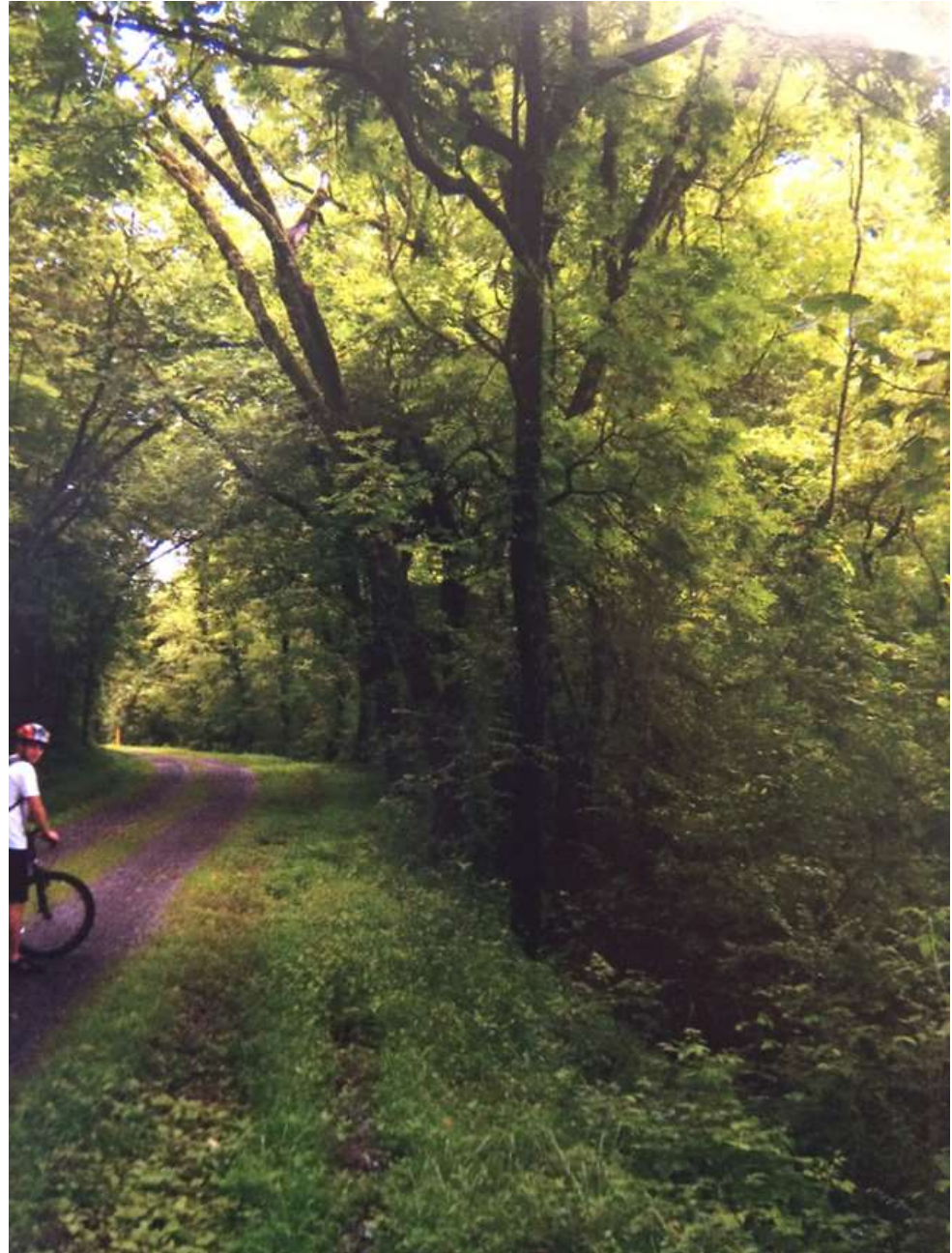


# Update on Proposed Racetrack in Oak Ridge

Virginia Dale and Ellen Smith  
Advocates for the Oak Ridge  
Reservation (AFORR)

January 12, 2021

Acknowledgements: some photos,  
maps, and information are from the  
US Department of Energy, the City of  
Oak Ridge, Doug Colclasure, & Pat Parr

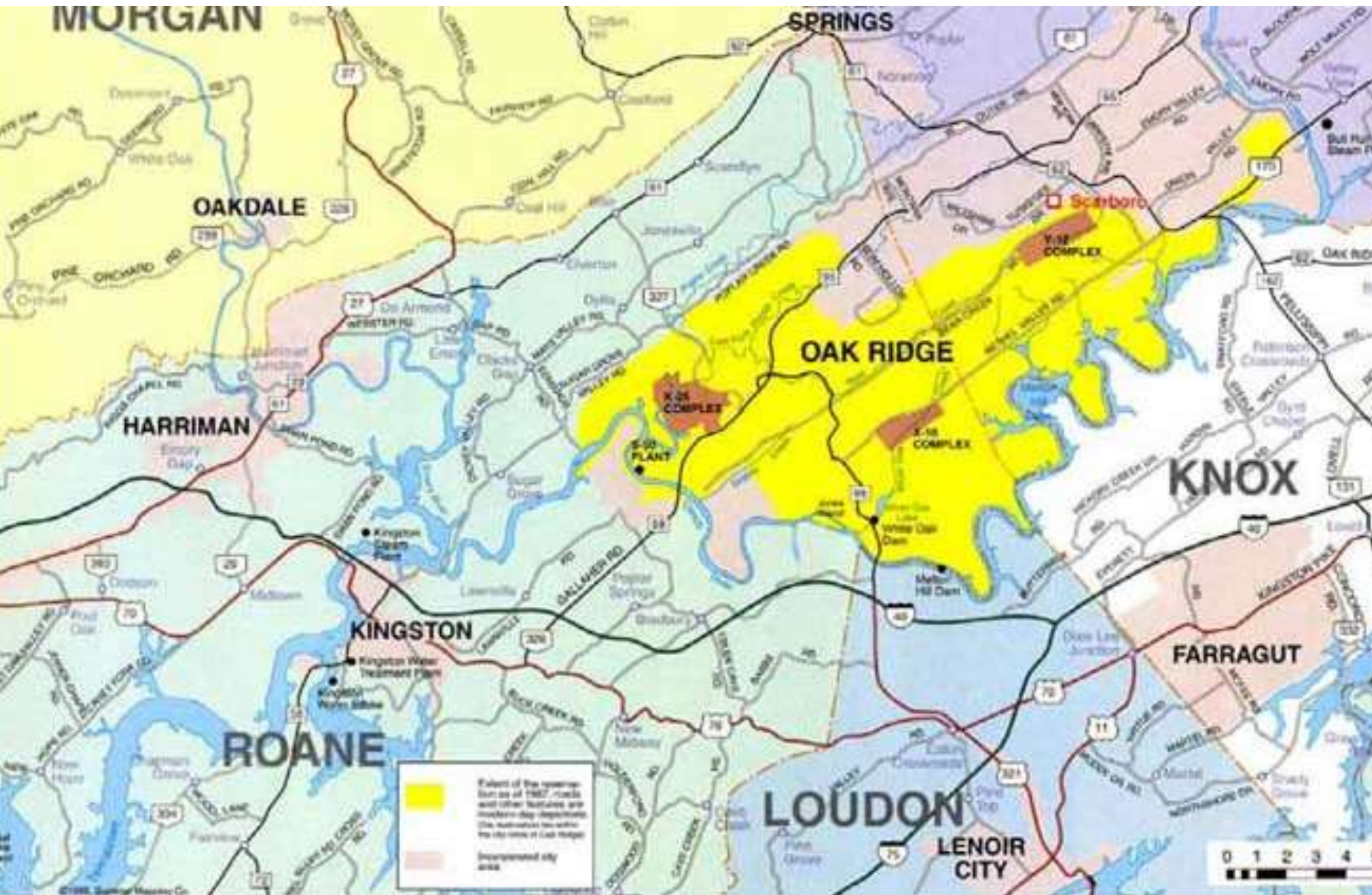


# Summary

- A real estate developer wants to build a motorsports complex in an Oak Ridge industrial park
- Site has significant ecological and recreational value
  - Federal government (DOE) transferred land for industrial use with major restrictions to minimize environmental impacts
  - Adjacent federal property is now protected by conservation easement.
  - Popular high-quality greenway trails
- Proposed development would:
  - Destroy natural assets that DOE committed to protect
  - Adversely affect recreational users and nearby residents
- Questionable claims of economic benefits
  - Speculative proposal; developer claims are not supported by feasibility study or business plan
  - Industrial development would yield greater public benefits
- Development cannot happen without approvals from City of Oak Ridge and DOE
  - Rezoning requires City Council approval
  - DOE deed restrictions limit site to industrial use
  - Developer wants federal land that is excluded from development to avoid adverse impacts



# Oak Ridge Reservation is in Roane & Anderson Counties

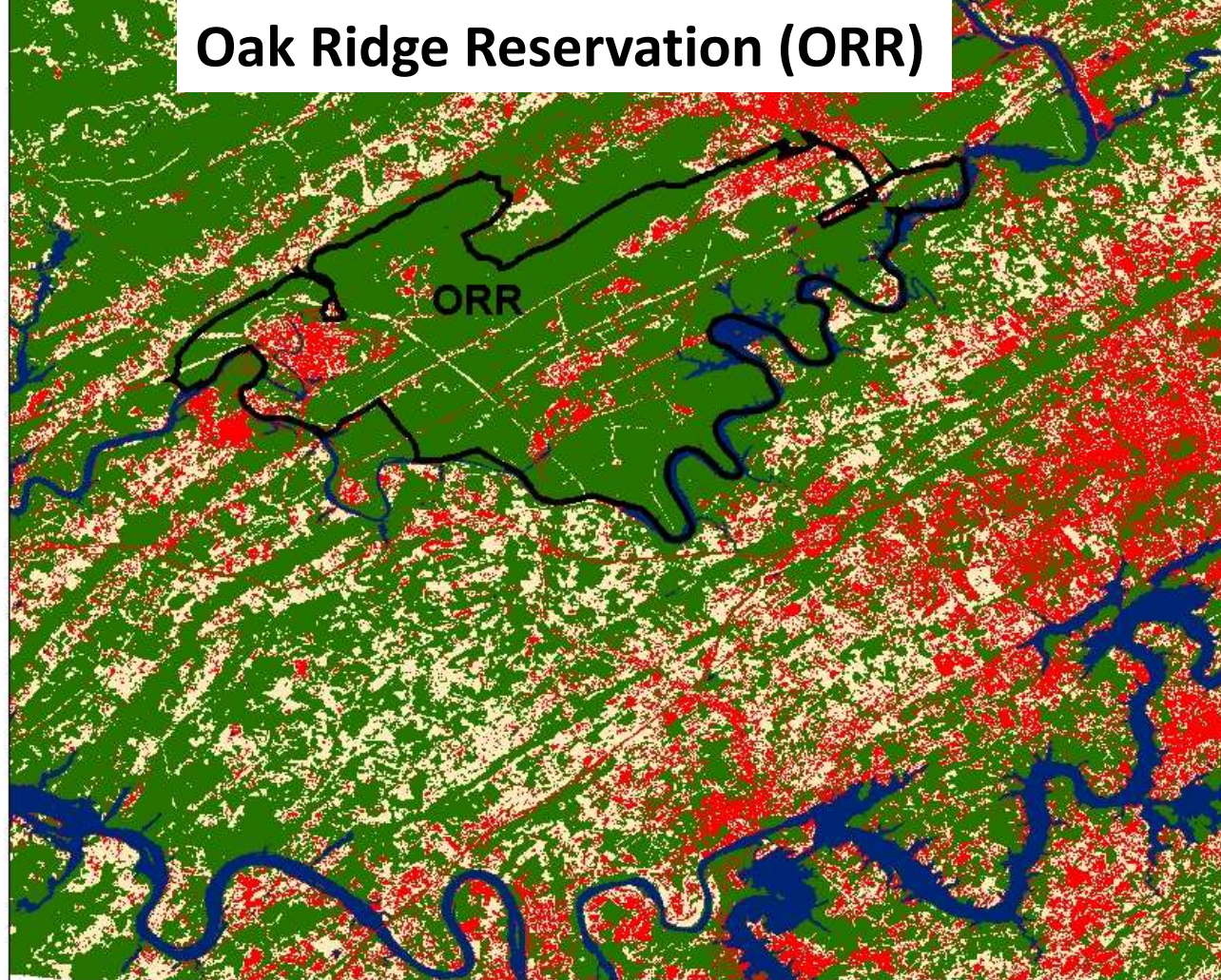


# Horizon Center








# Oak Ridge Reservation (ORR)



## Land Cover

(from Landsat TM image dated July 3rd 2006)

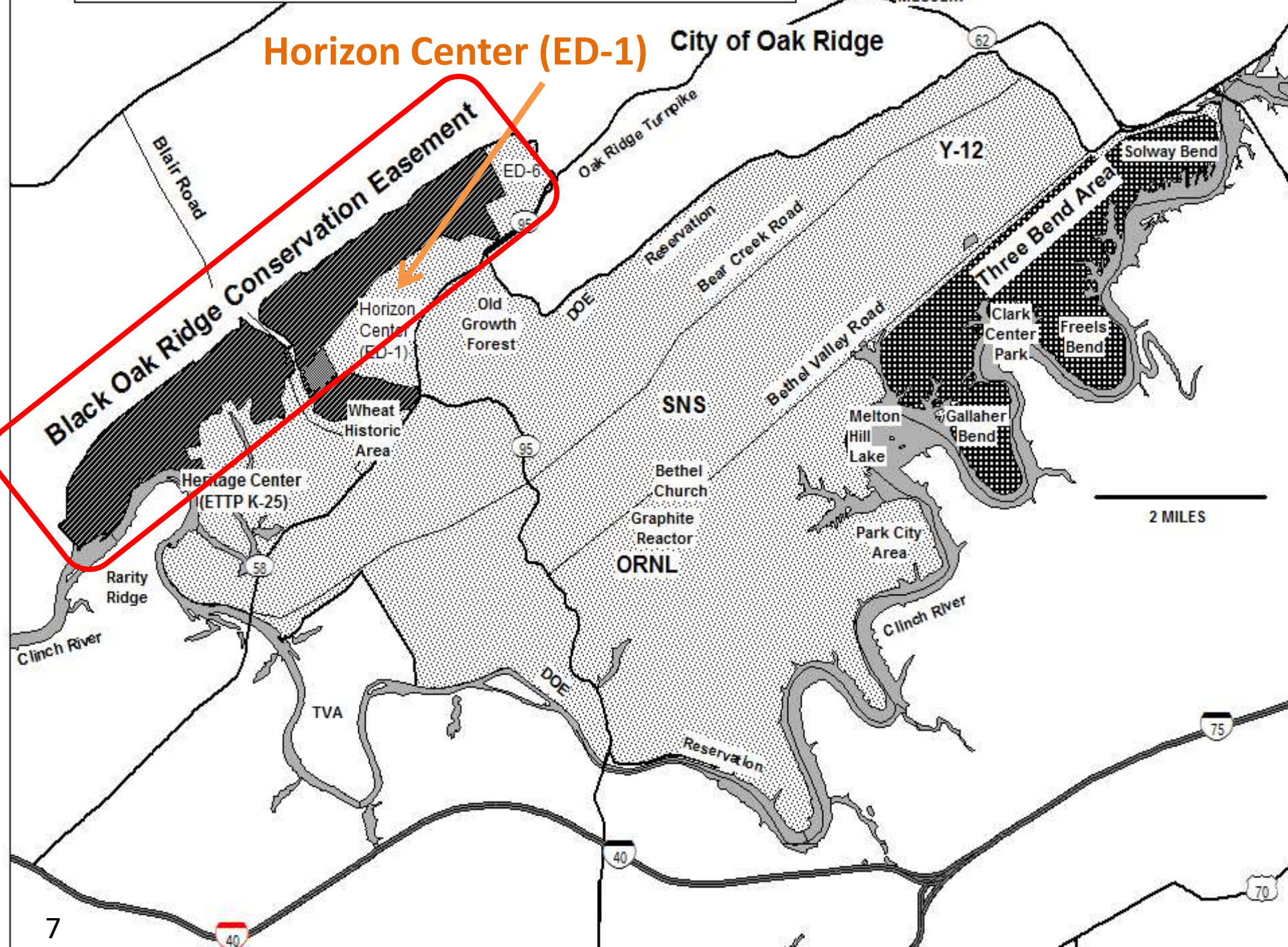
### Class Names

-  Water
-  Forest Land
-  Agricultural Land
-  Urban Land



0 1.5 3 6 9 Kilometers

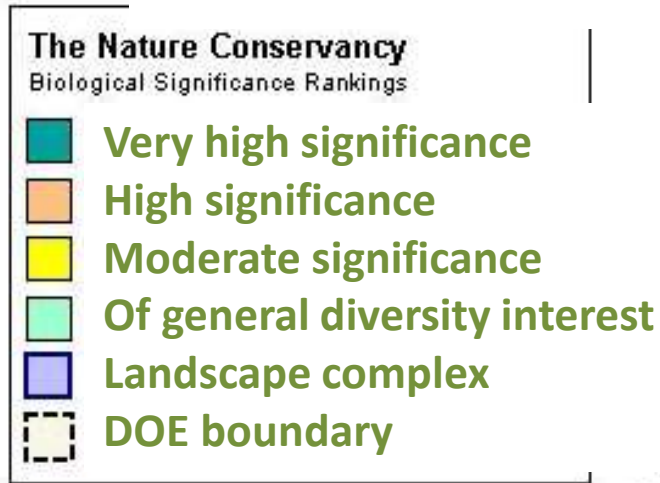
# Horizon Center (ED-1) City of Oak Ridge



# History of the Oak Ridge Reservation (ORR)

- **Established in 1942-43 as part of the Manhattan Project**
- **Originally > 60,000 acres acquired by eminent domain by US Army Corps of Engineers**
- **Now the ORR is 33,508 acres owned & managed by the DOE**
- **Values and functions of the ORR:**
  - **Environmental research**
  - **Technological operations**
  - **Unique biological areas, historical, & archeological sites**
  - **Buffer zones for human health & safety**

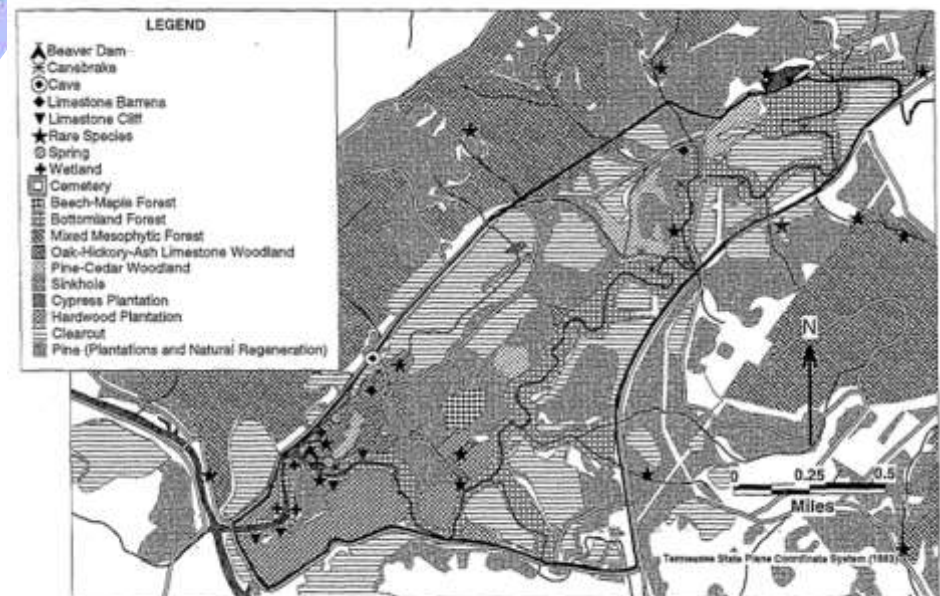
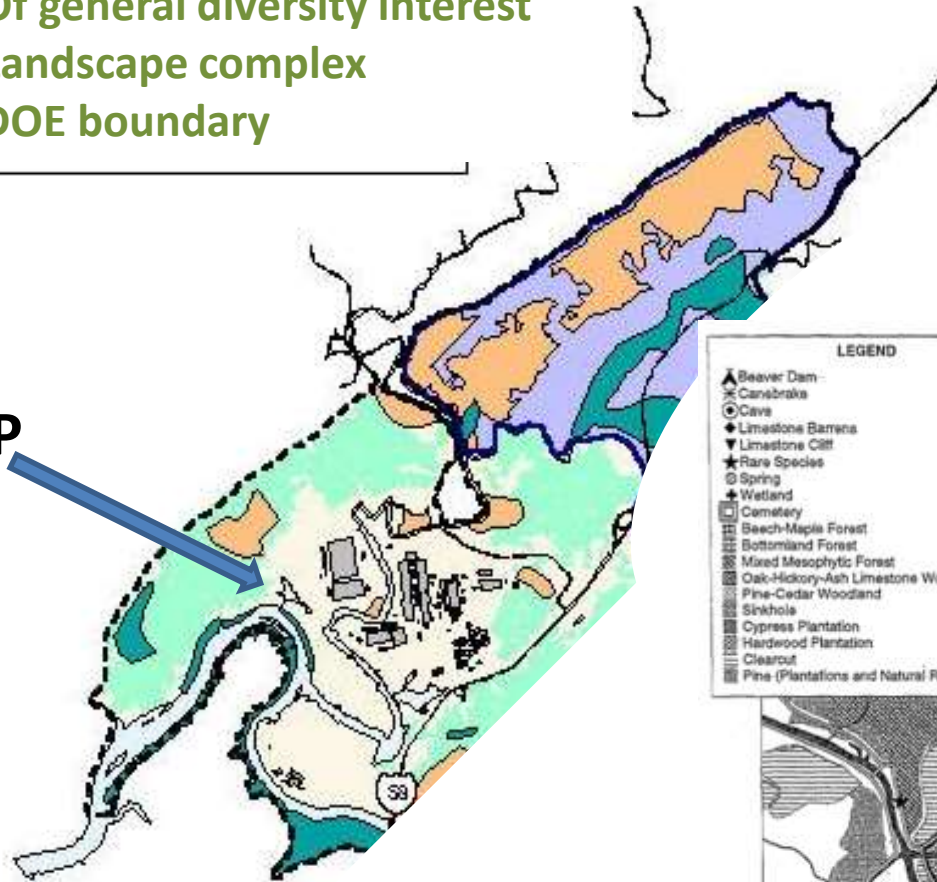
# The Nature Conservancy identified biologically sensitive areas on the ORR



## Natural features of Horizon Center

- Beaver dam
- Canebrake
- Cave
- Limestone barrens
- Limestone cliff
- Rare species
- Spring
- Wetland
- Cemetery
- Beech maple forest
- Bottomland forest
- Mixed mesophytic forest
- Oak hickory ash limestone woodland
- Pine cedar woodland
- Sinkhole
- Cypress plantation
- Hardwood plantation
- Clear-cut
- Pine

**ETTP**



# Advocates for the Oak Ridge Reservation (AFORR)

- Locally-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization established in 1999
- Supports preservation of natural resources on the ORR—for the long-term benefit of
  - DOE
  - Local community
  - National and international interests.
- Focuses on values for
  - Science and Technology
  - Conservation
  - Economy and Jobs
  - Public Health and Safety
  - Education
  - Recreation
  - Historical Significance



# 1996 compromise allowed industrial park in high-value natural landscape

- DOE wanted to accommodate expressed urgent need for greenfield industrial park to support economic revitalization after Cold War ended
- NEPA environmental assessment found that proposed 1000-acre land transfer for industrial park could have potentially significant environmental impacts
- To avoid potentially significant impacts that would require an EIS, a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) was legally conditioned on mitigation measures deemed essential to avoiding such impacts
- About half of the area was excluded from transfer, including
  - Floodplain and riparian zones
  - Natural corridor system to connect bottomland habitat to upland hardwood habitat north of the parcel (now in Black Oak Ridge Conservation Easement}
  - Rare plant communities and habitats for protected species
- Roads and utility corridors not permitted to cross certain identified natural areas
- Was touted as model for coexistence of industrial uses and natural areas



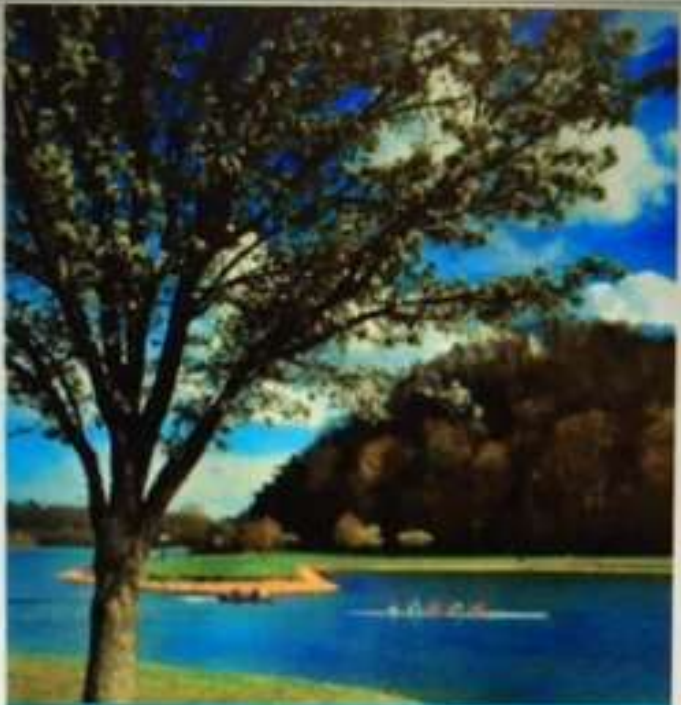
*Great horned owl chick – a beneficiary of the natural corridors*

# Black Oak Ridge Conservation Easement (BORCE)

- **3073 acres established 2007**
  - Settlement in lieu of payment
    - Under Natural Resources Damages Assessment
    - For toxic contamination of Watts Bar Reservoir
  - Natural Resource Trustees
    - State of Tennessee
    - Tennessee Valley Authority
    - US Fish and Wildlife Service
    - Department of Energy (DOE)
- **Attributes**
  - Ecological services (441,000 acre years)
  - Recreation: hiking, biking & bird watching (\$6.6M)
- **Managed by TDEC as Class II Natural Area**



Oak Ridgers place the highest value on preserving natural resources such as this greenway (as documented in the 2019 CityBluePrint).





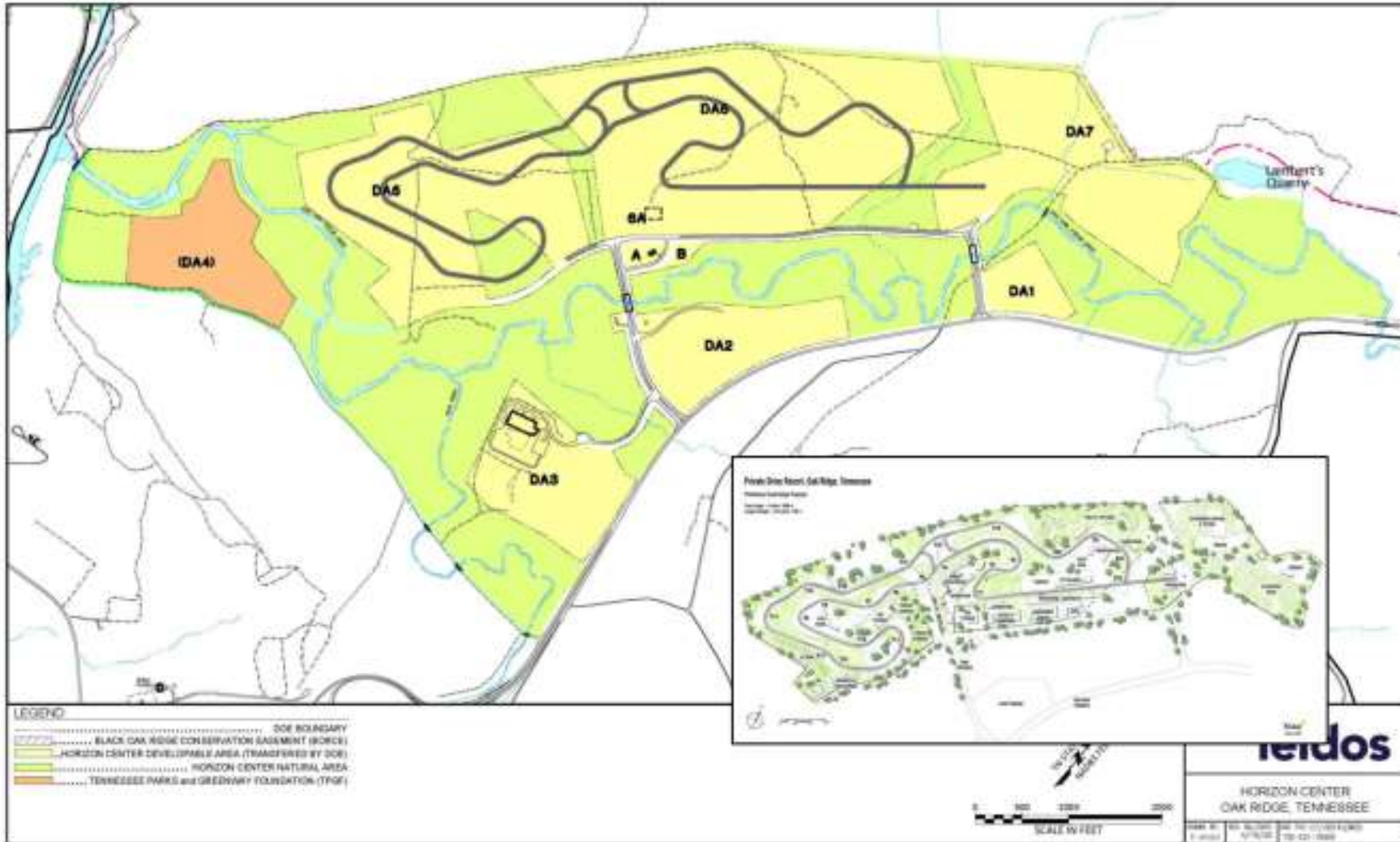
Horizon Center developed with emphasis on aesthetics

**Much money has been spent; yet industrial park is mostly empty**



*View from Highway 95*

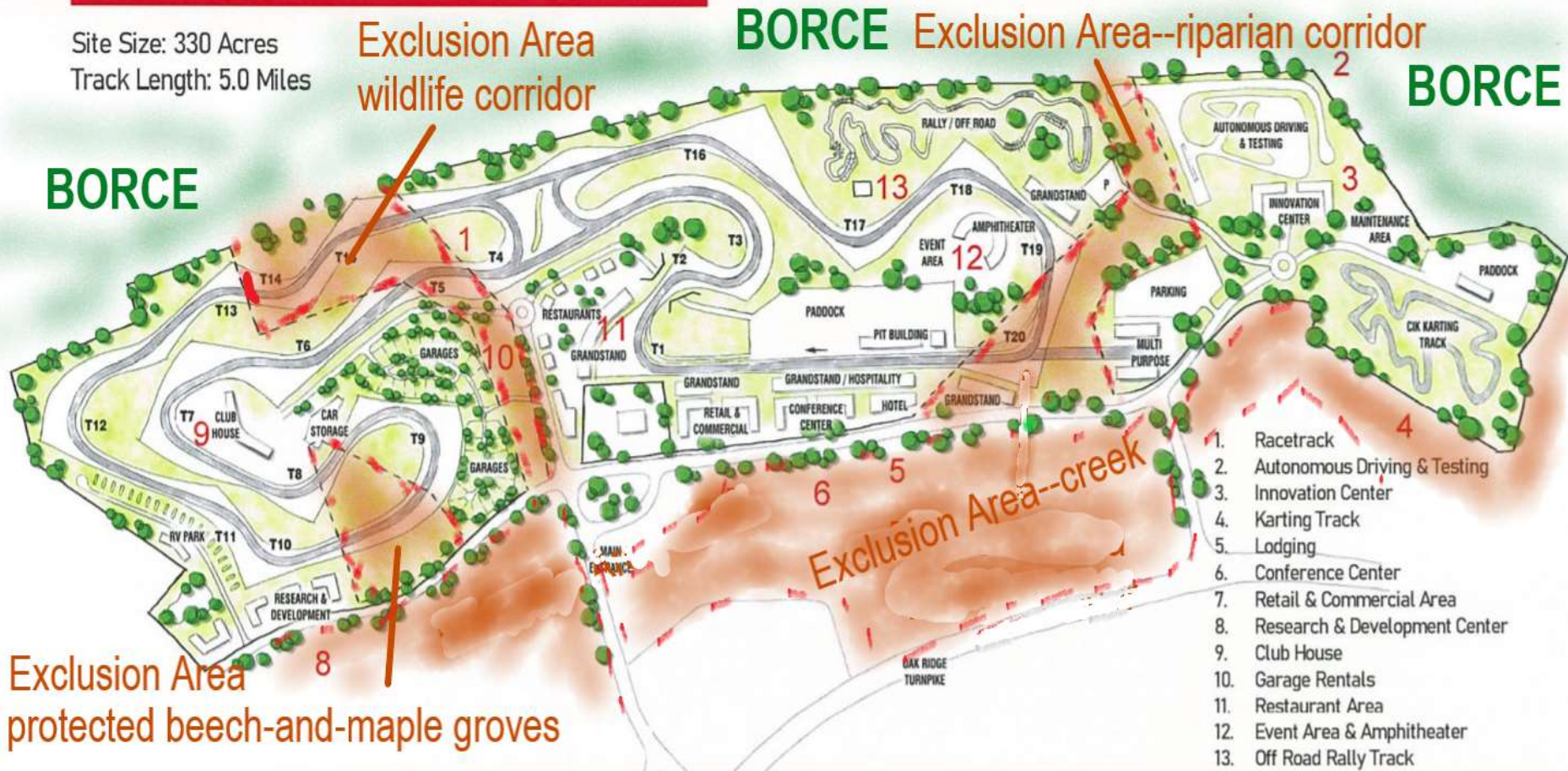
# Proposed racetrack in Horizon Center



# Proposed development would eliminate corridors & wildlife movement

## OAK RIDGE MOTORSPORTS PARK- ELEVATION

Site Size: 330 Acres  
Track Length: 5.0 Miles



# Oak Ridgers for Responsible Development (OR4RD)

## Community group established March 2020 to support:

- Benefits to quality of life
- Economics of land use
- High-paying and quality jobs
- Protecting natural assets

## Urges the City to:

- Perform due diligence in evaluating proposals
- Honor a fiduciary responsibility to taxpaying residents
- Place resident concerns above developer interests

## Has explored

- Effects on property values
- Noise implications
- Racetrack as compared to light industry



# Noise is an obvious concern

- Track proponents claimed that modern F1 racecars are quiet & many would be electric vehicles
- Noise modeling done for DOE (map) showed that racing noise would not be heard in residential areas
  - Similar predictions were made for other road-course tracks for wealthy car owners, but now conversation is impossible 1 mile away
- Even this model predicts intolerable noise levels on woodland greenways that are almost adjacent to the track
- No acknowledgment of the devastating impacts of noise on wildlife
  - Many creatures need quiet because they depend on sound for communication, warning of predators, etc.
  - One reason for BORCE was to protect nesting habitat for sensitive songbirds – this could be seriously affected by noise.



*Lines in colored image are noise isoclines*

# Why can't we trust the noise model?

We don't know for sure, but:

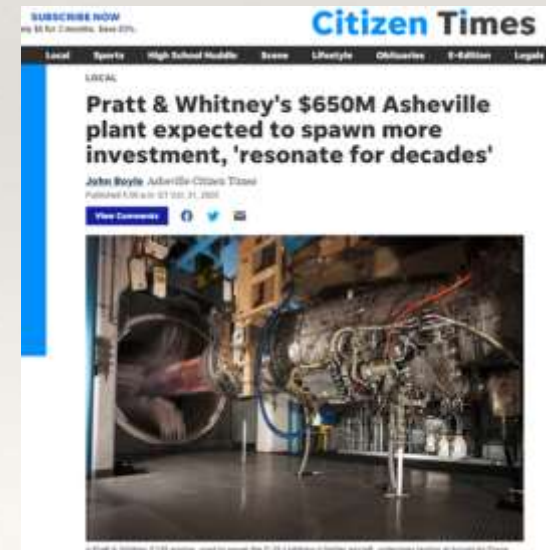
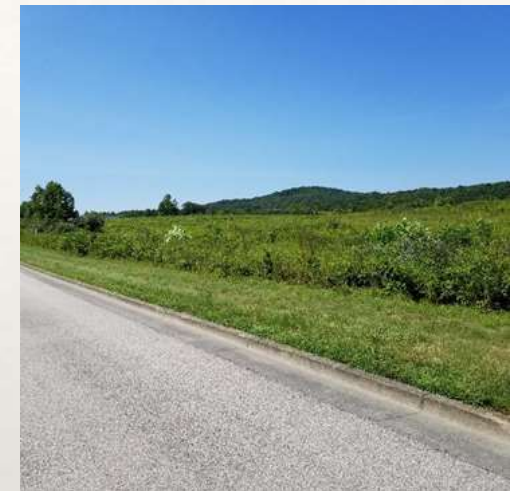
- Physics of noise appear to be more complex than what available models can handle
- Motorsport noise sources were not adequately represented by models designed for aviation
- Most modeling considered only a single race car
- No consideration of noise from proposed music amphitheater, loudspeakers, go-kart track, etc.
- When multiple vehicles (a race) were modeled, results were reported as averages over several hours (including times when no racing was occurring), thus reducing the predicted values.



# OR4RD: Economics of Land Use

- Lowered assessed value on existing residential property = lost property tax
- Reduced future development as area has become less desirable in terms of noise and natural assets
- Alternatives to consider

	Light industry or research	Motor racetrack
Number of jobs	1000s	100s
Type of jobs	Professional & high skilled	Track workers, food vendors
	Full time	Part time
Compatible with other activities on Horizon Center	Yes	No
Effect on natural assets	Minimal	Severe
Tax benefits	High	Low (few buildings)



# Multi-step process for City zoning decision

- City staff & Planning Commission are attempting to devise a zoning classification that could accommodate the developer proposal
- The Special Recreation District zone being considered would allow
  - Motor sports parks, zoos, camps, retreats, amusement parks
  - Associated hotels, restaurants, & residences.
- City Council approval (2 separate votes) is required to create a new zone in city ordinance.
- If new zone is created, City Council would have to approve the use of this zone for the Horizon Center site (2 separate votes).
  
- City should consider impacts on traffic, livability, & compatibility with recently adopted City Blueprint.



# DOE is expected to defer decision until after City Council acts



- DOE issued draft "Environmental Assessment Addendum" for comment in August, proposing "no significant impact" from changing land use & eliminating protected natural corridors to allow a racetrack.
- Over 700 comments were received; many will require significant effort to address
  - How much employee time & taxpayer money should the U.S. government spend to support development of a racetrack on land committed to conservation?
- If DOE decides to eliminate deed restrictions & relinquish protected land, it will be vulnerable to citizen lawsuit under NEPA for failing to prepare an EIS.
  - Also, the NRDA compensation value they were credited with for creating the BORCE might be reduced.



# **OR League of Women Voters' Statement of Concern – Dec 2020**

## **Concerns about motorsports complex at Horizon Center**

- Plans to cut across previously protected natural areas
- Impact on noise & traffic on BORCE
- Harm to west Oak Ridge communities

**Calls upon the City Council to reject the zoning changes necessary for that to happen.**

*Harriett McCurdy*

*President of the League of Women Voters of Oak Ridge*

# What AFORR suggests you do

- **Send letters or emails to**
  - Editor of the Oak Ridger
  - Oak Ridge Planning Commission
  - Oak Ridge City Council ([CityCouncil@oakridgetn.gov](mailto:CityCouncil@oakridgetn.gov))
  - Send copies to
    - Mark Watson & Jack Suggs (City of OR)
    - Debbie Duren (TDEC)
    - Shannon Young (TWRA)
    - John Shewairy (US DOE)
- **Points to be made**
  - To City:
    - Maintain current industrial zone for Horizon Center
    - Do not allow motor racetrack in Horizon Center; seek out light industry instead
  - To DOE – recognize your legal obligation to
    - Retain the recreational benefits and ecological services on the BORCE
    - Preserve the natural corridors & buffers in the Horizon Center “for aquatic biota, terrestrial wildlife & plant communities by their exclusion from development.”

Advocates for the Oak Ridge Reservation  
Oak Ridge City Council  
Subject: Horizon Center  
Dear Council,  
Advocates for the Oak Ridge Reservation (AFORR) is disturbed by reports that the City of Oak Ridge is seeking to establish a motor racetrack and establishing a new zone .... This would impact both the Black Oak Ridge Conservation Easement (BORCE) and the Horizon Center industrial park by cutting through other “natural areas” identified in mitigation conditions required for the NEPA Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) that allowed the transfer of the ED-1 parcel and its subsequent development as the Horizon Center. ....  
Sincerely, *Virginia H. Dale*  
Virginia H. Dale, President, AFORR  
Cc: Debbie Duren, Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC)  
Shannon Young, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA)

# Let's build on Oak Ridge's history of planning for economic, social and environmental benefits



Recognizing the ecological significance of this 50 acre parcel and the adjoining roadway's import as part of a network of greenway trails, the Community Reuse Organization of East Tennessee conveyed ownership of this property to the Tennessee Parks and Greenways Foundation for perpetual conservation.

The preservation of this acreage was made possible by the cooperative efforts of the Horizon Center Board of Directors: William Biloski; James Henry; Douglas Janney; David Patterson; Lou Rabinowitz and Lawrence Young, the U.S. Department of Energy, the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, and through the dedicated efforts of the following individuals:

Dianne Naff	Tennessee Parks and Greenways Foundation
Gerald Boyd	United States Department of Energy
Susan Cange	United States Department of Energy
Mike Farmer	CROET Chairman of the Board
Virginia Dale	Advocates for the Oak Ridge Reservation

## DEDICATED

For the use and enjoyment of the people of  
The City of Oak Ridge, Roane County and