

# Tennessee River Basin Network Meeting

*August 15-16*

*Tennessee Aquarium, Chattanooga, TN*

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## *Post-Meeting Summary*

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On August 15-16, 2017, the Tennessee River Basin Network convened their third annual meeting at the Tennessee Aquarium. A total of 76 participants attended over two ½ -day programs that focused on a range of resources on Day 1 and provided a facilitated discussion to determine future Network priorities on Day 2. Overall, the meeting participants communicated a strong sense of commitment to the worth of the Network, with specific action items stressing the overarching importance of:

- creating a transparent governance structure and messaging
  - mapping out the core meaning of the TRBN by identifying the mission and purpose
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## *Outcomes*

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Through a multi-phased facilitated discussion, the two TRBN Communities of Practice (Science and Management and Communications and Outreach) demonstrated a shared alignment of their choices for primary priority themes and overarching elements for the 2017-2018 year ahead, with identified actions, resources, and initial volunteers stepping up. (see TRBN Meeting Priorities Identified by CoPs). The top priorities indicated the interest in:

1. addressing governance and improving internal infrastructure
2. communicating the results of building such an internal infrastructure and capitalizing on the opportunity of the Hidden Rivers film by
  - a. creating shared messages
  - b. promoting and hosting film events
  - c. assisting with addressing the \$45,000 fundraising gap for Hidden Rivers

In fact, the fundraising gap was quickly addressed post-meeting, with the support of the Tennessee Valley Authority and Lyndhurst Foundation.

Further interest was expressed for transparency of funding, data, and evaluation as well as enhanced cooperation. Less time was spent on these latter priorities but these are part and parcel to the overarching Network interest. Overall, participants expressed the need to be working in partnership to highlight the importance of the beauty, biodiversity, and aquatic health of the Tennessee River. This brief report provides a summary of the meeting, its priorities and themes, and key observations—indicating areas of strength, need for attention, and ideas for the future.

The sources for this summary are the meeting itself, the notes from the final plenary discussion at the Aquarium, the flip chart notes from both Communities of Practices, and the 18 meeting evaluations.

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## *Areas of Opportunities*

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**INTEREST:** Overall, the participants communicated a strong interest and energy for the Network and demonstrated ongoing support and commitment. There are tremendous opportunities to capitalize on this interest and these resources. This was clearly expressed by the range of volunteers who stepped up during the closing plenary sessions and directly following the meeting to lead the CoPs, to identify examples for governance, messaging, and transparency, to develop a task force for governance, and to create organizational structure for promoting Hidden Rivers film. Such sentiments were also shared in participant evaluations and throughout the program. In fact:

- 28% of registrants offered to volunteer in some capacity during the meeting
- 61% of registrants offered to engage new people to join/participate in the Network
- 34% offered to serve on the planning committee!

**LEVERAGING HIDDEN RIVERS:** The film is widely viewed as a terrific tool for elevating attention for the TRBN mission, sharing the wonder of the Tennessee River and bringing new partners, funding, and interest for understanding the river and stewarding its resources.

**AGREEMENT ON PRIORITIES:** The CoP breakout sessions revealed a surprising alignment among participants for the needs and means to strengthen the Network and the opportunities for doing so. The breakout notes show the clear agreement for the Network priorities. This is particularly surprising given that 40% of participants were attending for the first time.

**BREAKOUT PROCESS:** Several participants indicated the breakout sessions process and prioritization discussions were valuable and helped move them along. A few participants suggested alternatives such as addressing more on-the-ground projects or “community organizing” facilitation.

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## *Needs Attention*

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**PARTNERSHIP:** The attendees indicated wide-ranging support for developing a broader mix of participants. Many noted that “not all the right people are here”. Including more diversity and a range of interests is an acknowledged priority and tackling it has been a recurring interest since the 2015 meeting. Participants suggested potential additions: State Fish & Wildlife agencies, Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, academics, stormwater management agencies, all states, Western Carolina University, Appalachian State University, University of Tennessee-Chattanooga, University of Tennessee-Knoxville, Duck River and other watershed groups, Association of Southeastern Biologists, Southeastern Fisheries Council, American Fisheries Society, community development groups, eco-tourism, and greater overall diversity.

**WHAT IS TRBN:** There’s significant interest AND confusion on What is TRBN? Similar questions were posed within the CoP breakouts, in plenary session, and on evaluations such as, What’s the mission? Who is TRBN? What’s the vision? Who is the planning committee? How to engage with TRBN? How do people get involved? This theme provides an opportunity to address these issues through engagement with participants and new partners. Coupled with this sentiment is the question posed by one

participant about the purpose of the network, “Is this a meeting with attendees who network or a network with members that support the work and message?” Greater clarity is needed.

**GOVERNANCE:** See above. In addition, participants suggested fostering internal ownership.

**REGIONAL MEETINGS:** Participants indicated interest for holding regional or subgroup meetings (or information on how to set up regional meetings) or other events, communications, and interaction. (Regional meetings could be organized by river basin geography: Almost 60% of registrants work in Upper Tennessee River, 47% in Middle Tennessee River, 38% Lower Tennessee, and 23% other.)

**OUTREACH:** Linked to partnerships and regional meetings is the need for outreach. Participants suggested engaging in government relations, elected officials, watershed groups, etc.

**RANGE OF EXPERIENCE/KNOWLEDGE:** Most participants indicated learning new information but a subset expressed they had a greater depth of knowledge and gained little new information.

**FOCUS ON AQUATICS:** Over 80% of participants indicate their work is focused on fish. How can TRBN capitalize further on the demand from this group? One participants suggested bringing more technical experts from various aquatic sciences and studies and working together to create a map that prioritizes upcoming work and identifies where critical needs exist for imminently imperiled species and habitats.

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### *Ideas for Next Year*

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These are just a few ideas from participants for next year’s meeting or network actions.

- Actual collaborative projects, i.e. sturgeon reintroduction or sicklefin
- Leverage Report Card
- Plug additional projects into TRBN (AppLCC?)
- Include a TRB map
- Consider Adopt-A-Stream and iCreek tools, as well as use AmeriCorps
- Create a freshwater information network
- Provide press release for use by members
- Print packet materials double-sided
- Add more vegetarian options (Participants were pleased with broader range of food options.)

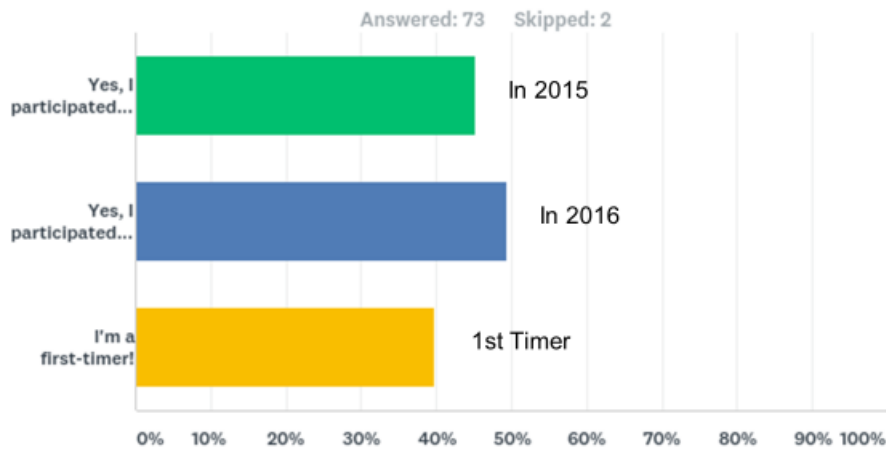
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### *Final Observations for Strengthening the Network*

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The overall meeting format is strong and participants value it. Next year will certainly pose an opportunity for more outreach on the meeting and meaning of the TRBN, given the launch of the Hidden Rivers film. Thus, engaging additional partners—not just more, but a broader range, and more diversity, is essential. Sharing more on-the-ground success stories, especially collaborative efforts would also be worthwhile. Finally, providing or hosting more opportunities for engagement throughout the year can contribute to the goals of transparency and governance of the TRBN, as well as build and sustain collaborative initiatives.

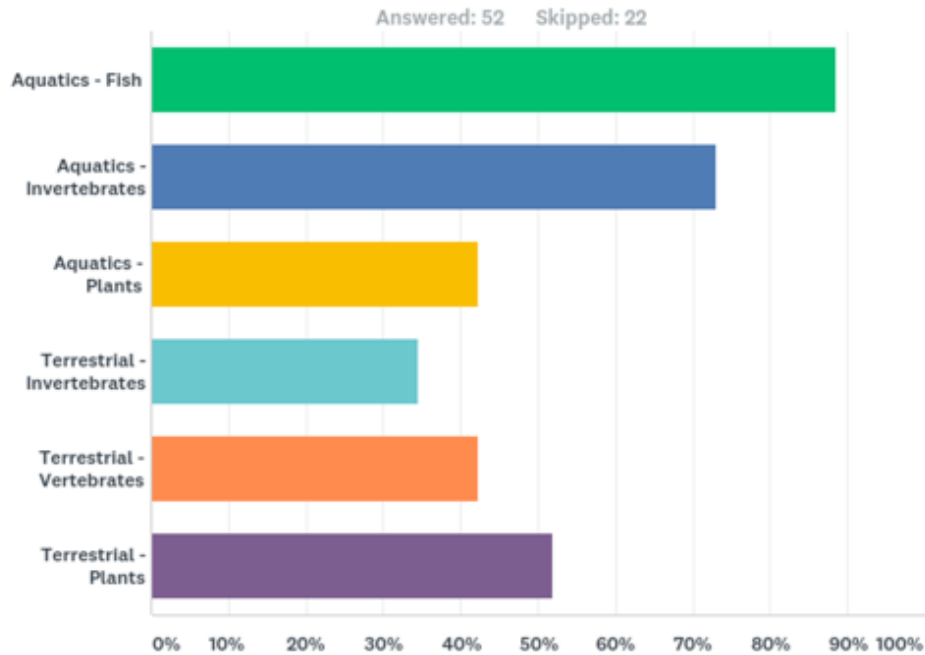
## Have you participated in past TRBN meetings?



## What is the main area of your work?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Education/Outreach/Communications	18.99%	15
Watershed Management/Habitat Restoration	34.18%	27
Organization and Partnership Coordination/Engaging Non-Traditional Partners	12.66%	10
Science and Research/Captive Propagation and Reintroduction/Population Augmentation	13.92%	11
Other (please specify)	20.25%	16
TOTAL		79

**Within which Taxa or Group(s) does your work focus?  
Check all that apply**



**How can your organization support TRBN going forward?**

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Help facilitate meeting	20.97%	13
Serve as Community of Practice team leader	17.74%	11
Serve on planning committee	33.87%	21
Engage new people to join/participate in the Network	61.29%	38
Provide funding support to the Network	6.45%	4
Contribute research	37.10%	23
Secure private sector involvement	6.45%	4
<a href="#">Responses</a> Other (please specify)	16.13%	10
Total Respondents: 62		