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## Tennessee Clean Water Network Honors West Tennessee Hero

*Chester McConnell Named 2005 Bill Russell River Hero*

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*(Memphis, Tennessee)* The Tennessee Clean Water Network (TCWN), the only statewide organization solely dedicated to protecting our clean water resources, presented Chester McConnell with the 2005 Bill Russell River Hero Award Monday at the Memphis Botanical Gardens. Each year, the River Hero award is presented to an individual who strives to protect, restore and enhance Tennessee's waters and the communities who depend on them. Mr. McConnell is responsible for initiating, running and reinvigorating some of the most important river protection campaigns in West Tennessee history.

"We are truly excited and honored to be recognizing Mr. McConnell for his outstanding dedication to preserving rivers in Tennessee," said Renée Hoyos, Executive Director for TCWN. "Mr. McConnell is an inspiration to all citizens who want clean water and healthy watersheds in their communities."

Chester McConnell has worked on river issues in Tennessee and around the country for over 30 years. Chester is credited with halting the West Tennessee Tributaries Project and with saving the Wolf River and Ghost River, and Jerrall and Black Swamps.

"As with anyone who is recognized for their work, I am elated for being chosen by TCWN to receive the River Hero Award." Stated Chester, a retired wildlife biologist. He adds, "Serious problems and threats remain to Tennessee's important river systems but with the knowledge we have gained over the years, there is considerable hope that the future can be better."

One of the better examples of a success story is the Wolf River, which flows through Memphis. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) planned to channelize the river and drain the adjacent wetlands. Chester's wife, Dorothy, retained an attorney and threatened legal action to halt the channelization. The agency halted the channelization and asked how to solve the problems associated with the Wolf River. Chester responded by working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and developed the Stream Obstruction Removal Guidelines (SORG). NRCS applied the SORG to Wolf River restoring the natural flow and largely restored the river to its natural condition. Now, many thousands of outdoor interests enjoy the natural resources of Wolf River. More importantly, the SORG have been used on several hundred streams throughout the United States.

"A Tennessee Clean Water Network's recent victory adds hope for the state of our rivers and wetlands," states Hoyos. She adds, "For the past 30 years the state of Tennessee illegally barred

citizens and other affected parties from the right to appeal pollution and other water quality permits.”

Under the Clean Water Act, every state must allow citizens to appeal water quality permits. Permits are given to industry to discharge pollutants into our rivers, lakes and streams in addition to destroying wetlands.

Along with the Tennessee Conservation Voters and other environmental groups, TCWN’s legislation granting third parties the right to appeal water quality permits sailed through both the Tennessee House and Senate unanimously and became law on June 7<sup>th</sup>. Now, we have the same right to appeal a permit as the industry that does the polluting. This gives Tennesseans an equal process to meet polluters head on by challenging the permits that are issued by the state.

“Chester McConnell has been a leader in wetlands protection in West Tennessee for over 30 years.” Exclaims Al Hamilton, Tennessee Clean Water Network Board Member. “If Chester had this right 30 years ago, who knows how many more wetlands could have been protected.”

### **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 93<sup>rd</sup> birthday. The Tennessee Clean Water Network is honored to add this award to his amazing legacy.

The Tennessee Clean Water Network wishes to thank the 2005 Bill Russell River Hero sponsors including: John Noel and Melinda Welton, Tennessee Scenic Rivers Association, Mid-South Fly Fishers, Chickasaw Group-Sierra Club, Wolf River Conservancy, Reelfoot Lake Watch Group and Swan Conservation Trust.

For more information about the Tennessee Clean Water Network call 865.522.7007 or visit [www.tcwn.org](http://www.tcwn.org)

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