

THE RAVAGING OF OHIO'S PUBLIC LANDS

Recently passed legislation allowing tree cutting and drilling for oil and gas in our state parks, state forests and other public lands reminds me of the “Robber Baron” days of the late 1800’s. During that time it was the intoxicating richness of the American continent which induced a state of mind that made waste and plunder inevitable. It was a continent rich in soils and minerals and forests and wildlife and this produced in people the fallacy of – the Myth of Superabundance. According to that myth, our resources were inexhaustible. We must remember that in those days, as today, the resources of our public lands are always in the crosshairs of state politicians; greed is always in the forefront.

As I think more about this legislative fiasco, a question comes to mind, “Why should our beloved public lands pay the price for the extreme greed of Wall Street and the big banks who, with their obscene salaries and bonuses, brought our entire economy to its knees?” We all need to ask this question of all our legislative people in Columbus. In a state as heavily populated as Ohio and where public land ownership ranks near the bottom of the 50 states, it seems extremely short sighted (and yes, even criminal) to allow timber and mineral extraction and other forest degrading activities in state parks and forests.

The remaining forests in Ohio are extremely diverse and complex ecosystems. In other words the forests consist of more than just trees. A recent and on-going study on a 1200 acre Ohio forest tract has identified in excess of 7,400 species of plants and animals (Coovert 2012). This species richness rivals the Great Smoky Mountains and is something for which all ohioan’s can be proud. However, the average size private woodland in Ohio is only 40 acres which is far too small to preserve species richness over time. This small woodlot size is especially troubling when it comes to preserving breeding habitat for neo-tropical migrant birds – the warblers, vireos, tanagers, orioles, flycatchers and thrushes; colorful creatures that are so meaningful to so many people. These spectacular avian species are especially impacted by forest fragmentation caused by clear cutting, roads, drilling rigs, etc.

This forest fragmentation, which is essentially dividing the forest into smaller and smaller units, is the major cause of neo-tropical bird decline. Unless large roadless and undisturbed tracts are preserved (state parks and forests) future extinction of these small birds is assured.

Those of us who have devoted our lives to procuring and preserving Ohio’s public lands find the ruling to allow cutting, drilling and fracking to be outrageous. It also makes many of us extremely angry. It is now time to express our deep concern to our legislators and to the governor . The more concerned voices there are the better our chances of saving Ohio’s natural lands.

Paul Knoop, Jr.