



Work to save Buckshutem Tract

By Letters to the Editor/The News of Cumber...

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Special to The News**

Paul Porreca's idea of addressing more motorsports noise by keeping the possible future ATV facility where it was originally planned creates more problems than solutions. Before rushing to embrace added noise, both the city and motorsports officials should first address the controversial noise levels area residents are already battling. Moreover, there's no guarantee that locating an ATV facility across the street from the motorsports park on the 200-acre city-owned "Buckshutem Tract" will be far enough away to keep the added racket out of residents' ears and backyards.

As evidenced by a recent lawsuit brought on by the local citizens' group TrackRacket, many believe they're already being forced to live with more noise than anyone bargained for. If Phase II comes to fruition and woodlands are cleared to make way for a new oval track, ATV and motocross park, things will certainly get even louder, and for a larger affected area.

Having heard the unending roar of engines from a kayak just north of the Mauricetown Bridge, well south of Millville city limits on a now diminished Wild and Scenic River, it's not hard to sympathize with this group's dogged efforts to seek concessions to reduce present and anticipated noise.

Indeed, the numerous noise complaints being reported across city limits and beyond indicate that there are many variables involved in how and where unwelcome sound travels. Distance is an important factor, but it is greatly influenced by elevation, weather and prevailing winds.

As for noise abatement, it seems the only measure planned for Phase II is a 300-foot vegetation strip and sound wall where the Buckshutem Tract straddles the Bevan State Wildlife Management Area. The lack of a sound wall along Buckshutem Road is a concern, since the oval track is planned to service practicing stock cars, which are famously loud.

Worse still, if sound walls were so effective there wouldn't be a growing chorus of upset citizens demanding more be done. Somehow, clear-cutting yet another forest to make room for even louder engines only raises the stakes as additional neighborhoods are subjected to even greater motorsports-related noise.

Unfortunately, noise is not the only unintended consequence to consider. A major concern with carving an ATV facility out of the northern flanks of Buckshutem Forest is that it will only create a spillover effect, whereby visiting ATV-users quickly become bored with legal trails and turn to adjacent state and private lands.

It is for this reason that ATV facilities, which no town in New Jersey has understandably ever welcomed, might serve everyone better if located at exits along highways at sites and areas less vulnerable to illegal abuse.

While some will argue that ATV facilities are needed to provide a legal place for people to ride, there's no evidence to suggest that such measures actually curb the rampant trailblazing, vandalism, and costly destruction that illegal ATV use already wages against both private and public lands alike.

Wildlife enthusiasts are drawn to Buckshutem Forest for its concentration of rare plants and animals. It is equally attractive to outdoorsmen, who routinely visit the area in droves during hunting season. It would be a shame to undermine these time-honored uses by further marring this popular, yet fragile forest with more noise and trailblazing.

Over the years, the public has made a significant investment in preserving Buckshutem Forest for a variety of compatible public uses and environmental protection. Unfortunately, many of Buckshutem Forest's most-sensitive lands remain unprotected and threatened by development. For example, the seeps and springs that form Buckshutem Creek begin within the 200-acre tract now slated for Phase II motorsports park development. Both the creek and its fragile wetlands flow directly into Laurel Lake, where the need to protect and improve water quality should not be ignored.

Buckshutem Forest represents a premier destination for hikers, hunters and others whose passive recreational use and enjoyment of this special place cannot co-exist with the incredible levels of disturbance and destruction that will follow Phase II development.

If the motorsports park fails to exercise its option to purchase the 200-acre Buckshutem Tract, the city should reconsider development here and instead explore preserving it as a scenic buffer to the Bevan State Wildlife Management Area.

In this alternative scenario, the city could sell the Buckshutem Tract to the state Green Acres program to help protect resources like Laurel Lake as well as one of the county's most important forests.

Such a deal could go a long way toward enabling the motorsports park to achieve peaceful co-existence with its neighbors — both people and wildlife included.

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