

Phone: 865.522.7007
Fax: 865.525.4988
Email: info@tcwn.org
www.tcwn.org



P.O. Box 1521
Knoxville, TN 37901
123A S. Gay St.
Knoxville, TN 37902

Tennessee Clean Water Network Honors East TN Hero

Wilma Dykeman Named 2007 Bill Russell River Hero

Embargoed Release:
October 26, 2007 6:30 PM

Contact: Cortney Piper, TCWN
865.522.7007 ext 102
865.789.2669 (cell)

(Knoxville, TN) Tennessee Clean Water Network held their fourth annual Bill Russell River Hero Award ceremony today honoring Wilma Dykeman's legacy. The River Hero award is presented annually to an individual who strives to claim our right to clean water and healthy communities.

"Wilma Dykeman motivates others to follow in her foot steps to protect the waters we live with and love," stated Renée Hoyos, TCWN Executive Director. "TCWN is humbled to honor Wilma's legacy with the 2007 River Hero Award."

Senator Lamar Alexander presented the award to Wilma's son, Jim Stokely honoring the critical role Dykeman played in protecting the French Broad River for over fifty years.

"When I was first living on my own, my mother used to send me Wilma Dykeman's stories to remind me of who I am and where I came from," Alexander said. "Her pen could bring the people, mountains and rivers of Tennessee to everyone. I commend the Tennessee Clean Water Network for honoring Wilma and her legacy of promoting conservation, and thank them for their work in protecting our lakes and rivers."

One of Wilma's most notable achievements was her role in designating the French Broad River as an American Heritage River in the 1990's. Wilma devoted much energy and passion to convincing leaders in North Carolina and Tennessee of the river's worthiness for that designation and the benefits it would bring.

After graduating from high school and Biltmore Junior College in Asheville, Dykeman attended Northwestern University for a bachelor's degree in speech.

Wilma Dykeman published more than sixteen books in her lifetime.

The French Broad (1955), recounts the history, legend, biography, sociology, and economics of a mountain region that draws its life and ways from this river and its tributaries. The work, her first, won the Thomas Wolfe Memorial Trophy in 1955.

The French Broad was groundbreaking when it was published in 1955, and has never been out of print. It inspired stewardship of the French Broad River, whose water quality has since vastly improved.

Dykeman has been named Tennessee Conservation Writer of the Year and Tennessee Outstanding Speaker of the Year by State Association of Speech Arts Teachers and Professors, and she has held the honorary title of Tennessee State Historian since 1981.

“The sole blame for the river’s [French Broad] fouling could be laid to no one person or group. Because the river belongs to everyone, it is the possession of no one,” Dykeman wrote before listing the fish kills and studies documenting pollution dating back to 1939.

Wilma passed away at the age of 86 on December 22, 2006 leaving a legacy of environmental stewardship and education for future generations along the French Broad River.

“As an educator, novelist, historian and active citizen, Wilma changed the course of French Broad River history,” added Hoyos. “Her ability to construct such grasping and inspiring works is part of what allowed her to sway people’s opinions and spur them into action.”

The Tennessee Clean Water Network organizes communities who, like Wilma’s French Broad River community, are facing threats to their clean water.

The Man Behind the Award

William (Bill) Russell was a world-renowned geneticist and long-time advocate for Tennessee waters. Together with wife Liane, he founded Tennessee Citizens for Wilderness Planning (TCWP) in 1966, an organization dedicated to the protection of land and water through public ownership. Bill co-authored and facilitated the passage of the Tennessee Scenic Rivers Act in 1968, the first such comprehensive act in the nation, preceding the national act.

“Bill worked tirelessly to prevent the construction of a dam on the Obed River, a river he had come to love above all others,” said Cortney Piper, Director of Development and Communications for TCWN. “He eventually succeeded in not only saving the Obed from the dam, but in having it designated a National Wild and Scenic River in 1976.”

Bill Russell died on July 23, 2003 shortly after his 93rd birthday. Tennessee Clean Water Network is honored to add this award to his amazing legacy.

For more information about the Tennessee Clean Water Network and the Bill Russell River Hero Award call 865.522.7007 x102 or visit <http://www.tcwn.org/riverhero/>

###