

Stepping Stones

Will a wetlands education center be built on crucial habitat?

Following Wetlands Appreciation month in Eugene, here's a riddle with some surprisingly disturbing answers for wetlands-appreciators:

What do the proposed West Eugene Wetlands Environmental Education Center and the proposed West Eugene Parkway have in common?

The obvious answer: *Wetlands!* The education center will help teach us to treasure and understand life in west Eugene's almost-gone wetlands while the highway would be built in those wetlands.

The less obvious answers:

- The seven buildings, amphitheater, parking lot, and roadway proposed for the education complex would *likewise* be built in West Eugene Wetlands.

- Both the highway and education complex would be built on potentially crucial upland "stepping stones" for our endangered Fender's blue butterfly.

The central issue is the reality that West Eugene's Wetlands are a mixture of "wet" and "upland" prairie. Sometimes only a few inches' difference in elevation distinguish the two, with upland prairie perched slightly to moderately above adjacent, water-logged wet prairie. Those few inches, however, spell the difference between home and not-home for certain plant species and their associated wildlife.



We are evicting Fender's blue butterfly from its home on Earth.

Fender's blue butterfly, listed nationally as "endangered," is linked inextricably not only to our Willamette Valley, but also to an exclusively Willamette Valley plant, Kincaid's lupine. This lupine, federally listed as "threatened," is an *upland* prairie plant. In the West Eugene Wetlands, Fender's blue butterflies lay their eggs only on Kincaid's lupine; their larvae (caterpillars) eat only Kincaid's lupine leaves; the caterpillars rest for the winter at the base of Kincaid's lupine, resume feeding on Kincaid's lupine the next spring, build a pupa and finally emerge as butterflies. During their 15 days of butterfly-ness, Fender's blue butterflies fly primarily within and among Kincaid's lupine patches, searching for a mate and egg-laying spots.

When wet and upland prairies still filled much of Willamette Valley, a Fender's blue butterfly could insure the genetic adaptability of its species by mating with a Fender's blue butterfly from a nearby Kincaid's lupine patch. (Butterflies, like us, need to look beyond their immediate relatives for mates.) Now, with 99.9 percent of all Willamette Valley wetland and upland prairies drained, plowed, farmed, paved or "developed" (i.e., eliminated) for homes and businesses, we are evicting Fender's blue butterfly from its home on Earth. Simply, neighboring lupine patches are too few and far away.

In west Eugene, we have one of the best chances to lure Fender's blue butterfly back from the cliff of extinction. The Nature Conservancy tries to protect one main population of Fender's blue butterfly south of West 11th in their Willow Creek Preserve. The BLM hosts another, more modest population, about 3.1 miles (5 km), to the northwest, off Fir Butte Road. But Fender's blue butterflies mostly fly short distances within a lupine patch, with wanderers occasionally flying up to about 1.2 miles (2 km). In order to prevent the extinction of Fender's blue butterfly, "stepping stones" of Kincaid's lupine need to be restored between the two main West Eugene butterfly populations, along with certain native plants that provide nectar (butterfly fuel).

Unfortunately, both the proposed highway and education complex are sited for construction in upland prairie, directly in the northwest-southeast path in which Fender's blue butterfly needs every Kincaid's lupine stepping stone it can find.

Just as the West Eugene Parkway was planned before the values of West Eugene's wetlands were understood, so the education center was planned before upland prairie was appreciated as crucial habitat. However, alternatives to environmental destruction always exist. In the case of the Education Center, for instance, a more modest footprint of buildings on the western half of the site would allow for butterfly restoration and use of the eastern half, which is connected to still more upland habitat to the north. Alternatively, a donated site on some private land might be possible.

The Education Center's website notes that its "sustainable design features ... demonstrate that humans can live responsibly with the land." If the Center decides to demonstrate that responsibility for *location* as well as *design*, it will provide an admirable example for Oregon Department of Transportation, Federal Highways Administration and us all.

It's about genuine appreciation of wetlands.

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How to Be Happy

by Shannon Wheeler



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

FLUENCY WALK

In response to "Culture of Whiteness" (cover story, 5/18), I identify myself as a 33-year-old white (German, Swedish, Irish, possibly Czech) female with no university affiliation. When I read that article, I read about an issue lived by students taking a risk to educate people like me. In this letter, I address those who desire a world that embraces diversity of appearances, backgrounds and experiences.

At last year's Take Back the Night (to end sexual violence), one of the speakers said, "We need to become fluent in the struggle of the person sitting next to us." Most people I know have two reactions to such a statement. First, they acknowledge the need for change with no follow-through. If we don't talk about it, it'll go away, right? Next, they get agitated. No one cares about their burden so why should they care about anyone else's crap? And so it goes.

Personally, I cannot relate to the specific struggles these students face. All I know to do is listen and learn. It is a start. I will bear witness. I have and will continue to talk about what they have shared with my friends and family. If more is required of me, I will be open to it. I can do this because every day I acknowledge my own needs, first. When did this become selfish?

I propose that you ask yourself honestly what it is in your daily functioning that disables your ability to fully experience your neighbor, your friend, or a stranger who is walking the same sidewalk.

Katie Custer
Eugene

ASLEEP AT THE WHEEL

I'm perplexed. For a week now I've been trying to see how we, as a community, and the *Weekly*, as a business, benefit from the publishing of J.K. Larkin's Viewpoint (5/25).

Initially I thought that perhaps it was an editorial oversight, that maybe it wasn't even read before its inclusion in the issue, and that someone on Lincoln Street was guilty of being asleep at the wheel. Maybe it's that, de-

spite the fact that Larkin is clearly a terrible satirist and has given us only a thoroughly incomprehensible series of generalizations to masquerade as a "viewpoint," what he has to say is so important that Eugene needed to read it. But no, the Larkin piece is not important. It doesn't even seem to have much of a point. In fact I am, as I said, perplexed that it was even deemed worth printing.

But maybe I'm really missing the point here. Maybe what it really says is that *EW* believes racial stereotyping in our community is OK, so long as it comes from someone who is, of course, only kidding. Unfortunately, by giving a voice to the uninformed, you share in the blame. I mean it's not like you *had* to print the article; you chose to. Whether you personally find it offensive or not, you had to at least be aware that a sizable portion of our community might find it so. And to what end?

I hope that in the future you will make more informed and responsible editorial decisions.

Geoff Stiles
Eugene

WEP ALTERNATIVE

At 7 pm June 15, West Eugene Transportation, Land and Neighborhood Design Solutions (WETLANDS) will sponsor a forum and dialogue about the West Eugene Parkway, potential federal lawsuits and the WETLANDS alternative to the WEP. This free event will be held in Harris Hall, 8th and Oak.

June 14 is the 10th anniversary of the 1996 lawsuit by Save Our ecoSystems against the Federal Highway Administration.