

ARE THE GREENBELTS JUST FOR JOGGERS AND POLO PONIES?

Homeless people can be cited for illegal camping just for using a sleeping bag in the Pogonip, yet joggers and polo ponies are allowed to use the greenbelt area.

by Becky Johnson

The Pogonip is sacrosanct," trumpeted Joe Rigney of the Green Party of Santa Cruz County. "And I have a blocking concern if this language is included in the final version." Why would an environmentalist oppose a plan to clean up the environment?

At issue was a letter written by Linda Lemaster to be sent to the Santa Cruz City Council in support of Camp Paradise, the self-help encampment currently located along the eastside of the San Lorenzo

River across from a tannery, under a freeway bridge, and behind a cemetery. The area had been neglected by both the local environmentalists and city officials for years as tons of trash accumulated. Junkies and alcoholics frequented this area which was rarely visited by the police. But now the environmentalists are insistent that the camp must go.

One proposal put forth at the City Council by Councilmember Ed Porter had been to temporarily borrow two to three acres on the extreme eastern edge of the Pogonip to serve as a temporary campsite where Camp Paradise could relocate. The newly formed Santa Cruz Service Corps (SCSC) would oversee the camp.

The Lemaster letter to be presented to the City Council was approved by the Green Assembly with all references to the Pogonip, the greenbelt areas, or to the Master Plan struck per Rigney's concern, despite the efficacy of locating the camp in areas where campers would be working

Homeless people can be cited for illegal camping just for using a sleeping bag while in the Pogonip. Since joggers and polo ponies are allowed to use the Pogonip, one has to wonder who is protecting what for whom.

The Pogonip, where an estimated 600 campers already live, had been considered as a potential site for the campers of Camp Paradise under the supervision of the SCSC. Dr. Paul Lee, a longtime homeless advocate, was promoting the program, had enlisted 30 Camp Paradise dwellers as workers, and could provide at least \$50,000 in funding.

But environmentalists were apparently so opposed to homeless people using the parks and greenbelts that they rejected without examination a plan that is arguably good for the environment and can be utilized at a bargain. Acting on their behalf, Councilmember Keith Sugar

to clean up the environment.

The Pogonip is the 640-acre parcel of greenbelt land purchased by the City and running between the City and the University of California Santa Cruz. (Pogonip is an Ohlone word meaning either white fog or white death. The Pogonip Club, which occupied the lower portions of the area in the 1920s, consisted of a golf course, a polo field, and a clubhouse serving alcohol, hence the word PO-GO-NIP for polo, golfing, and nipping. Experts disagree on which word the large greenbelt area in the northern part of Santa Cruz is named after.)

Santa Cruz has a lot of parks and greenbelt areas. While the city is blessed with nearly 2,000 acres of parks and greenbelt areas, it lacks the funding to maintain these parks sufficiently. Litter removal, trail restoration, invasive non-native species removal, poison oak removal, and the re-establishment of native flora are all required.

led the council on October 23rd to vote to not even investigate that site or any other greenbelt site.

It has been a classic case of environmentalists vs. homeless rights, but it need not be. There is no reason eco-camps can't be designed and operated as just one more use of the beautiful greenbelt areas that surround Santa Cruz. To do otherwise, when it is clear no environmental threat has been demonstrated, is to show that the flag of "Environmentalism" is being waved to cover up the real anti-homeless bigotry behind the decision to exclude exploring the Pogonip as a potential site. Somehow the answer is always "no" when it comes to finding a place for homeless people to camp or sleep.

Celia Scott needs to stop her whispering campaign against the "dirty" homeless. She needs to publicly explain why she sabotaged even talking about using

The Service Corps planned to establish a series of temporary campsites in the parks and greenbelt areas, and have the campers/service corps workers do maintenance work in exchange for a legal place to camp. The camp would move from site to site and do cleanup and maintenance.

The plan would be a win/win situation for the homeless campers and for the environment. The taxpayers would benefit from it too. And conservatives who believe homeless people should have to work to get a place to live like the idea and are supportive.

But hard-core environmentalists such as Joe Rigney, Patricia Matachek of the San Lorenzo Urban River Project Task Force, environmental attorney and Councilmember Keith Sugar and former Mayor Celia Scott were adamant that the council should never consider such a move. Despite all the environmental benefits the Service Corps could offer, these

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the Pogonip as a future site for the 50 or 60 people currently living in Camp Paradise. The public needs to hear reasonable environmental explanations why one ecologically sensitive camp cannot temporarily occupy greenbelt areas while they are engaged in restoration work, even though illegal camps without the same ecological consciousness are a fact of life in those same areas. Scott did not return a phone call asking for her comment.

If the Pogonip is unacceptable to Scott, Rigney, Matachek, and Sugar, then they need to tell the rest of the community where the people of Camp Paradise are supposed to go. Certainly they can find two or three acres somewhere in the nearly 2,000 acres of parkland for an ecologically-minded work camp for homeless people.

Becky Johnson can be reached by e-mail at becky_johnson@sbcglobal.net

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few squeaky wheels prevented even a discussion of temporarily using two to three acres of the Pogonip for such a purpose.

And the homeless campers can't stay where they are now, either. Now that Larry Templeton and Camp Paradise have driven off the alcoholics and junkies and have removed an estimated 24 tons of trash, the environmentalists are showing an interest in protecting this piece of the San Lorenzo River's riparian corridor.

When it was covered with years of accumulated trash, buzzed night and day with the industrial noises of Salz Tannery across the river, mixed with the sounds and smells of the freeway which crosses the river nearby, no environmentalist voiced a hint of concern.