high level of e coli was found through their monitoring efforts. The kids visited with the business owners around the bay to share their results and they did not back down. Within three to four years the business owners took responsibility and started to do something about it. The three kids that I would call the leaders of this project have all become successful in their older years.

What has been your proudest moment for your organization? Seeing the kids that have grown up with us now taking leadership roles in their communities.

Anything special happening this year? We are celebrating our 15th anniversary in April! We also are going to roll out an Adopt a Waterway program with our city and county partners. Lastly, we have been going through a rebranding process. Keep your eyes out for this when we roll it out in April!

How did you hear about the Tennessee River Basin Network? I heard about the Network through TVA

Why do you participate in the Tennessee River Basin Network? I participate because of learning opportunities the Network provides. Having experts around to share their

knowledge is great and what I need to keep up on my technical skills. I also believe in partnerships We are all stronger when we can work together.

How could TennSEA support others in our Network? We have a strong knowledge base in community outreach and working with school teachers and urban partners, such as developers. We are here to provide insight to any Network members on these topics if they need.