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Mother nature rules

*When her irresistible force meets the trifling plans of men
 the results can be awesome*

by Lee Lynch

I finally understand why nature is called Mother. Don't worry, I'm not launching into a separatist anti-patriarchal diatribe. We've been through a flood here, and I'm awed.

Men, fathers, may be the ultimate authority in some families, may run most governments, start the wars and operate agribusiness to feed the world, and be the primary builders (and therefore excavators) of our earth, but well, let me tell you the story of our park.

The park is a few miles from our home. I go there to run the dog along the river. There's also a wetlands trail where pileated woodpeckers, big prehistoric-looking birds, hammer industriously at trees and, taking flight, let out Woody Woodpecker screeches. There's the beaver pond trail, where, if we walk quietly, we can spot handsome wood ducks, swimming beaver and even hear the eerie call of a rare shrike.

In effect, the park and adjacent federally owned land are wildlife sanctuary, healing haven, natural playground and cradle to a river that flows from a volcanic lake into the Pacific Ocean.

I don't even mind sharing our park. In summer ministers conduct outdoor services under a pavilion surrounded by groomed lawn and picnic benches. Raucous wedding parties disturb the robins and thrushes and song sparrows. But once down by the river, there is no sound except the flowing waters, scolding kingfisher and mewling osprey.

As a kid my mother took me to Central Park in New York. I learned there that a park is a sacred place, the heart of a community, to be respected and protected. In the sticks, I suppose there's just too much country for folks to hold a piece of wild land inviolate. Little things began to happen.

It started inside me. During the anti-gay ballot measures I felt terribly vulnerable tromping the trails with only a pussycat of a dog by my side. I armed myself with pepper spray.

As Oregon became more divided between pro-gay eco-liberals and anti-gay wise-use conservatives, the park seemed to fall apart. Beer cans appeared in coves along the river. Bonfires smoldered near dry brush. Trail signs were knocked over, and lovingly placed bluebird houses torn down and deliberately smashed. I met forbidden trail bikes and found all-terrain vehicle tracks. Cables were sliced so that 4-wheel-drive pickups could play Big Wheels on the eroding riverbank.

Our Audubon Society chapter, which has always had a care-taking relationship with the park, fought back until the park ranger was replaced, the cables repaired, the park patrolled. We put up new bird houses, cleared trails, resurrected signs, brought a federal official to see the damage. And brought him back again when a park neighbor

bulldozed down to the beaver pond to improve his property. The pond drained.

It was a slow, ironic process, but as the anti-gays were beaten back, the park came to look respected once again. Bluebirds and swallows returned to houses. I met bird watchers and rare-plant enthusiasts along the trails. My pepper spray got lost deep in my backpack.

It seems we did too good a job: The next thing we knew the local remote-control plane/car/boat hobby club decided our park would make a perfect runway/speedway/mini-marina. They had it all set up with the county and the feds before presenting their plan to protectors of the park.

We met with them on the proposed runway

site and nearly had a shouting match before it was all over. The hobby club spokesmen told us their planes made almost no noise and that they'd only take down a few habitat trees. Our ornithologist told them what they'd be doing to the blue heron rookery for starters.

The movie will be called *Showdown on the Wetlands*—the all-male wannabe pilots and racers in a line, their backs to the pesticide-ridden orchards, the mixed female/male group of protesters along an overflow pond hosting herons and ducks. Maybe for a few million nuts they could cast that

wiry red squirrel with a voice like a rusty hinge whose burrow is right square on the site of the proposed race circuit.

Closeup: Mother Nature riding a faint crescent moon over the park, witnessing the showdown.

"I'm fed up!" she says. "Not only can't the dumb humans respect one another, now they want the land I bequeathed to Rusty Red-Squirrel! I'll show the sons of women!"

This winter it began to rain. The rain filled the ruined beaver pond and flooded the "improved" property. It merged the overflow ponds and covered the proposed runway. Bursting over its banks, the river raged along, covering every man-made "improvement." By New Year's Day that river had risen to flood stage. When I saw it a few hours before it crested, it was surging just under the rooftop of the pavilion where the preachers preached and the breeders married.

Mother Nature took off her gloves, took over, took back what's hers. While Rusty Red-Squirrel and his fellows raced for high ground, Mother Nature tossed fallen trees like so many toothpicks against the foundations of bridges. She collapsed roads and objected to houses perched where she'd planted roots. She nearly drowned those foolish enough to put motorized toys in her waters. She ripped wires off poles. Networks, Internet, fish-nets, net profit, they all went downstream.

Men's plans? Her river roared her laughter.

