

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 166

By Bell

A RESOLUTION expressing support for appropriate action to be taken to enable the Ocoee River to maintain its status as the nation's most popular whitewater destination.

WHEREAS, the State of Tennessee is fortunate to possess mountains, rivers, lakes, and other natural wonders that benefit our quality of life and boost the economy of the State by attracting visitors to rural counties; and

WHEREAS, in East Tennessee, the Ocoee River has become the nation's most popular whitewater river, but its fate is uncertain. In 1983, legislation passed by Congress provided recreational water releases from the Ocoee No. 2 power project and enabled a contract between the State of Tennessee and the Tennessee Valley Authority to provide reliable releases for 116 days per year. That contract expires in March 2019. The last recreational release for rafting will occur in October 2018; and

WHEREAS, since the Ocoee River first became available for rafting in 1978, nearly five million people have rafted the river, with over two million of those visitors arriving in the past ten years; and

WHEREAS, a University of Tennessee study in 2013 found that whitewater rafting generated \$43 million in annual economic benefits within a sixty-mile radius of the Ocoee River. A total of 622 full-time job equivalents (FTEs) are created by whitewater rafting and kayaking on the Ocoee River; and

WHEREAS, the Ocoee River is an economic engine and centerpiece for tourism development in the southeastern corner of Tennessee, which has led to the construction of lodging facilities, restaurants, and retail outlets. Many of these inns, restaurants, retail outlets, and shops will struggle to survive without the annual influx of visitors to the Ocoee River; and

WHEREAS, unless a solution is found soon, investments in facilities and amenities to support the hundreds of thousands of visitors to the Ocoee River will cease; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED NINTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that we respectfully appeal to Governor Bill Haslam, to the members of the Tennessee Congressional delegation, and to the leadership of the Tennessee Valley Authority to take appropriate action to arrive at a solution that will enable the Ocoee River to maintain its status as the nation's most popular whitewater destination.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we support the continuation of management of the Ocoee recreation area by Tennessee State Parks and a solution that will provide flows into the river for at least the same number of days as currently enjoyed from the Ocoee No. 2 and Ocoee No. 3 projects.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we hereby urge that a final solution be realized before December 2016 to provide the businesses dependent upon recreation visitors to the Ocoee River with the incentive to continue to invest in and maintain their facilities in a manner that will provide high-quality services to the traveling public.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the future of the river depends on consolidation of management of recreation and fees under the auspices of Tennessee State Parks, and we urge the appropriate authorities to take the action necessary to achieve these goals.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that appropriate copies of this resolution be prepared and transmitted to Governor Bill Haslam, the Tennessee Congressional delegation, and Bill Johnson, President and Chief Executive Officer, and the Board of Directors of the Tennessee Valley Authority.