



**Tom Bennett**  
**2015 recipient of the Holman Award**

**Our watershed watchdog**

**By Callie D. Moore**

Tom Bennett is a retired newspaperman of 30 years, 23 of which were spent working for *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. Tom has a degree in Government from Florida State University and dedicated a large part of his life to promoting freedom of information and open government, continuing in those pursuits today.

In 2005, Tom and wife Lorraine built a home in the Martins Creek community of the Hiwassee River watershed where she grew up. Since taking up full-time residency, Tom has jumped into river conservation with both feet! He is a dedicated supporter of Cherokee County's annual litter sweep on Hiwassee Lake and in the late-2000s organized residents in the Martins Creek community to adopt a section of Martins Creek Road.

Tom is the consummate member and volunteer - the one you can always count on to pay his dues before the reminder or show up early with the pickup truck, loan tools, and work as hard as he is physically able with a positive outlook. But the contributions that led to his nomination are somewhat non-traditional.

It's not every watershed organization that has a professional staff writer that they pay, well, nothing. Since fall of 2006 when HRWC started the WATR Column (Watershed Activities Thoroughly Reviewed) for Tom's writings on its web site, he has written extensively about a variety of land use and public policy issues related to water quality and watershed health. An exceptionally good student, he learned the lingo and the environmental challenges facing the Hiwassee River incredibly quickly.

As 2008 dawned, he was also writing a bimonthly column entitled "The Far Blue Mountains" for a local newspaper, The Cherokee Scout. From his research of historical records about the building of four large dams in the watershed in the 1940s ("TVA Dam Construction," Nov 2006, WATR Column) to his coverage of the new casino ("Casino and Environment," July 2014, WATR Column), Tom's writing is thorough and fact-driven, but with the feel of a story, rather than a technical report.

Arguably his most effective work has been through a series of articles over several years covering the issues and concerns related to construction of "Corridor K," a proposed new road through the mountainous terrain of the Hiwassee River basin that was originally planned by the Appalachian Regional Commission in 1965.

Tom's articles have readership not just in the Hiwassee River basin, but also throughout the southeast. His writings have served as a call to action for those who would protect the Hiwassee River and the rural nature of our Southern Appalachian communities.