



In Memoriam: *Tyler Alley Sykes*

Editor's note: The following was provided by the Service's Cookeville, Tennessee, Field Office in tribute to the memory of Tyler Sykes, who tragically passed away due to illness shortly after she wrote the preceding articles.

Tyler Sykes joined the Fish and Wildlife Service in 1998 as the Endangered Species Recovery Coordinator in the Cookeville, Tennessee, Ecological Services Field Office. She brought to her job a tremendous love for natural resources along with the dedication and determination to accomplish the objectives she set. Tyler had boundless energy and the persistence to stick with even the most difficult task, but she was always quick to smile and had a bright personality that lit up the office. Tyler was outgoing and never failed to speak out for the rare species she was entrusted to protect, but her willingness to listen and work cooperatively gained her the respect of even the most adversarial personnel. She was truly a rising star in the Service. Tyler accomplished tremendous things in her short career and left lasting marks in the hearts of her colleagues. Years from now, one will be able to travel throughout Kentucky and Tennessee and see testimonials to Tyler's dedication and hard work in thriving populations of rare plants and animals.

Shortly after Tyler joined the Service, she began working on recovery of the Spring Creek bladderpod (*Lesquerella perforata*), an endangered plant endemic to central Tennessee. Through her persistence, she pulled together a partnership among the Service, Tennes-

see State Heritage Program, the City of Lebanon, and two private companies (Cracker Barrel and TRW) to protect the few known populations of this species.

Tyler's work with the Barrens topminnow (*Fundulus julisia*) stands as a shining example of her hard work and dedication to the protection and recovery of rare species. This spring-dependent fish is endemic to south-central Tennessee; only two known populations remain, both on private lands. Working with the office's Partners Coordinator, a District Conservationist from the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and landowners, Tyler developed a conservation plan for this species that involved protection of the two known populations, propagation and augmentation, and reintroduction into historic sites.

Tyler's ability to establish partnerships was instrumental in her development of the first aquatic Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) in the Southeast. The Nashville crayfish (*Orconectes shoupi*), an endangered species, is endemic to the Mill Creek watershed, which is located primarily within the boundaries of this rapidly growing city. Although it continues to exist in Mill Creek and its tributaries, the threats to this species are many. Tyler managed to bring a developer into partnership with the Service and metropolitan Nashville agencies to develop an HCP for protection of the Nashville crayfish. In addition to the HCP, Tyler worked with the City Parks Department on a Greenway development project that will further help protect the Nashville crayfish while

providing walkways and parks for the enjoyment of city residents.

Like any fish and wildlife biologist, Tyler loved to be out in the field, working directly with partners to protect the rare species with which she was entrusted. She would walk the stream bottoms in central Tennessee looking for Spring Creek bladderpod, walk high cliffhines to monitor populations of Cumberland sandwort (*Arenaria cumberlandensis*), or stand in the river passing slab rocks down the line to improve habitat for the boulder darter (*Etheostoma wapiti*). No matter how wet or muddy she got, there was always that beaming smile and words of encouragement for her colleagues.

The Service is diminished by the loss of Tyler Sykes. We will never know what she would have accomplished had she been able to stay with us and reach her full potential. But we do know that she was an inspiration to us. She showed us what hard work, dedication, and persistence can achieve. She has left a permanent mark on the trust resources of Tennessee and Kentucky, and we know that the rare species she worked with are better off for having been under her care. We will miss her.

Tyler leaves behind a husband, Robbie, two daughters, Chloe and Alley, and a host of friends and colleagues who miss her sorely. To contribute to a trust fund established for the Sykes children, you can send donations to: Sykes Children's Trust Fund, AmSouth Bank, 790 S. Jefferson Avenue, Cookeville, Tennessee 38501.



Tyler Alley Sykes
September 15, 1971 – May 14, 2002
Photo by Robert Sykes