

an eagle's quill, had been given to Polk by a Virginia Democrat named Elizabeth H. Curtis. She said that on the day the Whigs nominated Clay for the presidency, a quill from an eagle landed on her land. Since her husband supported Clay and she supported Polk, Polk's victory gave Elizabeth Curtis bragging rights in her house. She presented the quill to Polk as a gift.⁵⁰

The Walker tariff largely resolved the tariff issue for the next decade. Polk urged Congress to place a tariff on tea and coffee in 1847 in order to help finance the Mexican-American War but Congress ignored his recommendation. Ten years later, Congress revisited the tariff. The lowering of the tariff created an economic boom. When Polk travelled to New England for a goodwill tour in 1847, one Bostonian informed Polk that the successes that he would see could be attributed to the Walker tariff. A group of Democrats in Suffolk County, Massachusetts, informed Polk:

In the results all around you, as you pass through our cities, towns, and villages you will discover at every step, the practical demonstration of the fulfilment of the pledge you gave the country, before your election, that you would give your support to a Tariff for revenue, sufficient for the ordinary expenditures of the Government, and at the same time affording incidental protection alike to agriculture, commerce, manufactures and the mechanic arts.⁵¹

In an 1856 stump speech, William H. Seward, a New York Senator, asked his audience, "What shall I discourse upon? The Tariff, National Bank, and Internal Improvements, and the controversies of the Whigs and Democrats? No; they are past and gone." For Seward and other Americans, the only issue in American politics had become the question of slavery's extension. The Walker tariff, which was a significant achievement of Polk's presidency, cooled the debates about economic regulations.

In the place of tariff discussions politicians, editors, ministers, and ordinary Americans focused on the future of slavery. When Polk journeyed to New Hampshire in 1847, he perhaps sensed the impending troubles for his country that would erupt over slavery. He stated: "To this people is confided the last hope of man for well-regulated self government, and if our system fails, where shall we look hereafter, for another experiment which shall hold out a higher promise of success?"⁵²

⁵⁰ "Memoranda Regarding Eagle's Quill Pen," James K. Polk Collection, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville.

⁵¹ B.F. Hallet et. al. to James K. Polk, June 28, 1847, in Wayne Cutler, ed., *North For Union: John Appleton's Journal of a Tour to New England Made by President Polk in June and July 1847* (Nashville, 1986), 120.

⁵² Joel H. Silbey, ed., *The American Party Battle* (Cambridge, 1999), 2:73; Cutler, *North for Union*, 61.

"United We Stand, Divided We May Be Dammed:"

Grassroots Environmentalism and the TVA in Western North Carolina

By Savannah Paige Murray*



On August 31, 1971, the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) held a public hearing at the University of North Carolina at Asheville to discuss the agency's plan to develop portions of Western North Carolina. Carolyn Moore, a local resident and one of over three-hundred people in attendance, took the floor to express concern for the proposal. She explained that the region was "one of the few places in America where you can see the beautiful picturesque mountains, fertile soil, and many rare and wild plants and flowers."¹

Moore offered this evocative description of her environment because it was a landscape in jeopardy, not endangered by air pollution, deforestation, or other environmental crises of the time, but instead threatened by TVA. In 1966, the federal agency released a plan for comprehensive water resource development in Western North Carolina, a plan that included 14 dams, 74 miles of river channelization, the displacement of 600 families, and flooding 18,225 acres of the region's most fertile farmland.² The magnitude of this project sparked immediate controversy in the four affected counties (Buncombe, Henderson, Madison, and Transylvania).

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¹ Carolyn Moore, "A statement in opposition to the proposed TVA dam and reservoir at Mills River," August 31, 1971, folder 7, box 3, Org. 19, Upper French Broad Defense Association, Organizational Records (hereafter UFBDA Records WRA), State Archives of North Carolina, Western Regional Archives, Asheville.

² Martha Gash Boswell, "Grassroots Along the Upper French Broad: The Valley Versus the Tennessee Valley Authority, 1961-1972," folder 13, box 2, UFBDA Records WRA.



In 1970, concerned residents formed the Upper French Broad Defense Association (UFBDA). These self-proclaimed “Dam Fighters” embraced the motto, “United we stand, Divided we may be dammed.”³ In the months that followed, they waged a campaign to derail TVA’s plan for Western North Carolina. They first opposed the Mills River dam in Henderson County, the first project in the plan. TVA suggested their plan would offer the region’s residents flood control, better water quality, increased water supply, and economic growth through recreation and shoreline development. Members of the UFBDA shared Carolyn Moore’s sentiment that “this project is unnecessary, foolish, and the dam[s] should be forgotten about now and in the years to come. . . . So TVA we don’t want you in Mills River and stay away!”⁴

The members of the UFBDA used a variety of tactics to spread their message. Within the first year of their existence, the UFBDA printed 50,000 pamphlets, increased membership from 100 to more than 900, presented a slideshow containing information about the proposed plan to 50 civic organizations, and sent 3,500 signed postcards to state and federal politicians.⁵ These efforts culminated with a large anti-TVA crowd at the 1971 hearing. As a result, a week after the hearing North Carolina Governor Robert Scott spoke out against the project. Scott explained that TVA should revise the project’s environmental impact statement because the current version did not take into account the “objections of the citizens of the Upper French Broad area who, until lately have seemingly not had much opportunity to be heard.”⁶

The UFBDA and their message of opposition to TVA’s plan for Western North Carolina attracted national media attention. In November 1972, the *New York Times* reported that budget limitations and growing environmental concerns had led TVA to halt the project. TVA’s official statement explained that, “there has been an inevitable erosion of interest” in the Western North Carolina plan, and since “adequate local support and commitment no longer exist,” the \$100 million federal project was being withdrawn. The report not only announced that the UFBDA achieved their goal, but it also highlighted their efforts, stating that TVA’s now defunct project for the region, “did not have the support of the farmers who would have lost their land, and they formed the base of an opposition that grew as retired executives and environmental groups—the area chapter of the Sierra Club and

the Conservation Council of North Carolina—lined up against harming of the trout streams.”⁷

Acknowledgement of the UFBDA’s efforts by both the Governor Scott and the *New York Times* illustrates just how far-reaching the efforts of Western North Carolina’s Dam Fighters were. This grassroots environmental organization illuminated the concerns of residents and gave them a voice. The legacy of the UFBDA was more than just halting TVA’s plan. The manner in which the UFBDA championed their cause were perhaps more significant. The UFBDA was successful in their “dam fight” because of their vast regional knowledge, their partnership with a rising politician, and their capitalization on changes in national policies related to greater environmental awareness. This trifecta allowed the UFBDA to illustrate what member Alex Duris suggested should be the main purpose of the TVA opposition movement, to illustrate that “people cannot be pushed around at the whim of bureaucracy.”⁸

* * * * *

The UFBDA represents an important grassroots environmental effort that challenged federal authority to re-shape and control the natural environment. However, the history of the UFBDA is largely absent from the scholarly literature. David Whisnant’s *Modernizing the Mountaineer* (1994) briefly discussed the UFBDA. He argued that the group achieved success because of the agency’s disregard for local cultural values, but the book did not provide details about the UFBDA’s range of grassroots activities.⁹ Most surprising, the UFBDA’s story of success in the face of a large government enterprise has not been part of TVA studies, especially those focused on controversial parts of the agency’s history.¹⁰ Kathryn Newfont’s *Blue Ridge Commons: Environmental Activism and Forest History in Western North Carolina*,

⁷ E.W. Kenworthy, “TVA Drops Plan for 14 Dams Along River in North Carolina,” *New York Times* November 17, 1972.

⁸ Alex Duris to Martha Gash Boswell, September 2, 1969, folder 3, box 1, UFBDA Records WRA.

⁹ David E. Whisnant, *Modernizing the Mountaineer: People, Power, and Planning in Appalachia* (Knoxville, 1994, 52-53).

¹⁰ The construction of Tellico Dam represented the agency’s greatest public struggle. Much like the proposed dams in Western North Carolina, TVA claimed the Tellico Dam would offer ample recreation opportunities and shoreline development, both to the benefit of local residents and the local economy. Also similar to the formation of the UFBDA, a vocal group consisting of local farmers, conservationists, and scientists questioned the need and real benefits of the dam project. Tellico opponents focused on the environmental impact of the dam, specifically the possible extinction of the snail darter, a small fish. Ultimately the opponents lost their fight with TVA and the Tellico Dam was completed in 1979. See, William B. Wheeler and Michael J. McDonald, *TVA and the Tellico Dam, 1936-1979: A Bureaucratic Crisis in Post-Industrial America* (Knoxville, 1986); Zygmunt J.B. Plater, *The Snail Darter and the Dam: How Pork-Barrel Politics Endangered a Little Fish and Killed a River* (New Haven, 2013).

³ Jere Brittain, “Statement to UFBDA Members,” [no date, ca. early 1970], folder 7, box 1, UFBDA Records.

⁴ Tennessee Valley Authority, “Environmental Statement: Mills River Dam and Reservoir,” box 3, folder 11, Upper French Broad Defense Association (1967-1977) Collection (hereafter UFBDA Collection UNCA), Special Collections, University of North Carolina Asheville; Carolyn Moore, “A statement in opposition to the proposed TVA dam and reservoir at Mills River,” August 31, 1971, folder 7, box 3, UFBDA Records WRA.

⁵ Boswell, “Report of the Corresponding Secretary For 1970-1971,” folder 6, box 1, UFBDA Collection UNCA.

⁶ Connie Blackwell, *The Asheville Citizen*, September 10, 1971, folder 6, box 3, UFBDA Records WRA.



(2012) covered the Western North Carolina Alliance (WNCA), another grassroots environmental group in the same region. The book presented a comprehensive history of the region's forest and demonstrates how commons-based environmentalism shaped the development and preservation of the landscape. The most compelling segment of the text chronicled the efforts of the WNCA to protect the region's forests from industrialists determined to degrade the environment in order to secure profits from timber and fossil fuel reserves.¹¹ Much like the members of the UFBDA, WNCA members were a diverse group of individuals with disparate education levels and backgrounds, who successfully collaborated to form a cohesive opposition to preserve their local landscape.

The legacy of the UFBDA can be employed to combat negative stereotypes that have plagued the Appalachian South for centuries. However, the value of this organization extends far beyond the mountains. The case of the UFBDA illustrated the ability of residents to collectively organize in order to change environmental policy and prevent environmental devastation, a narrative that exists throughout American history. For example, in *Reasonable Use: The People, the Environment, and the State, New England 1790-1950* (2001), John T. Cumbler illuminated New Englanders from a variety of backgrounds including public health proponents, engineers, and scientists, who all joined efforts to wrestle with conflicting understandings of "progress." These pioneers of environmentalism contended with powerful industrialists and employed the power of the state to regulate environmental degradation, successfully improving local water quality and implementing vital groundwork for future government efforts to curtail pollution.¹² Similarly, Andrew Hurley's *Environmental Inequalities: Class, Race, and Industrial Pollution in Gary, Indiana*, (1995) documented how white middle class and working class residents joined with black workers for a brief time to police the polluting habits of the steel industry in the early 1970s.¹³ These and other studies provide important historical roots for modern environmental efforts, not only in the regions where they occurred, but in similar communities throughout the nation and the globe.

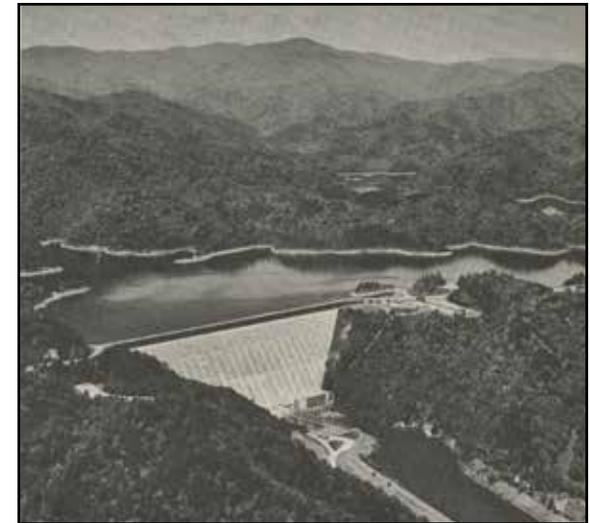
A strong regional knowledge and shared understanding of the local environment contributed to the success of the UFBDA. Many UFBDA members and their families were farmers and multi-generational inhabitants of the mountain region. This prolonged and frequent interaction with the landscape allowed them to develop astute objections to TVA's plan for the region, objections that stretched beyond laments at lost homes

¹¹ Kathryn Newfont, *Blue Ridge Commons: Environmental Activism and Forest History in Western North Carolina* (Athens, GA, 2012), 189-226, 251-70.

¹² John T. Cumbler, *Reasonable Use: The People, the Environment, and the State, New England, 179-1930* (New York, 2001).

¹³ Andrew Hurley, *Environmental Inequalities: Class, Race, and Industrial Pollution in Gary, Indiana, 1945-1980* (Chapel Hill, 1995).

The Fontana Dam, the tallest dam in the Eastern United States, opened in 1944 to help generate electricity for the war effort. Fontana Dam brochure, ca. 1950s, Tennessee Valley Authority.



and farms, but that instead suggested that the project was unnecessary. They concluded that the alleged benefits of TVA's plan—economic development, improved water quality, and flood control—were not superior to existing conditions.

Members of the UFBDA were well aware of the fates of other counties in Western North Carolina counties. During the 1940s, TVA built a number of dams to generate electricity for the war effort. Most notably, in less than two years TVA built the massive Fontana Dam on the Little Tennessee River in Swain and Graham counties. Other TVA dams were built in Western North Carolina for electric power generation, and after devastating flooding in 1940 the agency planned for further river improvements.¹⁴

TVA developed a regional plan in Western North Carolina which would increase recreation opportunities and decreased damage from future floods. Several counties, including Cherokee, Clay, Graham, and Swain, accepted the plan and thereafter TVA constructed dams and reservoirs. Other counties, including Buncombe, Henderson, and Transylvania chose not to accept TVA's water control options. These decisions resurfaced during the late 1960s, when TVA announced its plan for a larger regional flood control plan in Western North Carolina. In 1967, TVA opponents from Transylvania County presented data suggesting that those projects resulted in a decrease in both population and per capita income.¹⁵ Of the four counties, only Graham County increased in population size by 1970. The other four counties experienced a population decrease numbering in the thousands during the same period. In contrast, Buncombe, Henderson, and Transylvania counties, all of which refused TVA's first offer for comprehensive water resource development, experienced population growth between 1940 and 1970.

¹⁴ See, Tennessee Valley Authority, *The Fontana Project: A Comprehensive Report on the Planning, Design, Construction, and Initial Operations of Fontana Project* (Washington, D.C., 1950).

¹⁵ Charles Taylor, speech before the Citizens and Taxpayers League of Transylvania County, February 2, 1967, 12, folder 6, box 3, UFBDA Records WRA.

Counties with TVA Projects	1940 Population	1960 Population	1970 Population	Net Change in Population 1940-1970	Percent Change in Population 1940-1970
Cherokee	18,813	16,335	16,330	-2,483	-13.2%
Clay	6,405	5,526	5,180	-1,225	-19.1%
Graham	6,418	6,432	6,562	+144	+2.2%
Swain	12,177	8,387	7,861	-4,316	-35.4%
TOTALS	43,813	36,680	35,933	-7,880	-65.4%

Counties without TVA Projects	1940 Population	1960 Population	1970 Population	Net Change in Population 1940-1970	Percent Change in Population 1940-1970
Buncombe	108,755	130,074	145,056	+36,301	+33.4%
Henderson	26,049	36,163	42,804	+16,755	+64.3%
Transylvania	12,241	16,372	19,713	+7,472	+61.0%
TOTALS	147,045	182,609	207,573	+53,798	+158.7%

Table 1: Population Change in Select Western North Carolina Counties, 1940-1970.¹⁶

In 1967, Cherokee, Clay, Graham and Swain counties reported very low per capita incomes. The average per capita income among the counties which accepted TVA's first offer for water resource development was \$744.50 per year. In contrast, the counties which refused TVA's plan had an average per capita income of \$1,384.75.¹⁷ UFBDA members recognized that TVA's presence in a county did not guarantee economic growth and prosperity, as TVA frequently suggested. These income and population disparities cannot be connected entirely to TVA, however, that data weakened TVA's credibility in the region. This lack of appreciable positive change in the region after 25 years of TVA presence generated public skepticism TVA's proposals for new developments.

The UFBDA saw TVA's offer of increased recreation opportunities through the construction of dams and reservoirs as a false promise because of their knowledge of pre-existing uses of the local landscape. In their 1971 environmental statement, TVA claimed that "the Upper French Broad basin presently has virtually no water-based recreation opportunities."¹⁸ This

¹⁶ Taylor speech, February 2, 1967, folder 6, box 3; Martha Gash Boswell's "Grassroots Along the Upper French Broad" folder 13, box 2, all in UFBDA Records WRA.

¹⁷ Taylor speech, February 2, 1967, folder 6, box 3, UFBDA Records WRA.

¹⁸ Tennessee Valley Authority, "Environmental Statement Mills River Dam and Reservoir," 11, folder 6, box 1, UFBDA Collection UNCA.

statement struck a chord with UFBDA chairman Jere Brittain who wrote to TVA on August 2, 1971 stating: "The Upper French Broad basin is widely known and intensively used for stream-based recreation." Brittain included several examples of this existing recreation, such as "trout fishing, canoeing, hiking, swimming, and camping." Further, he pointed out that Mills River was also home to several youth camps and both public and private camping facilities.¹⁹

Part of TVA's omission of these pre-existing recreation facilities may have been based on the agency's misunderstanding of the local use of the landscape. In their environmental statement on the proposed Mills River project, TVA stated that the "reservoir area presently has no fishing access points open to the public."²⁰ Brittain replied directly to this claim in a letter to TVA saying, "from the earliest memories of the oldest citizens in Mills River the public has fished freely in Upper Mills River." The absence of designated

public access points for fishing did not mean that residents were not fishing. Brittain further clarified that: "Trout fisherman simply park their cars on the public roads, and go fishing" and in doing so receive "virtually no interference by property owners."²¹ TVA seems to have misunderstood that local residents viewed the river as a commons, or a shared resource, and did not need designated public fishing access points on the Upper French Broad River.



A number of summer camps were located close to the French Broad River, which local residents considered a shared public recreation area. State Archives of North Carolina, Western Regional Archives, Asheville.

This existing recreational use of the landscape negated TVA's suggestion of increased benefits from reservoir construction. TVA had difficulty understanding the existing use of the French Broad River because it did not easily translate into profits and economic growth. With the type of recreation Brittain described, the only economic tie would have been trout licenses, a much more nebulous profit than what the TVA promoted. TVA was

¹⁹ Jere Brittain to Tennessee Valley Authority Office of Health and Environmental Science, August 2, 1971, folder 6, box 3, UFBDA Records WRA.

²⁰ TVA, "Environmental Statement," 14, folder 6, box 1, UFBDA Collection UNCA.

²¹ Brittain to TVA, August 2, 1971, folder 6, box 3, UFBDA Records WRA.

more focused on developing recreational businesses such as campgrounds, restaurants, and gift shops—all new construction projects that would have been easier to attach to economic growth. The shared use of the Upper French Broad River was not easily connected to annual profits, thus TVA did not understand this loss as significant to local residents.

The 1966 plan for water resource development in Western North Carolina promoted improved water quality in the region. TVA proposed that this could be accomplished by diverting water from more pristine sources, such as Mills River, into more heavily polluted segments of the French Broad. TVA suggested that the Mills River dam and reservoir would provide additional water to “reduce the plant nutrient concentrations in the French Broad River and the headwaters of Douglas reservoir.” This phenomena, known as the “dilution solution” to water pollution was explained at the UFBDA’s August 1971 hearing by an ecologist on the faculty of Warren Wilson College, an institution which would have lost a substantial part of its campus in the implementation of TVA’s plan. Dr. Willis Egger commented that within TVA’s plan for the region, “clean water from Mills River, and other rivers, would be used to dilute only partially treated wastes.” Dr. Egger and other UFBDA members did not approve of this method and claimed it would not lessen the negative impacts of pollution but instead would only send pollutants further downstream where they would accumulate in lakes and estuaries. Instead of sending pollutants through watersheds, Dr. Egger suggested the “only ways by which our waterways can possibly survive as living ecosystems will be through complete treatment of sewerage, and reprocessing and recycling of chemical industry wastes at the source.”²² Opponents argued that from an ecological standpoint, the use of water from Mills River and other French Broad tributaries to dilute pollution was not an adequate solution.

By spring 1971, TVA’s offer of improved water quality for Western North Carolina was no longer necessary or relevant. On March 9, 1971, North Carolina’s Board of Water and Air Resources issued a proclamation reassigning the classification ratings for many different stream segments in Western North Carolina, all of which had been previously rated Class E—the lowest rating the board afforded. TVA originally proposed to use their “dilution solution” to raise the French Broad River and many of its tributaries to Class C, a classification indicating the rivers were healthy enough for recreational use. However, without any intervention on the part of TVA, the North Carolina Board upgraded all of the French Broad’s tributaries from their previous Class E ratings. In fact, six of the French Broad segments that TVA proposed to improve were reclassified as Class A-II rivers, healthy

²² Willis A. Egger, “A Statement on the Proposed Mills River TVA Dam,” August 2, 1971; Upper French Broad Defense Association, “Impact of the Proposed TVA Project on Mills River and the Upper French Broad Valley,” folder 6, box 3, all in UFBDA Records WRA.

enough to serve as trout breeding grounds.²³ These improvements in water quality were achieved not by flushing polluted streams with less polluted water, but instead by identifying and eliminating sources of pollution, just as Egger had encouraged.²⁴ While it is unclear if these river cleanups were instituted to attack the necessity of TVA’s involvement in the region, they did just that. By addressing point-source pollution in the region, the water quality of the French Broad River improved without TVA intervention. Improvement in water quality further negated the necessity of TVA’s plan for Western North Carolina according to the UFBDA and further bolstered their opposition to the plan’s implementation.

Members of the UFBDA were familiar with local history and pointed to an alternative water management plan for flood control, which did not include flooding farmland. In 1957, Henderson and Transylvania county commissioners requested the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) to complete a study of the Upper French Broad River and develop a flood control plan for the region. This study resulted in the recommendation of installing small headwater dams in the two counties that would provide flood control without flooding privately owned land.²⁵ Residents in Henderson and Transylvania counties, who later became members of the UFBDA, supported this plan. Local opponents argued that the SCS plan was a superior alternative to the TVA dams for the region because it would allow for the preservation of the 64 homes and 60 farms within the Little River community. In 1969, Representative Charles Taylor (R), an important political ally for the UFBDA, requested that the TVA investigate the validity of the SCS plan for the region. This alternative would “cost about the same and give approximately the same flood control as the TVA dam.” Despite being equal in cost and effectiveness, TVA claimed that the SCS plan was inadequate because it would not provide the estimated \$75,000 in recreational activities and \$90,000 in water storage value that their project would bring to the Little River community each year.²⁶

For members of the UFBDA, this disparity in recreational activities and water storage values was not a satisfactory explanation as to why the TVA plan was more appropriate for the region than the SCS plan. A lack of consideration and exploration into the SCS plan was a common complaint against TVA in statements at the August 1971 hearing as well. Charles H.

²³ North Carolina Board of Water and Air Resources, “New classifications assigned to certain waters in the Cape Fear, Catawba, French Broad, Little Tennessee, Neuse, Pasquotank, Roanoke, Tar-Pamlico, and Yadkin-Pee Dee River Basins,” March 2, 1971, folder 6, box 3, UFBDA Records WRA.

²⁴ Connie Blackwell, “Scott Finds TVA Impact Statement ‘Inadequate,’” *The Asheville Citizen*, September 10, 1971, in folder 6, box 3, UFBDA Records WRA.

²⁵ Taylor speech, February 2, 1967, folder 6, box 3, UFBDA Records WRA.

²⁶ Martha Boswell to Everett Jordan, September 9, 1970, folder 4, box 1, UFBDA Records WRA.



TVA's plan called for flooding much of the high-producing agricultural land in the Mills River community. State Archives of North Carolina, Western Regional Archives, Asheville.

Campbell, Mayor of Brevard, North Carolina, posed the following question at the hearing: "Are there alternatives available which would meet our reasonable needs [for flood control] without so great a cost?" Campbell concluded his statement by stating that that question had "not been answered to my satisfaction," once again illustrating that UFBDA members were not convinced that the TVA plan was the only option for the development of water resources in Western North Carolina.²⁷

The UFBDA possessed a solid understanding of the implications of the TVA plan for their region. Their localized knowledge produced a healthy skepticism of TVA's plan, a perspective they were able to share via their political alliance with Charles Taylor, an up-and-coming politician. Taylor was an excellent ally for the UFBDA, but he was not the group's first choice for assistance. As soon as the TVA released their 1966 plan for water resource development in Western North Carolina, UFBDA members believed that the TVA had the upper-hand in terms of political support. In a 1983 interview, UFBDA corresponding secretary Martha Gash Boswell recalled that the TVA plan for the region was "powered by Congress, backed by the Raleigh establishment, [and] by the commissioners of the four counties, Buncombe, Madison, Henderson and Transylvania." Widespread political support for TVA created an enormous challenge for UFBDA because they "didn't seem to have an outlet anywhere."²⁸ With little support from local, state, and federal politicians, the UFBDA sought out to place a new leader in office, one that shared their determination to "Save WNC from TVA."²⁹

²⁷ UFBDA, "Impact of the Proposed TVA Project," folder 6, box 3, UFBDA Records WRA.

²⁸ Martha Gash Boswell Interview by Ron Holland, Brevard, NC, October 11, 1983, 21-22, folder 4, box 3, UFBDA Records WRA.

²⁹ This slogan was printed on blue and red bumper stickers that the group sold for \$1. See, folder 13, box 1, UFBDA Collection UNCA.

Charles Taylor began his campaign for a seat in the North Carolina House of Representatives in May 1966 with a platform that, "contained a crucial plank—Stop TVA!"³⁰ Taylor ran this campaign in three mountain counties. Although only Transylvania County would be affected by TVA's plan, he gained support in Jackson and Swain counties for his stance on election reform. Taylor's political aspirations were also aided by his ability to "be both exciting and convincing in political encounters, and always ready to meet any gathering large or small."³¹ Taylor, being a native of Transylvania County, also had an impressive network of friends, acquaintances, and allies among 4-H club members, an organization in which he served as a local, state, and national leader. Despite his charisma and social networks, Taylor was at a disadvantage in terms of his political affiliation. Taylor was a Republican, the minority party of Jackson, Transylvania, and Swain Counties. Most UFBDA members were Democrats, so Boswell and other Transylvania County Democrats had to cross the aisle to gain Taylor's support.

Boswell and other local political activists formed the group "Democrats-for-Taylor" to garner votes for this young anti-TVA politician. This group elicited Democratic volunteers for Taylor's campaign, mainly by making phone calls to their neighbors. On Election Day in 1966 Taylor received 2,000 Democratic votes in Transylvania County.³² Taylor also secured a majority in Jackson and Swain Counties and thus "three Democratic counties sent their first Republican and first conservationist to Raleigh."³³ Luckily for the UFBDA, Taylor did not forget about his campaign promise to "Stop TVA" once he got to Raleigh. In February 1967, Taylor presented his own study on TVA's plan for Transylvania County to the newly formed citizen's group, the Transylvania Citizens and Taxpayers League. This presentation resulted in a unanimous vote by the 100-citizen audience to oppose TVA's plan for the region.³⁴ This first formal step towards the opposition of the agency's water resource development plan could not have happened without the election and support of Representative Charles Taylor.

In his first term in the North Carolina House, Taylor gained popularity. When he ran again in 1968, he received a 4,000-vote majority and maintained his office.³⁵ Taylor continued to investigate and oppose TVA's plan for Western North Carolina and in February of 1970, Taylor met with TVA chairman Aubrey Wagner and the other members of the board of directors in

³⁰ Boswell, "Grassroots Along the Upper French Broad," 13, folder 13, box 2, UFBDA Records WRA.

³¹ Ibid., 14.

³² Boswell Interview, October 11, 1983, 10, folder 4, box 3, UFBDA Records WRA.

³³ Ibid., 11.

³⁴ Boswell, "Grassroots Along the Upper French Broad," 12, folder 13, box 2, UFBDA Records WRA.

³⁵ Ibid., 13.

Knoxville. According to UFBDA members, at this meeting, Taylor stated that TVA's current plan "was not in the best interest of Western North Carolina." Taylor also correctly foreshadowed the outcome of the entire fight for water resources in the region by warning TVA officials that "short of some kind of compromise, based on the SCS small dam program, a substantial public organization would ultimately defeat the entire project." While TVA's board allegedly "scoffed at the idea of defeat" they did "agree to study the questions raised and to meet later with Taylor to discuss alternatives." On May 1, 1970, Taylor met again with TVA leaders, and much to the disappointment of the UFBDA, "no modifications of the TVA project were offered."³⁶

When discussions with TVA proved unfruitful, Taylor resorted to more discreet tactics that were ultimately quite successful. In fact, these political maneuvers allowed for the 1971 public hearing, an event that turned the tide for the UFBDA in their fight against TVA. As 1970 was quickly coming to a close, Taylor "picked out a bill that was particularly popular and he wrote one of those nice little addenda to the bill as a very innocent amendment." Without explicitly mentioning TVA or Transylvania County, Taylor scribed an amendment that required "if any organization was going to channelize a river, or a stream in North Carolina, they should be required to have a public hearing first." This amendment applied directly to TVA's plan in Western North Carolina because in order to increase water flow among the French Broad's tributaries and build reservoirs, the agency proposed to channelize several streams, a process that involves digging a ditch within stream beds to create a more linear channel for water to flow through. The amendment passed without contest and created a new obstacle for TVA in Western North Carolina.³⁷

The required public hearing began on August 31, 1971. This hearing was initially slated for one day, but there was there was such a large turnout, with so many citizens who wished to give statements, that the event lasted three full days. According to Martha Gash Boswell, the event was much more tolerable thanks to the "unfailing supply of prime country food from the valley kitchens in a nearby classroom" which the UFBDA organized. The UFBDA not only worked as a group to keep members in attendance fed, the members also displayed yellow scarves as a visual symbol of their solidarity. UFBDA member Arthur Dehon designed these yellow kerchief scarves, which Boswell referred to as "the brilliant triangle, worn across the shoulders." Dehon passed out these scarves to every "Dam Fighter" so that "the hall blossomed yellow" and illustrated that more than two thirds of the audience members supported UFBDA and opposed TVA's plan.³⁸ The

official TVA record of the event recounted that there were 58 statements of support for TVA and 281 statements in opposition to the agency's plan for the region.³⁹ The statements in opposition to TVA came from UFBDA members, conservation organizations, scientists, local residents, as well as members of the Mills River Baptist Church, which was subject to flooding and destruction if the TVA plan were implemented.

The public hearing illustrated that there was a lack of support surrounding TVA's plan and it made another complaint about the agency's project quite apparent. Nearly every individual who spoke out against TVA at the hearing voiced concerns over the meager and incomplete nature of the agency's environmental impact statement for the project. Overwhelmingly, the speakers argued that the environmental statement did not include enough detail about the negative ecological effects of stream channelization. Similarly, hearing attendees criticized TVA's focus on only the Mills River project, rather than all of the project's 14 impoundments.⁴⁰ Criticism of TVA's environmental record coincided with a development in conservation on the national level. During this period, national efforts to clean and protect the natural environment resulted in the first National Earth Day, the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency, and the passage of the Clean Air, Water, and Endangered Species Act.

For the UFBDA, the 1969 National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) was the most important legislation for their cause. NEPA, which Boswell described as "the Magna Carta of ecologists," required environmental impact statements for proposed development projects in the United States. Further, the law required "full justification for the impact of any major construction on the environment." This legislation also created a new body, the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), within the Office of the President, to which the UFBDA



Approval of TVA's plan required a public hearing, which was held at the University of North Carolina, Asheville campus in late August 1971. Many attendees wore yellow scarves to symbolize their opposition to the plan. State Archives of North Carolina, Western Regional Archives, Asheville.

³⁶ Ibid., 14.

³⁷ Boswell Interview, October 11, 1983, 28, folder 4, box 3, UFBDA Records WRA.

³⁸ Boswell, "Grassroots Along the Upper French Broad," 20, folder 13, box 2, UFBDA Records WRA.

³⁹ Ibid., 21.

⁴⁰ UFBDA, "Impact of the Proposed TVA Project," 1:189-249, folder 7, box 3, UFBDA Records WRA.

and other grassroots environmental organizations could appeal.⁴¹ Members of the UFBDA packaged copies of transcripts from the 1971 public hearing and sent them directly to the CEQ to highlight that TVA was in violation of the new national legislation.⁴²

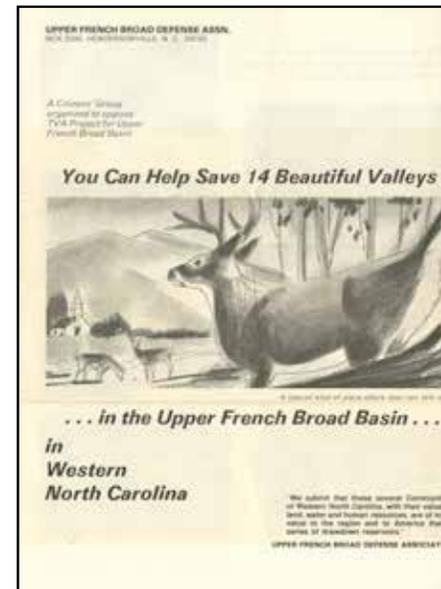
In May 1971, Brittain gave a presentation to the Public Works Subcommittee of the Senate Appropriations Committee. He appealed directly to NEPA stating that Section 102 of the act “specifically provides that the [Environmental] Impact Statement reveal irretrievable loss of resources, alternatives to the proposed action, and any adverse environmental effects.” Brittain also communicated his understanding of the advisory potential of the CEQ as he asked the Senate to delay any additional funding for TVA’s project “until the CEQ reviews all appropriate impact statements and makes its recommendation.”⁴³

Brittain’s statement before the Senate Appropriations Committee appealing to NEPA in opposition to the TVA made quite an impression. The chief clerk of the committee reported to the UFBDA that it was “the best exhibit he had ever seen presented in Congress” in his 20 year experience.⁴⁴ Brittain’s appeals to NEPA included a request to freeze the \$4 million appropriation for the Mills River project. In his statement before the Senate, Brittain included the claim that “the project cost exceeds the project benefits.” Brittain shared a revised cost-benefit ratio of 0.88 to 1.0 rather than TVA’s initial ratio of 1.4 to 1.0, which caught the attention of North Carolina Representative Charles Jonas (R). Representative Jonas had been critical of TVA’s plan for Western North Carolina from the outset and had a history of cutting federal programs.⁴⁵ Representative Jonas saw Brittain’s plea of freezing federal funds for the TVA as a way to reduce federal spending.

Boswell recalled that when Brittain presented before the Senate in May 1971, “Nixon was trying to save money from boondoggles, to make a little better showing financially” and perhaps trying to win favor with the President. Jonas argued before the Senate that TVA’s project was one of the boondoggles to be frozen. Congress responded and froze the \$4 million allocation for the Mills River project. Boswell described this as a major contribution to the group’s success commenting that this freeze was “one of the steps without which we could not have won, perhaps. At least we would

have lost Mills River. That would have gone ahead if it hadn’t been for the freezing.”⁴⁶

UFBDA members were effective in their appeals to NEPA, CEQ, and the Senate, but also to environmental policy and the shifting political climate of the time. When the group began their anti-TVA activities in 1970, they were operating in a period of intense backlash toward government spending,



The Upper French Broad Defense Association distributed a wide range of printed material to residents in Western North Carolina in an effort to build local opposition to TVA’s river development plan in the region. State Archives of North Carolina, Western Regional Archives, Asheville.

attitudes that stemmed from skepticism at the effectiveness of the massive War on Poverty programs. This skepticism produced citizens groups in poverty stricken areas such as the Appalachian South. Such organizations were sparked by well-intentioned volunteers who flooded the southern mountains, whereas others, such as the UFBDA, were created “by the spontaneous responses of poor people themselves” often to protect their communities from definite threats like the building of a dam.⁴⁷

The UFBDA capitalized on the national impulse from both Democrats and Republicans to conserve government funds. They tied their efforts to stop TVA to fiscal conservatism. Boswell recalled that: “For 1972 our ambitious target was the Transylvania County Board of Commissioners, as these three men had the unquestioned authority to stop TVA intrusion

with a single resolution.” In the 1972 election of Transylvania County Commissioners, members of the UFBDA rallied around three Republican candidates, fiscally conservative leaders whose political ideologies made them vehement opponents of TVA’s project in Western North Carolina, which equaled more than \$100 million in government spending. All three UFBDA-endorsed candidates were elected in November 1972 and each “pledged to meet the challenge of flood control by more acceptable means than TVA

⁴¹ Boswell, “Grassroots Along the Upper French Broad,” 14 (quotes), folder 13, box 2, UFBDA Records WRA; Edward P. Morgan, *The 60’s Experience: Hard Lessons about Modern America* (Philadelphia, 1991), 232.

⁴² Jere Brittain to Council on Environmental Quality, October 5, 1971, folder 6, box 3, UFBDA Records WRA.

⁴³ Jere Brittain, “Statement of Upper French Broad Defense Association,” May 19, 1971, folder 6, box 3, UFBDA Records WRA.

⁴⁴ Boswell Interview, October 11, 1983, 25, folder 4, box 3, UFBDA Records WRA.

⁴⁵ Marjorie Hunter, “Sharp Cuts Seen: Both Sides in Congress Predict Reduction in Domestic Funds” *New York Times*, January 25, 1967.

⁴⁶ Boswell Interview, October 11, 1983, 31 (first quote), 26 (second quote), all in folder 4, box 3, UFBDA Records WRA.

⁴⁷ Ronald Eller, *Uneven Ground: Appalachia Since 1945* (Lexington, 2008), 140 (quote), 129-40.

impoundments.”⁴⁸ On November 14, 1972, one week after the elections, TVA announced that they would abandon all plans for their project along the Upper French Broad, thus securing a victory for the UFBDA.⁴⁹

Local opposition to the project was not the only issue for TVA. By the late 1960s, TVA's expansion as a power company caused many within the organization to question how to rectify their new role as a power supplier with their initial regional development mission.⁵⁰ TVA's coal-fired power program created organizational tensions and a questionable public image. In 1961, TVA signed a contract with two Kentucky residents to provide the agency with cheap, surface-mined coal for coal-fired electricity generation plants.⁵¹ By 1962, the negative environmental effects of surface-mining ignited the development of grassroots opposition groups throughout Kentucky. By the mid-1960s, TVA's use of coal elicited “protests by journalists, congressmen, governors, and local community groups” who all claimed that TVA was responsible for “the destruction of much of the Appalachian coal region.” This period also brought legal battles for TVA from a host of environmental organizations.⁵² Legal proceedings and public outcry continued into the early 1970s when TVA launched a nuclear power generation program.⁵³

Growing anti-TVA sentiment of the period, especially related to environmental concerns, made it more difficult for the agency to suppress the opposition on the Upper French Broad. In previous projects, such as the Watauga Dam and the Land Between the Lakes, TVA had been able to overcome local opposition by holding public hearings and securing political support. Further, the growth of grassroots environmental awareness created important political allies in both parties, who saw TVA as a large government agency in need of trimming. The agency's decision to abandon the Western North Carolina plan may have also been influenced by the lack of electric power generation at any of the proposed dam sites. At a time when more energy was needed for projected uses, TVA focused on projects that created electricity.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ Boswell, “Grassroots Along the Upper French Broad,” 24 (quotes), folder 13, box 2, UFBDA Records WRA.

⁴⁹ Boswell Interview, October 11, 1983, 27, folder 4, box 3, UFBDA Records WRA; E.W. Kenworthy, “TVA Drops Plan for 14 Dams Along River in North Carolina,” *New York Times*, November 17, 1972.

⁵⁰ Erwin C. Hargrove, *Prisoners of Myth: The Leadership of the Tennessee Valley Authority 1933-1990* (Knoxville, 1994), 4-5. See also, Walter L. Creese, *TVA's Public Planning: the Vision, the Reality* (Knoxville, 1990); Philip Selznik, *TVA and the Grass Roots: A Study in the Sociology of Formal Organization* (Berkeley, 1949); Erwin C. Hargrove and Paul K. Conkin, *TVA Fifty Years of Grass-Roots Bureaucracy* (Chicago, 1984).

⁵¹ Eller, *Uneven Ground*, 145.

⁵² Whisnant, *Modernizing the Mountaineer*, 50.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 283.

In 1972, TVA reported that “adequate local support no longer exists,” for the Western North Carolina plan.⁵⁵ The UFBDA was at the heart of the opposition and shaped the local response to the plan. By spreading their own regional knowledge, electing an anti-TVA politician, and being aware of the current political climate, the UFBDA played a significant role in terminating the TVA project. Further, TVA did little to connect with local residents in Western North Carolina. Throughout the 1960s and early 1970s as public backlash toward TVA increased, the agency became more insensitive to public opinion.⁵⁶

TVA's disconnect to the people it served was an important theme of this struggle. David Whisnant argued that TVA's “Upper French Broad tributary area development plan was defeated by local citizens partly because of its disregard for cultural values.”⁵⁷ As TVA chairman, Aubrey Wagner exhibited a lacking of concern for local citizens and their way of life. Wagner was remembered by some TVA colleagues as having “little respect for ‘red dirt’ southern agriculture,” a position which pitted him in direct opposition to the farmers of the UFBDA. Wagner was also described as a man “sure of his own knowledge of the organization [TVA] and could not be easily swayed by reports from below that were contrary to his experience.”⁵⁸ Wagner's disdain for agriculture and failure to appreciate local opposition certainly manifested in the controversy over water resource development in Western North Carolina.

TVA's misunderstanding of cultural values affected the fight to put TVA dams in the region. Residents viewed the agency's plan as inaccurate and unnecessary. The disconnect between what TVA's plan for Western North Carolina offered and what the region needed generated the anti-TVA backlash which eventually formed the UFBDA. TVA's lack of concern for local culture was not the main cause of the plan's failure. Instead, the anti-agriculture paradigm of the agency's plan was the catalyst for the grassroots efforts of the UFBDA, a group that successfully gathered and disseminated regional knowledge, formed astute political alignments, and acted in accordance with emerging conservation policies.

⁵⁵ Kenworthy, “TVA Drops Plan,” *New York Times*, November 17, 1972.

⁵⁶ Whisnant, *Modernizing the Mountaineer*, 52.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 275.

⁵⁸ Hargrove, *Prisoners of Myth*, 156.