

# Of Wars and Wetlands

Destroying what we don't understand.

In August 1967, with a sociology degree in my 21-year-old hand, I moved from Los Angeles to Madison, Wisc., to begin graduate school in social work. The huge University of Wisconsin campus was remarkably free of cars. I thought it quite clever of the university to have drained an adjacent swamp to build a parking lot from which students could ride buses onto campus.

That fall, I learned two large things: 1) it is *not* clever to erase wetlands for cars; and 2) the Freudian-oriented UW social work school was not going to help me effectively address poverty, hunger or social upheavals.

By 1968 I was in the Washington, D.C., women's jail for a week for quietly protesting the Vietnam War with four other Quaker women; had switched to a graduate program in elementary education; and was walking some of each week in Wisconsin's woods, remnant prairies and wetlands.

One evening last week, 36 years later, I found myself reading two things: a scientific article on an endangered butterfly threatened by the proposed construction of a highway through West Eugene's remnant wetlands; and *They Marched into Sunlight*, by David Maraniss. *They Marched* describes events of Oct. 17-18, 1967 in South Vietnam; Madison, Wisc.; and Washington, D.C. In Vietnam, a battalion of mostly young U.S. soldiers marched into an ambush that left 61 of them dead and an equal number wounded. That same day in Madison, the university called in city police who violently dislodged a student sit-in protest against on-campus recruitment by Dow Chemical Company, manufacturers of napalm. I had been walking to class past the Commerce Building when the violence erupted; I fled as tear gas filled the air of carless Observatory Drive.

Lying in bed after my evening reading last week, I thought about how destroying our fellow beings depends on our not *knowing* them. *They Marched* tells the stories of young soldiers who knew essentially nothing about the Vietnam they were bombing, or the Vietnamese they were shooting. At hearings about the West Eugene Parkway I realize how little the highway's proponents know the native inhabitants and needs of west Eugene's wetlands.

Take, for example, Fender's blue butterfly, whose only chosen home has been Oregon's Willamette Valley. Its egg is laid in May or June almost exclusively on Kincaid's lupine in the prairies' drier rises. Within a few weeks, a Fender's larva hatches, feeds on the lupine for a short time, and by July is lying dormant among debris at the base of the lupine. The next February or March, the larva wakes up and again begins feeding on the lupine and calls upon ants to protect it. The larva secretes liquid drops containing sugars and amino acids (for building proteins), and then calls ants to this offering by emitting a chemical that mimics the ant alarm pheromone. It can also tap out calls that mimic ant alarm calls. When ants arrive, they find the sugar drops and guard the larva. By the next month, April, the larva has gone into its pupal changing room. Almost a year after beginning as an egg, the Fender's blue butterfly emerges in May to fly about 15 days before dying. During its two weeks as a silvery blue male or soft brown female butterfly, it must feed on nectar (somehow the little butterfly recognizes and prefers nectar from native prairie flowers), find a mate, and, if female, lay eggs.

While Kalapuya Indians had used fire to perpetuate wetland and upland prairies throughout one-third of Willamette Valley, Euro-Americans of the late 1800s began their approach of draining, plowing, paving, and building towns in the valleys' wetlands. By 2001, less than one-tenth of 1 percent of Willamette Valley's wetland prairies remained, Kincaid's lupine was federally listed as threatened, and Fender's as endangered. Where Fender's once flew short distances between patches of Kincaid's lupine, it now tries to survive in 16 scattered populations with half of its native prairie remnants less than five acres in size. Only five Fender's blue populations have more than 100 individuals. In the dry parlance of the science article I read last week, "Given current population trends, population viability of the Fender's blue is not encouraging."

In *They Marched into Sunlight*, I am learning about the individual lives and feelings of some of my young fellow Americans who died in Vietnam the day I merely smelled police tear gas in Madison. In the science articles, I'm learning about a remarkable little butterfly and its plant and ant partners, none of whom I have yet met in person. I still know nothing about the young Vietnamese soldiers who died that October day in 1967; and nothing about most of the wetlands creatures who are disappearing throughout the U.S. All of these are our relations.

Lying in bed last week after reading these two seemingly disconnected documents, I wondered: If we should be forgiven for destroying what we didn't understand, should we be forgiven for failing to *try* to understand those whom we are felling?

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### JOINT PUBLIC HEARING

Eugene and Springfield City Councils and Lane County Board of Commissioners

**Tuesday, February 10, 6:30pm • Eugene Library, 100 W. 10 Ave.**

The public is invited to comment on proposed amendments to the *Eugene-Springfield Metro Plan* text and diagram. These amendments are proposed for compliance with Periodic review, a state mandated process to update comprehensive land use plans. The Metro Plan is this metropolitan region's long range plan for land use, public facilities and services, natural resources, housing, economy, and transportation, among other things.


**Contact:** Carol Heinkel, LCOG 682-4107; Kathi Wiederhold, LCOG 682-4430; Kurt Yeiter, Eugene, 682-8379; Mark Metzger, Springfield, 726-3775; Stephanie Schulz, Lane County, 682-3735; and [www.lcog.org/metro](http://www.lcog.org/metro)



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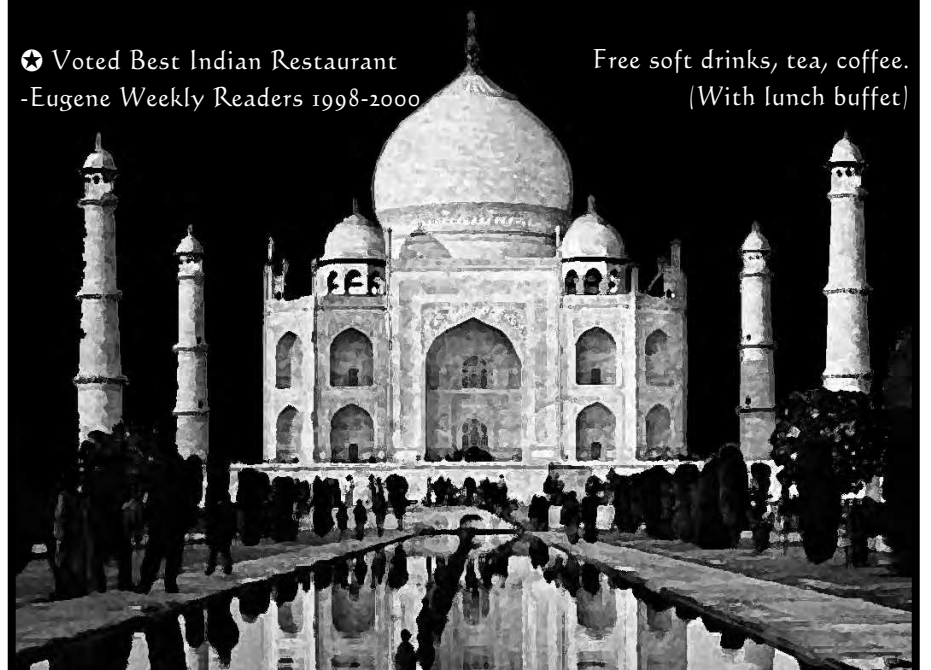
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