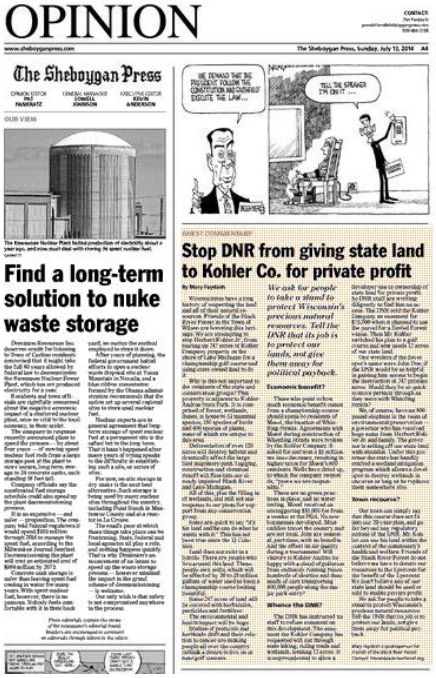
GUEST COMMENTARY – Sunday 7/13/14


OPINION

The Sheboygan Press

Find a long-term solution to nuke waste storage

Stop DNR from giving state land to Kohler Co. for private profit

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By Mary Faydash
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Wisconsinites have a long history of respecting the land and all of their natural resources. Friends of the Black River Forest in the Town of Wilson are honoring this heritage. We are attempting to stop Herbert Kohler Jr., from tearing up 247 acres of Kohler Company property on the shore of Lake Michigan for a championship golf course and using state-owned land to do it.

Why is this not important to the residents of the state and conservation groups? This property is adjacent to Kohler-Andrae State Park. It is comprised of forest, wetlands, dunes, is home to 33 mammal species, 150 species of birds and 400 species of plants, some of which are unique to this area.

Deforestation of over 125 acres will destroy habitat and drastically affect the large bird migratory path. Logging, construction and chemical runoff will flow into our already impaired Black River and Lake Michigan. All of this, plus the filling in of wetlands, and still not one response to our pleas for support from any conservation group.

Some are quick to say “it’s his land and he can do what he wants with it.” This has not been true since the 13 Colonies.

Land does not exist in a bubble. There are people who live around this land. These people own wells, which will be affected by 20 to 35 million gallons of water used to keep a championship course looking beautiful.

Some 247 acres of land will be covered with herbicides, pesticides and fertilizer. The environmental and health impact will be huge.

Studies of pesticide and herbicide drift and their relation to cancer are making people all over the country rethink a desire to live on or near golf courses.

Economic benefit?

Those who point to how much economic benefit comes from a championship course should speak to residents of Mosel, the location of Whistling Straits. Agreements with Mosel during construction of Whistling Straits were broken by the Kohler Company. It asked for and won a $5 million tax base decrease, resulting in higher taxes for Mosel’s 800 residents. Wells have dried up, to which the company responds, “prove we are responsible.”

There are no green practices in place, and no water testing. Mosel received an unstaggering $10,000 fee from a vendor at the PGA. No new businesses developed. Most caddies travel the country and are not local. Jobs are seasonal, part-time, with no benefits. And the effect on air quality during a tournament? Will visitors to Kohler Andrae be happy with a cloud of pollution from endlessly running buses, hundreds of shuttles and thousands of cars transporting 400,000 people along the major park entry?

Whence the DNR?

The DNR has instructed its staff to refuse comment on this development. The easement the Kohler Company has requested will cut through state hiking, riding trails and wetlands, totaling 12 acres. It is unprecedented to allow a developer use or ownership of state land for private profit. So DNR staff are working diligently to find him an access. The DNR sold the Kohler Company an easement for $75,000 when it planned to use the parcel for a Tented Forest venue. Then Mr. Kohler switched his plan to a golf course and now needs 12 acres of our state land.

One wonders if the developer’s name were John Doe, if the DNR would be so helpful in gaining him access to begin the destruction of 247 pristine acres. Would they be so quick to move permits through as they were with Whistling Straits?

We, of course, have an 800pound elephant in the room of environmental preservation — a governor who has received huge sums from Herbert Kohler Jr. and family. The governor is selling off our state land with abandon. Under this governor the state has handily crafted a wetland mitigation program which allows a developer to destroy wetlands in one area as long as he replaces them somewhere else.

Town recourse?

Our town can simply say that this course does not fit into our 20-year plan, and go far beyond any regulatory actions of the DNR. Mr. Kohler can use his land within the context of the community’s health and welfare. Friends of the Black River Forest do not believe we have to donate our resources to the 1 percent for the benefit of the 1 percent. We don’t believe any of our state land should be used or sold to enable private profit.

We ask for people to take a stand to protect Wisconsin’s precious natural resources. Tell the DNR that its job is to protect our lands, not give them away for political payback.

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