Open letter to Arcata destroying wetland for oil consumption

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
16 April 2009

Mother Earth and human justice received a setback on April 15th, where one would not have expected it -- but I guess this is why it's my ex-hometown. The following is my open letter to Arcata, Calif.'s government, upon the city council's deciding to destroy a beautiful wetland for accommodating oil consumption and speculative construction-development.

Open letter to Arcata's government destroying wetland for accommodating oil consumption

To: Susan Ornelas sornelas@cityofarcata.org, Councilwoman

Michael Winkler mwinkler@cityofarcata.org, Councilman

Alex Stillman astillman@cityofarcata.org, Vice Mayor

Mark Wheetley mwheetley@cityofarcata.org Mayor

Doby Class dclass@cityofarcata.org - Public Works

Oona Smith osmith@cityofarcata.org - Public Works

City manager citymgr@cityofarcata.org

cc: Shane Brinton, Councilman

Re Foster Ave. Roadway Extension scheme

Dear Susan, Mark, Michael, Alex, Doby and Oona:

One could just as well address you instead, "Dear road builders / destroyers of the local and global ecosystem / promoters of oil guzzling" -- for you will be judged by your worst mistake, whatever that is, on the Arcata City Council and in life.

To be judged by your best work is also possible, if you were to see beyond short-term dollar-considerations and if you thought more about future generations and other species. It is not too late.

(Thank you Shane for your lone dissent that showed independent thinking, as befits a young person concerned about the imperiled world your discredited elders have bequeathed. You may remember that only one Congressperson, a relatively young black woman, voted against the Iraq invasion in 2003 [ed. correction: against Bush's using military force against terrorism, in 2001] -- how many now wish they had also done so?)

I am aware of good votes you all have made. However, as you may have heard, without a healthy ecosystem there is no justice, peace, or community. The dichotomy between jobs and environment is false. While it's true you can't have jobs on a dead planet, and "green" jobs don't make up for overall destruction from humans' consumption, there is actually no conflict between good economy and good ecological management. We simply have to admit and reject what is inefficient and unsustainable about economic activity in order to arrive at something lasting and fair.

As a long-time oil analyst with a well-known track record, I must reiterate for you that the oil-based infrastructure has a very limited future. It is folly to go in the opposite direction of known trends and sober indicators. For you to "mitigate" for more motor-vehicles and a commitment for more asphalt, by accommodating walkers and bicyclists (who, along with drivers are already well taken care of where you want to re-engineer), does not mean you are acknowledging energy reality or preparing for post-peak oil's petrocollapse.

As Councilmember Winkler knows intimately, some wonderful substitute for the internal combustion engine for a nation of drivers, such as fuel cells or hydrogen, is only a pipe dream. Do you all feel that our oil mess will be solved by someone else someday, such as an Obama in his second term? Or that better EPA mileage standards will save us? You should know better.

Unfortunately, politics and compromise cloud these issues -- if you so allow. Society is not at a point where a litmus test can be expected to see what aspiring leader would destroy life for the sake of the dollar. When frogs and the other flora and fauna of a wetland and a whole town's commons are sacrificed for a greater road and all implied with it, the "decider" sets him/herself up as an enemy of the Earth and of the people. Is this not modern society's recent tendency, accounting for the global crises threatening our very existence?

Some of you are apparently ecologically illiterate, a commonplace affliction. If you are not, and you still wish to attack one of the only wild areas in the city (apart from the thinned Arcata forest), then you are acting hypocritical or phony. Justifying anti-environmental actions with some good ones -- recycling, farming organically, and having a groovy bumper sticker -- represents a challenge that weighs upon everyone, especially your victims of compromise. People are asking about you, "Where have these supposedly educated people been, when so many science-news reports have come out about the decline of amphibians worldwide?" These questions will not stop, even after you may stop the frogs from producing more pollywogs, photos of which taken at your site for destruction have been shown to you.

Why did you ignore facts, logic, and lack compassion, and ignore rights of residents living by the site of your pet road project? This question raises other questions which you will some day be compelled to answer in shame, if you do not reverse course while you still can and regain some respect that your constituencies assumed was due when you were elected.

I recommend that at first opportunity to retreat, and there will be such chances, you back down in order to save your reputations and legacies.

You must have thought, dismissively and conveniently, what is just another road? But: what is just another crime, just another life taken?

What will your descendants, and all who come after us, think of the added, unnecessary destruction of wildlife habitat that you have pursued?

If one believes greater motor-vehicle access was required between Hwy 101 and Alliance Road, such a person ought to get off his or her lazy behind and walk or bike -- especially in a lovely place as that which you want to befoul.

Your 4-out-of-5 councilmember action last night, against the Greater Shay Sanctuary, can correspond nationally to an estimate of four out of five persons, or 80%, of oblivious or compromised liberals and others, reflecting the modern

culture at large: the death culture, disconnected from nature and fellow humanity. However, in truth, most people long for more peace and nature but are forced by the economic system to drive themselves in ill health over the ecological cliff.

If you are successful in your ill-conceived scheme, the result will be a black mark upon the town, or rather gray: asphalt and concrete with crankcase drippings known as poison runoff. I believe that you may need a reminder of what you are generating: non-point source pollution run-off into the Creek. So, I hope that you will be shown, as office holders, many samples of what the sources of pollution are from cars and trucks that you are willing to add to the ecosystem. If I had a car I would save some crankcase drippings and other material and deliver them to you. I know this sounds distasteful when you would rather be toasted by the high and mighty who believe in unending paving and economic growth.

Michael’s shocking vow to accommodate cars (see my previous report on Culture Change) and to vote for a destructive road cannot be excused just because he personally drives little. His defensive statistics on his transportation strike some of us as attempted mitigation of guilt.

There are plenty of roads already in cArcata. You may be afflicted with a syndrome known as "Humboldt's Not L.A." This is the attitude that says, "Hey, we're not in southern California and this isn't L.A., so we can always build or widen roads or pave another parking lot, because we have it made in our beautiful Humboldt." Such minds do not appreciate enough the ancient redwoods that once dominated Arcata and the north coast.

We must reverse course: when modern humans' War on Nature has been all too effective, it is time to take out roads rather than add them, to thus restore ecological and spiritual health. Getting out of L.A. is barely a beginning for one's own improvement.

Some of us suspect corruption at work when expansionist development is ushered through, as in this case. The people of Arcata have had to fight off annexations and other schemes over the years, and the Foster Ave. Pollution Extension is clearly an incremental step for more urban growth at the expense of Nature and the global climate. But developers and the oil companies must be applauding your vote at your infamous April 15th meeting.

Councimember Stillman, by far the dominant property owner downtown, throws her weight around. Thus she is the embodiment of bourgeois values, when this leader of narrow-minded or fearful merchants -- preventing a beautiful car-free downtown Plaza -- was able to gain more and more influence over the city. The fascistic Arcata ordinances catering to rich shoppers and against poor people are a big reason nearby Eureka has become more popular and reasonable for artists and activists. In Stillman's successful fight to stop our Transportation Safety Committee's research into a car-free Plaza in the 1990s, aided by her protege Connie Stewart the Democrat, Stillman's excuse was "This is not Europe." With such dim thinking, it is no wonder today's Council can be led by staff rather than the other way around.

Poor people and those without their own property, such as students from the very proximate Arcata High School, use the wild area connected to Shay Park. It is typical that ridding the habitat intends to get rid of the people and creatures of the area. Homeless people and lonely travelers who can occasionally be found in your target area are considered by some to be undesirables for failing to contribute much cash to the economy. May they always be able to go there for peace and berry-picking. May the rare birds and other creatures always find food and shelter at the Greater Shay Sanctuary.

Where is Doug Thron, the Headwaters Forest photographer/advocate, who lived yards from the targeted wetland, when we need him? He will, as many ecologically minded citizens and former citizens will, find out the betrayal of nature and community peace by the pseudo leaders of cArcata. Earth First!ers are beginning to learn of your actions, and they are some very capable, peaceful people with connections. They happen to put people first, the ones I know, despite the poetic name of their movement. Many I know have quietly suffered violent law enforcement tactics, in defense of Mother Earth. Will you have us pepper-sprayed via Q-tips in the eyes, something Humboldt already is known for?

The Foster Ave. Roadway Extension will not be built. If it is built somehow, it will be dismantled either by depavers -- today's or Ecotopians -- or by Nature herself, in time.

"By any means necessary" is the only serious approach to defending nature and people's rights -- because the trickery and corruption of the system, as abused by the greedy and their patises, know no bounds. If I still lived in Arcata, the Nature area you are targeting, my back yard, would be protected somehow. It would be paved and polluted only over my dead body.

With respect for Earth and the people of Arcata,

Jan Lundberg

Oil-industry analyst

former 8 year resident on Grant Avenue

Founder

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Further reading:

"Stop 'America's Greenest City' - Arcata, Humboldt, Cal. - from Paving Wetland"
By Jan Lundberg

Culture Change Letter #249, April 15, 2009:

cArcata paves paradise

ACTIVIST READERS FROM ANYWHERE ARE URGED TO CONTACT AND QUESTION ARCATA CITY OFFICIALS ON THEIR PRO-CAR, PRO-OIL POLICY REGARDING "DEVELOPING" NATURE. Thank you.

City of Arcata

736 F Street

Arcata, CA 95521

(email addresses near top of this page)

Tel: (707) 822-5955 for all Councilmembers, City Mgr. and Public Works pavers.

Watch impassioned citizens' objections to Foster road extension at City Hall council meeting by going to this webpage: cityofarcata.com - go to April 15, 2009 meeting and click on Video.

This report is Culture Change Letter #250