

## Fighting for Their Lives

Can mediation save an endangered species' habitat?

In the three decades between the 1890s and 1920s, our southern states' bottomland swamp forests were logged into oblivion. By 1920, ivory-billed woodpeckers, dependent on these forests, were thought to be extinct.

But in 1924, the founder of Cornell University's famed bird laboratory found a pair in Florida. Two local collectors heard of the woodpeckers' presence and shot them. Again, extinction seemed to have occurred.

Then in 1935, a bird expedition found several pairs in an 81,000-acre Louisiana swamp forest owned by the Singer Sewing Machine Company. But then Singer sold the tract of bottomland to the Chicago Mill and Lumber Company for logging. Four federal agencies, including the Audubon Society and the governors of four Southern states, appealed to Chicago Mill to sell their timber rights so an ivory-bill sanctuary could be formed. Chicago Mill's chairman rebuffed the coalition, cheerfully announcing, "We are just money grubbers." The Lord God Bird (as the woodpecker was sometimes called because of its startling size and coloration) was last seen there in 1944 as the last of those trees fell.



With poignant tenacity, the ivory-billed woodpecker has been able to keep living, tooting, and resisting our propensity to use every inch of the Earth for only us, us, us.

In the late 1980s, two ivory-billed woodpeckers were found in eastern Cuba, and a small sanctuary was established. Logging continued apace around the sanctuary and the woodpeckers seem to have disappeared.

And now, in 2005, we learn that at least one Lord God Bird still exists in Arkansas' Cache River National Wildlife Refuge. With poignant tenacity, the ivory-billed woodpecker has been able to keep living, tooting, and resisting our propensity to use every inch of the Earth for only us, us, us.

Just as the South once included ten million acres of bottomland swamp forest, the Willamette Valley once included a million acres of wetland and upland prairie. Now we have less than 1,000 acres, much of it on developable private lands. Thus we have managed to erase 99.9% of this ecosystem, with its flood control, water storage, water quality, biodiversity and aesthetic values as completely as we erased the South's bottomland forests. Like the bottomlands' ivory-billed woodpecker, our prairie's Fender's blue butterfly was thought by 1937 to be extinct, only to be discovered again here in the 1980s.

West Eugene Wetlands is one of our valley's last, remaining public tracts of prairie. And yet the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) plans to construct a giant, four-lane highway (ironically called the West Eugene Parkway) that would divide these remnant wetlands.

Doesn't it make you wonder about our species?

Last week I participated in a gathering sponsored by the U.S. Institute of Environmental Conflict Resolution (USIECR). Established by Congress in 1998, USIECR is a resource for federal agencies embroiled in public lands, natural resources or environmental disputes with public or private entities. Most of the participants in this gathering were professional facilitators who help warring entities seek solutions that meet with agreement by all the relevant stakeholders. Their success stories are inspiring.

In attendance at this gathering was staff of Portland State University's Oregon Consensus Program, a statewide version of the USIECR. The Oregon Consensus Program facilitates collaborative agreement-seeking processes, and has a current agreement with ODOT Region 2 (Astoria to Cottage Grove) to help them assess potential projects for collaborative approaches.

And yet, in 20 years of stubborn planning for (and equally stubborn resistance to) the West Eugene Parkway, NO ONE has EVER assembled the various entities – ODOT, Bureau of Land Management, Federal Highway Administration, Army Corps of Engineers, Lane County, the cities of Eugene and Veneta, and community stakeholders and wetlands advocates – to seriously consider whether any alternatives might find acceptance with everyone.

What if a U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution had been used in 1939 to mediate between Chicago Mill and Lumber and the Lord God Bird? What if the Oregon Consensus Project were used in 2005 to mediate between ODOT, developers, other government agencies, and those who want to be sure the next generation can look across a healthy, open stretch of western Oregon's hummocky, dry-wet prairie; watch the once-nearly-extinct Fender's blue butterfly visit Kincaid's lupine; hear meadowlarks and silence; and grow old beside shining, seasonal ponds?

Doesn't it seem worth a try?

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