

H-Zcolumnjanuary24 SCREECHING: CLEARCUTTING OFFENDS!

In the weeks surrounding Thanksgiving 2023, along River Road you could hear folks moaning and groaning as they observed the scraping of the surface down into limestone bedrock. Defensively someone said, “they’re developing the future!” Just down from Loop 337 and before the bend to the river by River Road Ice House, the “earth mischief” was underway. A handful of trees were left.

Are we in New Braunfels and Comal County so desperate for dense population influx that no care or oversight is provided when scouring of the countryside is intended? For the radically and freshly exposed rock of the Guadalupe watershed with this devastating approach one could best shed tears of regret and indignation.

Just imagine all the exposed acres of limestone with small mounds of the modest topsoil of former days. Will the housing placement be landscaped with astroturf or its product cousin to feign outdoor grasses? If not, the attempts at landscaping, even xeriscaping will require water in considerable measure to nudge any live blades or plantings to attempt establishing. That’s to say nothing of the kind of runoff from impervious cover, rooftops and irrigation “systems” which the efforts will require. Alas, where are the planning overseers, policy providers, permitters and state legislative boundary builders with reasonable protections? The earth wounds and defacing shriek and shout that something is wrong and terribly incongruous with beloved River Road. Will there be a way to make amends? Might those engaged in the project sit down for pursuit of best practices ongoing with some of our informed local naturalists? Imagine what the deer that once grazed or the birds that built nests must sense about utter abandonment? Yikes!

In my earliest years as a youngster our family spent a day or two after Thanksgiving on the Mississippi coast where our grandparents had a small farmstead and some wooded acres alongside. We located a small Christmas tree to take with us. Along with the tree, we watched our parents carefully prune some wild yaupon and small branches of holly offered by a grand tree at property edge. We even put some extra pine sprigs that needed clearing for sharing with friends and neighbors before tying down the trailer. It was Easter break when we went back and found what little was left of our grand holly after some greedy vendors took the branches and left a very bare trunk. Taking to the extreme from that first sight on has remained a deep wound. I could feel that offense (the local sheriff’s comment when taking a photo of the savaged holly tree) once again as I beheld the “taking” and scraping on beloved River Road! In such circumstances, there’s no turning back once the deed is done. Perhaps some course corrections might ensue. I found that summer in Mississippi some little sprouting holly growths. I captured one carefully and that one grows in the safer section of the property to this day but, alas, never so grand. I potted two others that I gave to playmates and hopefully they grow to this day decades later as well.

Locally there are folks concerned about how much green is vanishing in our pristine jewel of Comal County. The whole of the beloved Texas Hill Country grieves when grievous disregard for our land, water and wildlife ensues. Check out the endeavors at comalconservation.org or better yet, join us in person 9 January at the McKenna Center, 6-7:30p.m. when Jessica Karlsruher of the TREAD Coalition will talk with us about “What is Natural Infrastructure, and Why Do We Care?” Very apt and timely!