

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Don't pave it all

In her editorial ("Greenway should be for all to use," 2/11/10) Debbie L. Nichols paints those who want to preserve and protect Bolin Creek as — in no special order — heartless elitists whose agility is only matched by our callousness to the disabled, a cartel of landed gentry with a hidden agenda to make the forest our own private recreation area, a band of opportunists blind and neglectful to social justice and, showing no mercy, Republicans (ouch).

I certainly understand why providing improved access along Bolin Creek has merit. This is true already for the creek valley's less-steep sections. On the other hand, I know that not all public lands in our country, be they raging rivers or snowy peaks, can be made fully accessible. My personal view is that the benefits of keeping one part of Bolin Forest unpaved outweigh the benefits of paving it. Does this make me a swindler looking to wrap my selfish aims in the guise of environmental concern? Hardly.

I am a physician and many of those I care for have significant disabilities. I am also a middle-aged cyclist who knows that one day I too may become unable to traverse down to the creek and stroll along its banks. But, just as when I stood with friends and neighbors fighting the Orange County airport, I appreciate the value of stewardship of nature — even if it comes at the expense of what may be good for some people.

Being opposed to transecting this section of the forest is not about limiting access to the wilderness. It is about how to preserve a special and small corner of our community — one which continues to be enjoyed by many. The greenway was not originally proposed to remedy the inaccessibility of these woods to the physically disabled, and although that would be a positive byproduct of a concrete path, unlike Ms. Nichols, I feel that alone should not be the factor which trumps all others when deciding if it should be constructed.

DAVID A. WOHL
Carrboro

Do you know a Town Treasure?

The Chapel Hill Historical Society each year honors 12 individuals or couples as Town Treasures — those who have guided, taught, led and ministered to the communities of Chapel Hill and Carrboro.

The Town Treasures are recognized in three ways: a black-and-white documentary photograph taken by Catherine Carter, a lifelong Chapel Hill resident and renowned professional photographer; a brief biography published in an Historical Society display and distributed throughout the local media; and a reception at the Chapel Hill Museum and the Seymour Senior Center.

We invite nominations for Town Treasures for 2010. The Historical Society's criteria for nominees are that they be age 75 or older, have lived in the Chapel Hill-Carrboro community for at least 20 years and have made a significant contribution to the community.

If you have a nominee for Town Treasure, please send your nomination to ccarterphoto@mindspring.com. Include your contact information and explain in 50 words or less why your nominee should be considered.

Thanks to all our citizens for their interest in documenting the stories of our community.

CATHARINE CARTER
ROSEMARY WALDORF
Historical Society board members

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Not my vision

DAVE COOK

I am not writing for the people who walk fast along Bolin Creek, missing the black snake coiled in the sun. I am writing for the woods themselves, the character of them. Encroachment has probably eradicated the four-toed salamander, but I write for other living treasures of this creek and forest residing in or along the creek: the colony of snowbells, moth mullein, wild comfrey, showy orchis, the madtom, the pike and the prothonotary warbler.

Suffice it to say it's an extreme waste of public money to make a pathway wheelchair accessible from Estes Drive all the way to the high school. Suffice it to say that the compaction of soil by heavy machinery creating a cement greenway, and the 10-foot wide impervious surface itself coursing several miles, will do nothing good for stormwater run-off. (I served on the board of adjustment for Chapel Hill for a number of years, and there's a very good reason for keeping impervious surface out of a flood plain.)

From early on, the collective vision of the Friends of Bolin Creek was to preserve the woods for their own

sake, a *preserve*— that was the word we sought out and used. A woods within an urban environment—that's what we talked about. What a treasure! That we might visit there, leaving as little impact as possible, so that the woods and creek could have their perpetuating effect for generations. We talked about walking, about passive recreation; we didn't talk about the creek and its woods as a fast track for skateboards, roller-bladers and bikers. Some members didn't even like that there were mountain bikers blasting past.

Bike lanes? Put them by the road where they belong.

Wheelchair accessibility? Several smaller or shorter wheelchair accessible sections make more sense than several miles of it and would be better use of public money.

There is always the tireless energy of the dollar, of convenience and another way to use concrete. One of the most difficult things for us to learn is that there are limitations. If nothing else, the economics of these times are teaching us that money and resources are not to be wasted. It might be an urbanist's vision — streetlights to preserve the safety of bicycle commuters,

or thinking of what new line can be drawn through the woods, to cut and belittle their intrinsic reason for being — but it's not mine. It was never ours when we talked about a preserve.

That's what inspired us when we suffered defeats in council meetings, sat through board meetings and attempted public outreach. Could others see the possibilities of the woods' subtle and benevolent presence, the trickle of the stream, the quiet light on the barks of trees, the possibilities of solitude inside the world busy all around us?

Ultimately we go to these woods to allow their effect on us, to replenish our souls. A forest has a subtle effect, and there resides there a lost connection for us, what is at the origin of our imaginations, our emotions and our spiritual well-being, a subtle effect ultimately benevolent and nourishing.

Dave Cook is a founding member of Friends of Bolin Creek. He is author of The Piedmont Almanac: A Guide to the Natural World, The Adventures of Crow-boy and Reservation Nation. He now lives in Durham and is program director at the School House of Wonder.

The desecration of sacred places

TIM TOBEN

They stood in a cold rain outside the coal plant at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Thirty-five students and community protesters, listening to NASA climate scientist James Hansen acknowledge that our consumption of fossil fuels is a case of "intergenerational injustice." It was 22 years ago in 1988, before most of these students were born, when Hansen first testified before Congress that emissions from burning coal and oil were creating a greenhouse effect that was altering our climate and could lead to catastrophic consequences for all species.

Commenters responded to reports of the student protest on Raleigh's newsobserver.com: "James Hansen is an eco terrorist. He should be ashamed of himself spreading this crap," wrote one.

"It is funny to see all of these brainwashed greens standing outside, bundled to the hilt, and getting a taste of 'warming,'" wrote another.

Indeed, the winter cold snap affecting the East Coast, in particular our nation's capital, seems to have taken the heat off Washington to enact comprehensive climate and energy legislation. Meanwhile, 95 percent of all glaciers around the world continue to melt.

I served on the president's National Finance Committee from North Carolina. He has no more ardent supporter, but I was disappointed in his state of the union address, when he prefaced his remarks on climate change with, "I know that there are those who disagree with the overwhelming scientific evidence on climate change," followed by a snicker when the naysayers applauded. He left the impression that there was still some

doubt about the science. But this is 2010, not 1988, and there remains no doubt among the broad scientific community.

So why have we not acted in 22 years? Why is global warming ranked 21st amongst public priorities for 2010 by the Pew Research Center? As my career has turned towards energy policy, I wrestle with that question. Last night, I heard the answer on YouTube. The late author Thomas Berry said: "The reason that the destruction continues around the planet is because we have forgotten the sacred dimension of

What if the oceans were considered sacred places, rather than "resources"? What if the Arctic was considered a sacred place, rather than a resource? What if the Appalachian Mountains were considered a sacred place, rather than a resource?

nature." Could it be that simple?

From the summer of 1999 until the spring of 2001, the Taliban threatened to destroy the giant Buddhas of Bamiyan in Central Afghanistan. The world was outraged. Ambassadors from the 54 member states of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, including Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, three countries that officially recognized the Taliban government, joined the protest to spare these "sacred places." In March, 2001, Mullah Mohammad Omar ordered the statues destroyed. Anti-aircraft guns, artillery and dynamite reduced the sixth-century monuments to rubble. The U.S. used that act of "barbarism" to meld the Taliban to al-Qaeda and coalesce international forces against the Afghan regime.

What if the oceans were considered sacred places, rather than "resources"? What if the Arctic was considered a sacred place, rather than a resource? What if the Appalachian Mountains were considered a sacred place, rather than a resource? Would we not likewise react with outrage and gather the ambassadors of the nations together to find an alternative to their destruction? The Buddhas of Bamiyan took 250 years to carve. Nature's sacred places, which provide our species and all others with fresh air, fresh water and the basis for healthy food systems, took 4.5 billion years to create. Those ecosystems are also our places of inspiration and meditation, not to mention the homes to millions of species that preceded us on this planet. By increasing our appetite for coal and oil, we are destroying many of those sacred places in less time than it took

to build the Buddhas of Bamiyan.

The mathematician Brian Swimme writes that 30 years from now, the word "resource" will be the "r-word," just as today we have the "n-word." It is with the same disregard for the sacredness of the underlying beings that we commit what Hansen calls "intergenerational injustice." It is time for Congress to act on comprehensive climate and energy legislation, not to satisfy the thousands of lobbyists that position themselves to profit, but to respond to those students standing outside the coal plant at UNC and the generation they represent. It is time to give them and their children hope that they may still inhabit a world of wonder and beauty and sacred spaces, like the one we inherited.

Tim Toben is chairman of the N.C. Energy Policy Council.

FOR THE RECORD

The misplaced stigma

CHRIS FITZSIMON

Here is a sobering statistic about the daily economic struggles faced by thousands of families in North Carolina. More than 1.2 million people in the state now receive food stamps. That is up 24 percent over a year ago.

And the real numbers are worse. The last study of food stamp participation found that only 63 percent of people in North Carolina eligible for food stamps were receiving them, ranking North Carolina 33rd in the nation in food stamp participation.

A recent New York Times story about food stamps tried to make the case that receiving food stamps no longer comes with a stigma and the program is now widely accepted as a way to help people make ends meet.

The story quotes Republican Sen. Richard Lugar who says that people now understand the country needs a strong food stamp program. But it also cites South Carolina Lt. Gov. Andre Bauer's quote about food stamps, that his grandmother "told me as a small child to quit feeding stray animals. You know why? Because they breed."

It's a similar sentiment to that expressed during the welfare debate in North Carolina in the mid-1990s, when state Sen. Hugh Webster showed up at a news conference with bumper stickers that said, "Can't feed 'em, Don't Breed 'em."

Webster has long since retired from the Senate, but his offensive sentiment remains in North Carolina, cloaked in only slightly less offensive language. A couple of years ago, local talk radio hosts were beside themselves about a state outreach effort to encourage people who were eligible for food stamps to apply for them.

A prominent Raleigh think-tanker was equally upset, and criticized the efforts to increase food stamp participation, saying that maybe some people who were eligible didn't apply because they didn't think they deserved to get them.

Not getting enough to eat is apparently appropriate punishment for depression or lack of self-worth or even bad luck. Why should the government encourage people to find ways to feed themselves or their families?

Another North Carolina anti-everything think-tanker recently derided farming interests for engaging in "protective lobbying" of the food stamp program because it benefits them financially, a statement that implicitly assumes that the food stamp program should not be protected.

The North Carolina bashers of the poor and the programs that help them have plenty of guidance from their pseudo-intellectual national counterparts. An economist with the Heritage Foundation calls the food stamp program "a fossil that repeats all the errors of the war on poverty." Errors like trying to help people who lose their jobs survive until they can find another one.

Then there's the loudest mouthpiece of the right, Rush Limbaugh, who said last year that the expansion of food stamp benefits by the Obama administration was part of its effort to expand the welfare state and to "take the nation's wealth and return it to the nation's rightful owners," which Limbaugh said was all part of the plan for "forced reparations."

Never underestimate the willingness of the right to try to use race to divide us, especially when millions of people of all colors are suffering.

The fact that almost two-thirds of the people in North Carolina who are eligible are getting help buying food is not something to criticize. It ought to be viewed as a step in the right direction that comes with a commitment to make sure the other 37 percent have every opportunity to sign up.

There's no stigma in getting enough to eat. Everybody deserves that. The stigma ought to come with spouting rhetoric that makes it harder for people to feed their families.

Chris Fitzsimon is executive director of N.C. Policy Watch.