

# Biologists disagree over issue of wetlands

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Post Correspondent

Many people, including U.S. Secretary of the Interior James Watt, understand the role of wetlands in maintaining the ecological balance.

It shouldn't be surprising that their existence would create yet another furor between developers and conservationists in the Mt. Hood corridor.

Biologists believe such areas are one of our nation's most vital resources, contributing toward maintaining and improving water quality, as well as aiding habitats for fisheries, birds and many wildlife species.

In the Mt. Hood area what is believed to be an important wetland area is a 400-acre wooded tract of land near Brightwood, known as Cedar Ridge.

This area is situated along Highway 26 and extends north to the Brightwood Loop Road and south to the Salmon River, where it follows the meander of the waterway. Here the area stretches east to the boundaries of the Bureau of Land Management's Wildwood Park.

At one time much of this area, prior to the building of Highway 26, was occupied by a large silver fox farm. The farm operated until sometime in the 1940s.

In the 1960s the late Roy Caruthers, a Brightwood resident and dentist who maintained his practice in the Lents area of southeast Portland, had the area logged and planned the first condominium and golf course for the area.

On New Year's Eve in 1969 Caruthers' untimely death, as the result of an accident that occurred while operating a snowplow, set the stage for a decade of controversy for Cedar Ridge, as other developers eyed the area for resort housing.

Today, three large developments are planned

for the Cedar Ridge area. These developments would occupy an estimated 450 acres and accommodate 847 townhouses and condominiums, 192 mobile homes, three recreational halls, parking facilities, sidewalks and roads.

Harold Winegar of Prineville, a consulting biologist for such groups as the Mt. Hood Natural Resources Coalition and the Rhododendron Neighborhood Group, warns that the Cedar Ridge area, as well as similar areas in the corridor, should not be developed. Any disturbance of the area's wetlands could mean the destruction of Cedar Ridge, as well as the adjacent Salmon River, as we know them today.

Equally as fragile are the so-called "dry" higher areas. Winegar said these areas are important because they contribute to the wholistic function of the wetland. This wetland area, which Winegar prefers to call a "riparian system," acts as a filter that purifies the water as well as maintaining the stream flows in the Salmon River.

The riparian system also maintains various plant communities which, along with soil and gravel deposits, naturally filters out pollutants. This plant community also provides a habitat for birds and a variety of wildlife species.

The developers of the proposed 345-unit Brightwood Glen subdivision, the Real Estate Loan Fund (RELF) of Salem, disagree with Winegar, and believe that most of these concerns can be mitigated through a well-engineered stormwater drainage system.

RELF officials contracted last year with Bierly & Associates Inc., a wetland and waterway resource consultant also headquartered in Salem, to analyze the stormwater drainage system proposed by the developers. The

system was engineered by Boatwright Engineering Inc., also of Salem.

The primary parcel of the Brightwood Glen development lies between Highway 26 and the Salmon River. It is bordered by Miller Road on the east. A steep ridge spans the boundaries of the development to the west, and acts as a barrier between the subdivision and an old wagon road, today called Blue Jay Lane.

Ken Bierly of the consulting firm visited the site on two occasions in May of 1981. The purpose of the visits were for "verifying vegetation and soil conditions and observing hydrologic setting and behavior" of the wetlands.

Bierly did not address the issue of the 19 acres of wetlands that were reported to be located in the platted area of the development. The study focused on a wetland area located just above the Salmon River on a flood-deposited berm that rises an estimated three to four feet. The findings were compiled in a report that was submitted to the Clackamas County planning division for review.

Since the developers proposed to discharge an undetermined amount of stormwater into wetlands administered by the BLM, a copy was submitted to that agency also. This wetland area is located 120 feet south of the development.

The total area of the BLM wetlands was not addressed in the report, rather the primary focus was on a large pond, which was estimated to cover about three-quarters of an acre. According to the Bierly report, this pond "occupies an abandoned meander channel of the Salmon River."

From the pond a small creek flows down over a cliff into a waterfall that empties into the Salmon River some 60 feet below.

To the southeast, only a short distance from where the falls enter the river, the Cedar Ridge area is dotted with beaver ponds and small streams. This area is only a few feet higher than the river at high water. Winegar said this area clearly illustrates the unique geologic contrasts that this "riparian system possesses."

Bierly classified the BLM wetland area as an "inland shallow fresh marsh" or a "Palustrine Emergent" wetland that is "persistent and semi-permanently flooded."

Like Winegar, the potential impact of the stormwater discharge system into the Salmon River was identified by Bierly as being increased bank erosion and, as a direct result, changes in water quality.

Bierly also acknowledged there is the potential for increased sedimentation in the wetland. Winegar went a step further, saying that by passing large amounts

of stormwater through the wetland it could result in its destruction due to the increased pollutants, which would be carried along in the runoff.

If this were to happen the impact on both the Salmon River, and the wetland itself, could be substantial, according to Winegar. However, according to the Bierly report, no such impact will occur as a result of the proposed stormwater drainage and retention system that has been designed for the Brightwood Glen development.

Winegar claims the Cedar Ridge riparian system is already overtaxed.

Additional impacts on this area would only mean a further degradation of the Mt. Hood corridor, he said.

The developers propose to drain the high-water areas of the subdivision site into a detention pond, which would be located near the junction of Highway 26 and Miller Road. From here the water will be channeled into the BLM pond.

To prevent oil and grease from passing into the pond,

the developers will construct the detention facility to trap such pollutants. How this will be accomplished is not identified in the report. But Bierly did state that "wetlands have been demonstrated to be effective in the removal of urban drainage pollutants."

The report notes the size and design of the pond "will facilitate settling of suspended materials and remove added nutrients from the discharge waters."

The only adverse impact the Bierly report said would occur as a result of the proposed stormwater system relates to the frequency of flows into the wetlands that could occur as a result of floods, or in times of water shortages.

After reviewing the report and surveying the site, Winegar said he could not concur with Bierly's findings. He said draining the area proposed by the developer will adversely disrupt existing plant communities and the natural drainage of the area.

In addition, said Winegar, a large portion of the site's "natural filters,"

such as vegetation and soils, are being removed from the purification process since most of the water is to be diverted into a holding pond and then released into the wetland through a pipe.

Another criticism Winegar said he has of the proposed drainage system is that it wouldn't maintain the natural time schedule of the riparian system, which allows water to be released in cycles to maintain flows. Much of this release reportedly helps maintain various plant species and maintains flows in the Salmon River.

On June 5, 1981, Edward G. Stauter of the BLM reviewed the stormwater plan and agreed that no adverse impact to the wetlands would result.

"We have reviewed the proposed storm runoff drainage for Brightwood Glen P.U.D. (planned unit development) that would impact public land under our jurisdiction... and have concluded that there would be no noticeable impact on the wetlands," wrote Stauter. "We have no objections to the proposed discharge."

Tross requested a joint investigation of the site between the project's wetland consultant, Bierly, and Gary Cook, the county's natural resource planner. As a result of that investigation, which took place on July 7, the wetland area was reduced from 19 acres to nine.

## Pihl, Shiprack to debate

Mark Pihl, Republican candidate for the House of Representatives for District 23, and his opponent, Bob Shiprack, a Democrat, will debate Oct. 14 at 7:30 p.m. at Sandy Union High School.

Jack Peters, SUHS superintendent, is organizing the symposium. Dennis Crow, assistant principal, is to serve as moderator.

The public is invited to submit questions prior to the debate.

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