

Guest Writer: Genevieve

"I am glad I shall never be young without wild country to be young in. Of what avail are forty freedoms without a blank spot on the map?"-- Aldo Leopold

A child embarks on an adventure. Leaving the paved streets of a small beach town behind, he follows a sandy path into the dunes. White mist swirls atop gold and green grasses. Sunlight diffuses the shore haze, and a crystalline glow is everywhere. The pine-ridged head juts out in the distance like a great watchful god. Breezes whisper the secrets of the sky, and the waves roll and roll. This place is magic. This beach is freedom.

The next couple hours are spent studying slugs and caterpillars, communing with seagulls, and trekking the quiet hills. As he rounds the foothill of a dune near the main beach access, the child makes another discovery: brand new condos.

The unbelievable silence scratches to a stop. It has been interrupted by this new-born evidence of the rumors and predictions Clatsop county residents have heard for some time: wetlands to the north may be doomed by commercial business parks. More dune acreage spanning the length of the county might be sold for condos and beach front homes. Riverside mileage in Astoria may eventually be forsaken for hotels and shops. Heck, at this rate it wouldn't be surprising to see the tentacles of west Portland creep right over the mountain range within the next twenty years.

Yes, these are upsetting notions. What is also disturbing is the number of times I have heard people say "well, a lot of people don't like it, but it's inevitable. The bottom line is the folks with the money are the decision-makers". When I hear a statement like that, fear and confusion well up in my heart. Are we lower-income citizens supposed to shrug our shoulders and say it may never happen, and even if it does, we'll be long gone by then anyway? Are we anti-progress throwbacks if the prospect of a snowballing rate of development strikes fear in our souls? And are reckless dollars what really control the destiny of the North Coast? Oregon is one of the greenest states in the nation, a quality its inhabitants and leaders have traditionally been proud of. But is the hue of a stack of greenbacks more enticing than the hue of a pure open space?

These questions do not necessarily lead to a 100% anti-development stance. They do however point to a hunch that there is an appropriate time to step back from the plans of progress. Visions can get out of control. Think how many places in the US have begun as idyllic small to mid-size communities. Then, once the idea of commercial promise has appeared on the horizon, massive physical growth has ensued. Some places have already experienced that fate to the extreme. Los Angeles, California is the prime west coast example. What was once upon a time a paradise is now a big city, ridden with the problems that come with over-building and over-population. Denver, Colorado is experiencing water problems due to hyper metro-expansion. Resources are running low. The area's water supply must now be reconsidered to satisfy the needs of city dwellers, farmers, and Arizona residents to the south. If a community caters to throngs of potential residents by repeatedly slapping up housing in any zoned "available" land space, people might see that as an invitation.

Granted, Clatsop county has not approached these extremes, and can hardly be considered a metro area. But conscientiousness and preservation on our current size-scale are necessary to keep this area a bounty of natural wonders. The past is the past for other places. But many of us around here are not convinced that c'est la vie is the most beneficial attitude for the destiny of our beloved land. Wetlands, rivers, shores and mountains are our sanctity. Not only do the few who choose to live here full-time need these wholesome places, but so do the visitors who journey here. If they want to frequent strip malls and view housing complexes, we're only about a hundred miles from Portland. People come here because it's away from the din of an urbanized lifestyle; the natural terrain is welcome relief. Its balance to the inland city is relaxing for the spirit.

It could be pointed out that building up the county means economic improvement in the short-run. It equals job opportunities, more accessible accommodation, and more modern draws for tourists. But there are things that progress of this kind cannot supply. The long-run beauties of a pristine shoreline and abundant native wildlife seem more important to human and planetary well-being. When the next generation of sons and daughters heads for the beach, will they see an area respected and protected, or an area disembodied and tarnished by their self-centered parents?

Perhaps the ultimate power is not in the influence of big dollars and progress, but in willpower -- the willpower to see past the material rewards and comforts that could be ours today, to the bright and shining wild land that is everyone's tomorrow. The most satisfying riches we can have as US residents

are in undisturbed natural spaces. Aldo Leopold said: "Man always kills the things he loves, and so we pioneers have killed our wilderness". But we haven't killed all of it. We have the choice to save our remaining open lands and let them live. You can call your local city hall or the county planning office (325-8611) to find out when planning commission meetings are happening. They are open meetings wherein zoning and building issues are discussed. Also, there is much literature and other venues of study are available about alternative methods of housing that are minimally intrusive to our natural environment.

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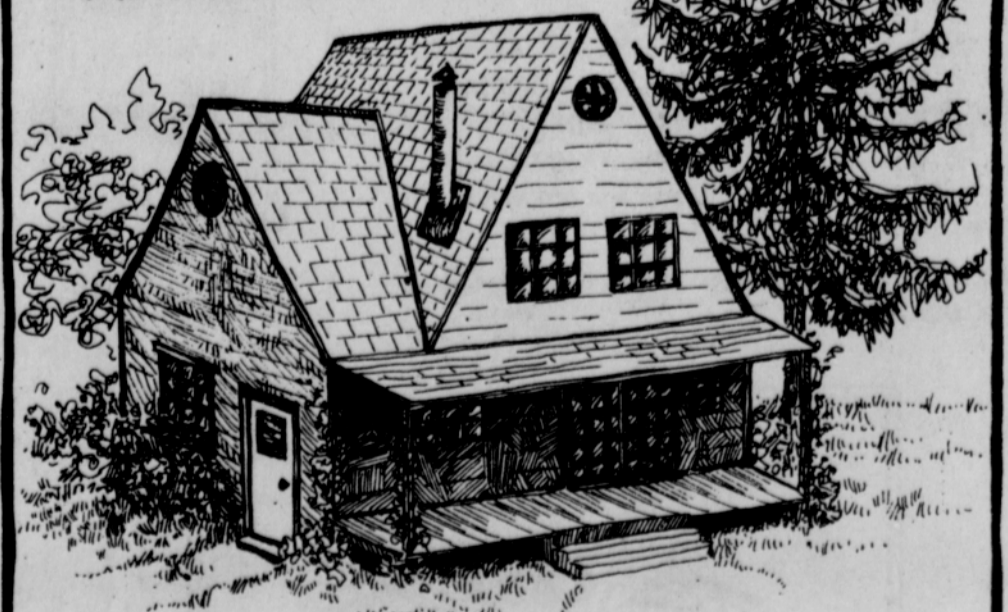
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