

Draining Frogs

Choice looms for a beloved Eugene park.

I remember the day I learned to distrust the word "development." I was in high school, walking near downtown Whittier, my town in Southern California. I paused at a fenced lot of bare dirt – and about 75 improbable rose bushes blooming in a dozen colors. Some neighbor had anonymously planted and tended the bushes for years.

A construction company's sign on the fence said, "This site soon to be developed." I realized that meant, "This place of roses soon to disappear."

Recently, I was crouched in an October Oregon wetland, which means it wasn't wet. The dark clay soil had contracted during summer into blocks of pea-gravel clay separated by deep cracks. A frog called from inside one of the cracks, hidden.

A friend was showing me native plants that have been restored to this wetland, after lawn and fill had been removed. Spike primrose, coyote thistle, Oregon sunshine, blue-eyed grass, tufted hairgrass. They had all regained a once-lost neighborhood. I particularly wanted to see a panic grass that grows there. I love the wildness of its name, and how its small seeds park far out from the main stem on gravity-defying, horizontal threads. We couldn't find the panic grass, but I learned of another one there: American slough grass, with thick, flat seeds ducks admire.

A dragonfly cruised past. A scrub jay flew. Another hidden frog called from inside its clay-crack sound chamber, inches from my foot.

My friend walks here often. Last year, he says, a marsh wren stayed through the winter, though they usually migrate far south. Tree frogs will begin calling in January. Crows mass in the nearby ash grove, migratory birds nest (and are sometimes eaten by crows) in the restored willows, butterflies locate host and nectar plants – all this and more in one small patch of nature.

But it's surrounded by developments. To the north of the patch lies a bus transfer station. To its west, a swimming pool. To its south, a maze of ball fields. To its east, a jogging/walking trail. Because this is Amazon Park.

Right now, there's a choice looming for the park: more open space of restored nature for children, old people, walking, and jogging; or the development of two more ball fields requiring extensive drainage at the edge of the wetland? The latter is being pushed by the Parks Department and ball players who run into an after-work baseball "traffic jam" three months a year. The former is being favored by a growing number of neighbors and other Eugeneans who use Amazon Park around the clock and year round, and have watched the park become stuffed with more and more developments, lights and parking lots, while open space has shrunk and shrunk and shrunk.

Currently, Amazon Park has five baseball fields (two of them guarded by offensive chain link fences); four soccer fields; four tennis courts; two in-line hockey courts; and two volleyball courts. And lights. Seventy-two bright, unshielded stadium lights above these 17 fields and courts. The park also contains a swimming pool (25 more lights) fenced dog park, wading pool, skateboard facility, two community centers, a bus transfer station and five parking lots.

However, if the chemically maintained lawns of two more fields are *not* built here, the creek could be allowed to meander, freeing it from its disheartening strait-jacket of concrete. The ash grove could be reconnected to the creek, expanding habitat for the bird and tree frog choruses, by simply moving the much-used jogging and walking path to the west side of the wetland (i.e., same length, more nature). A boardwalk could be built in the ash grove, elevated above winter ponds and spring camas, and under autumn colors and summer shade. Another boardwalk could snake through the wetland, giving a close-up view of the wetlands' remarkable seasonal changes. And all the lights could be shielded, so sunset and evening could come home to the park.

With this park, our community has a chance to do what communities too rarely do: consider the implications of alternative futures. We're much better at building one development after another, and then waking up one day to find we have drained frogs, wild grasses, and the rest of nature from our lives.

NOTE: One way to help insure that options are considered for Amazon Park is to contact Citizens for a Natural Amazon at 513-8151; and wander through www.cyberdyne.com/~tom/03/natural_amazon.html. A public meeting is scheduled for 7 pm Nov. 20, at the Hilyard Center, call 682-4914 to confirm time.

Mary O'Brien of Eugene has worked as a public interest scientist for the past 22 years. She can be reached at mob@efn.org



lem; this affects me in southeast Eugene and will affect you wherever you live. Our town's athletes will find a place to play and that might mean putting more pressure on your neighborhood's park and might mean more evening traffic in your neighborhood. Call the city (682-4800). Call 4J (687-3309). Oppose any loss of green space in our community.

C. Michael Arnold
Eugene

ANTI-WAR DEMOCRAT

Ellen Hyman's letter (10/23) questioning my letter about Dean's support for many of Bush's military policies missed the core issues.

An article published by Common Dreams April 14 goes into Dean's doctrine in more detail:

"In effect this supposedly 'anti-war' Democrat has announced his support for a policy in which Washington will decide which countries are allowed to have nuclear weapons and will reserve for itself the right to forcefully disarm those who do not voluntarily disarm by U.S. dictate. In this crucial regard Dean's position is in close accordance with the Bush doctrine of coercive disarmament and preventive war."

(From "As Baghdad Falls Howard Dean Folds Back into the National Security Establishment" by Charles Knight www.commondreams.org/views03/0414-09.htm)

It is easy for Dean to market himself as a "peace" candidate. However, Dean supports

Bush's military spending levels, an increase in what is euphemistically called "Special Forces," praises "Homeland Security" and agrees with Bush on the death penalty.

See www.kucinichdeancompare.com for more on the differences between Dennis Kucinich and the "Doctor for the death penalty." Kucinich is the only candidate who supports the Kyoto treaty, cutting the military budget, investigating where the Pentagon's missing trillion dollars went, campaign finance reform, gay marriage, medical marijuana, fair treatment for Palestinians and Israelis, withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq and opposes genetic frankenfood. On election day, the humanitarian, progressive choice will be clear: Kucinich for President!


Mark Robinowitz
Eugene

RIGHTEOUS MODE

It is obvious to me by now that some readers of *EW* do not like the "pornographic" ads being run. So for the rest of us out here who don't care, will the offended readers shut up please!?


It's been said before and I'll say it again: You are reading a free publication that is provided to you through the money generated by ads. If you do not like these ads, do not look at them. If you do not approve of an ad being run in a free paper, be prepared to pay a fee for the paper. If you cannot dig yourself out of "righteous mode," then do not read the publication.

If you are worried about your children seeing such ads, I would suggest taking care



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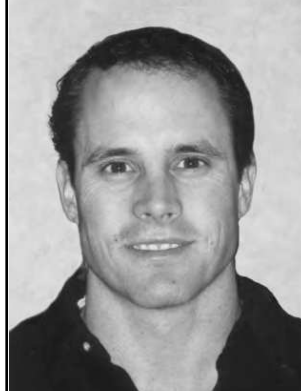


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Two more Markets, outdoors through Nov. 15!

Kenyan artist Martin Owino fills his brightly colored batiks with vibrant images of Africa. Perhaps these Masai women are headed off to the local market...

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