

VILLAGE VIEW

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If the stuff in your mailbox is similar to the stuff in mine, better than half your mail is appeals for money. The causes all sound worthy. Save the whales. Save the green turtles. Save the children. Help the war-weary Lebanese. Protect the bald eagle. Join the battle for/against abortion, nuclear proliferation, re-armament, capital punishment, unregistered handguns and on and on. All it takes is your contribution, together with those of millions of other Americans, to achieve the desired ends.

Recently a mailing arrived that asked for no monetary support. So unusual is this that even if I weren't already convinced the cause is just and important, I'd have studied the presentation. Because I'm already on the band-wagon, and because I've asked, in the past, for support of this effort on the part of a private land-owner to "fight city hall," it's now time to bring everyone up-to-date, and also, to ask once again that concerned individuals write letters telling officialdom where we stand.

The location is Grazing Fields Farm in Bourne. The plan in question is the route to be used for the extension of Route 25 from its present terminus in Wareham to the Bourne Bridge. The problem involves two proposed routes for the highway. The first, called the Wetland Route, is backed by the state DPW, and requires filling wetlands, drainage of salty highway run-off into fresh water ponds, and will cause noise and visual damage to the Farm Center and Wildlife Sanctuary, and destroy valuable cropland.

The second, and alternative route, was first proposed in 1968. The legal battle to defend the farm has dragged on and has held up work on the road for fourteen years. The alternate route would locate the highway 1,000 feet from the Farm Center and Wildlife Sanctuary, and at a safe distance from wellfields.

The DPW's proposed route requires filling over 70% of an 11-acre wetland adjacent to a Buzzards Bay Water District well. The 6-lane highway, plus two breakdown lanes (92 feet of macadam plus the width of the median strip) will be constructed within 300 feet of the well's pumping station. The highway will drain through Goat Pasture Pond and three lower fresh water ponds into Buttermilk Bay.

Grazing Fields Farm's proposed route will carry the highway over higher, forested ground, and drain, via a closed system, into Cape Cod Canal.

Federal and state regulations "require" its agencies to protect wetlands against unnecessary filling and to adopt any feasible alternative.

The farm's proposal will locate the highway through a stand of pitch pine; while destruction of the trees will result, will and the plants and wildlife that flourish there, will not be wiped out, nor will freshwater supplies be threatened.

Consider: Roughly 95% of the earth's water resources, according to a study by Virginia Polytechnic Institute, is too salty to use in agriculture. Millions of acres of land overlie saline aquifers that could be tapped, but are ten times more salty than the lethal limit for farm crops.

With fresh water in short supply, and with problems of water quality, on Cape Cod and in many other places, surfacing more and more frequently, is it not the responsibility of each of us to take individual steps to help protect what we have? Not only is our drinking and cooking water threatened, our food supplies are also in danger. Throughout the world, humans are dependent for survival on four cereal crops that comprise the bulk of our diet: corn, barley, wheat and rice. All require fresh water to grow.

Consider: Massachusetts imports from other states over 90% of the food we consume here. Our farms are declining in size and in numbers. Costs to bring food to Massachusetts increase as fuel-costs rise. Food prices reflect those increases.

Shouldn't we stand shoulder-to-shoulder with farm-owners fighting to defend their productive property?

Grazing Fields Farm is not the only one threatened. Neighboring property-owners, as well, will suffer if the DPW's plan is finally followed. A 3.5 acre section of the cranberry bog will be destroyed and one dwelling will be demolished. Another property, a farm, will be split in two. The alternate plan will require demolition or relocation of two wood-frame houses and a two-car garage, but leave the bog and another house intact, and the farm in one piece.

The projected usage of the highway is 9 to 10 million cars a year across the Wildlife Sanctuary's 11-acre wetland, 35 feet above surrounding landscapes on a massive earthfill embankment, through cultivated fields, and within 300 feet of farm buildings.

Despite FHWA/DPW regulations prohibiting the destruction of farmland when a feasible alternative exists, the DPW continues to push for the more destructive alternative. Four acres of prime cropland, now planted with alfalfa and classified by the U.S. Soils Conservation Service as "agricultural land of state and local significance," will be destroyed by the wetlands route, as opposed to the taking of only one acre of forested land so listed by the same service.

Grazing Fields Farm is struggling to preserve itself and is asking for public support. A public hearing will be held on Wednesday, Sept. 8, 1982, 7:30 P.M. at 239 Main St., Buzzards Bay. Your support will be appreciated at that time.

Those who cannot attend in person, or who want to do more, are asked to write Governor Ed King, State House, Boston, MA 02133, and send copies of their letter to Justin Radlo, Chief Engineer, DPW, Room 211, 31 St. James Ave., Boston, MA 02116, and to Norman Van Ness, Division Administrator, at the same address.

Long explanations are not necessary. Expressing your personal support for the upland route can affect the final decision. It can also give you the satisfaction of taking a stand for what is right.

All too often we feel overwhelmed and helpless against the juggernaut of state and federal agencies which take our money by taxation and use it to despoil our surroundings. In most cases, by the time we discover what's going on, we face the accomplished fact. It's too late to object.

In this instance, we have a chance to take a stand before the work begins. The highway, whether we like it or not, whether we want it or not, is going to be built. Where, and in what manner, is still undecided. We have an opportunity, now, to speak up and influence that decision.

Please sit down with pen and paper and voice your opinion. Please don't put it off. There's no appeal for financial assistance. There is a sincere appeal for your personal input. Your effort can help make state and federal authorities aware that fresh water and wetlands and farmland are valuable to you, to everyone, and that you want followed those regulations already in place, enacted for the protection of all of us as well as for farmers. Tell them that Grazing Fields Farm, its cropland, wetlands and wildlife as well as the fresh water supplies of Buzzards Bay are important to you and merit protection, and that you favor the upland route for the Route 25 highway extension.