



Sierra Club Partners with Friends of the Black River Forest to Save Kohler-Andrae

Press Release
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MADISON – At an awards ceremony held in Milwaukee last Saturday, Sierra Club-John Muir Chapter announced that it is partnering with Friends of the Black River Forest in opposition to Kohler Company’s proposed golf course development north of Kohler-Andrae State Park.

Friends of the Black River Forest president Mary Faydash, who attended the ceremony, said, “Friends is so grateful that the Sierra Club has partnered with us in an effort to retain Wisconsinites’ ownership of their state park land and preserve a rare Lake Michigan coastal ecosystem.”

Last June, Judge Mark Kaiser ruled against the DNR’s wetland-fill permit for the golf course project. Kohler planned to build a championship golf course by filling in a globally rare wetland and clear-cutting a beech forest on 247 acres it owns outside Kohler-Andrae State Park.

The area is home to several endangered bird and plant species as well as critical habitat for migrating birds.

But for many Wisconsin taxpayers, perhaps the most unwelcome aspect of the project is the land swap. Kohler wants the State to deed four acres at the entrance to Kohler-Andrae State Park to the company in exchange for an already developed piece of land north of the park with no natural resources value.

Kohler’s plans for the State Park include building a 22,000 square foot golf course maintenance facility on what is now a wetland near the park entrance, and a four-lane road with a roundabout to replace the current entrance to the park. The four-lane road would lead directly to the proposed golf course.

Naturalist James Buchholz, who served as Kohler-Andrae park superintendent for 25 years, said in a letter to the DNR, “removal of 4 acres of Wisconsin State Park property (which is owned and cherished by the citizens of Wisconsin) and giving it to the Kohler Company for their [commercial] use is wrong. It is also against the rules governing the Federal Land and Water Conservation Act (LAWCON). In addition, this action would be contrary to State of Wisconsin

rules and past policies against giving away or selling state park property without just cause or need.”

Kohler-Andrae State Park currently has 430,000 annual visitors, making it one of Wisconsin’s most visited and popular parks.

In his ruling last June, Judge Kaiser pointed out that the Scott Walker-era DNR had acted in haste, and the project could cause significant environmental damage. However, Kohler Company is appealing that decision in Sheboygan County circuit court. FBRF plans to file an appeal of the land swap.

In his letter to the DNR, Buchholz discussed “run off and ground water contamination” from the golf course project, “including septic, herbicide, pesticide and fertilizer leaching,” which he said would “be a major problem that will go unregulated and unchecked by anyone.”

In 1995, Kohler Company built Whistling Straits, a 36-hole championship golf course about 16 miles north of Kohler-Andrae State Park on the Lake Michigan shoreline. According to the group DNR Watch: Natural Resource Accountability Project, the permits granted by the state to Kohler Company were “almost immediately” violated. “For nearly two years citizens complained to the DNR that Kohler was in violation of every permit they held,” DNR Watch said. George Meyer, head of the DNR under former Republican governor Tommy Thompson, declined to act.

On the “Sustainability” page at KohlerCompany.com, the company describes its environmental mandate this way: “We are committed to leaving the world a better place than we found it and are committed to net zero environmental impact by 2035. For us this means reducing or offsetting all greenhouse gas emissions and sending zero solid waste to landfill; developing innovative energy- and water-saving products; and encouraging people to take action.”

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