

AFFEW NEWSLETTER

September 1997

ANNUAL ANNUAL MEETING ISSUE



This has been a busy year for the AFFEW crew that keeps an eye on things locally. As you probably know, one of the problems was made evident by the sour gas line being put through the county. Julie took a great interest in this when she was told not to worry; trust them. She should be praised for doing a fine job of trying to make the best of a mess, whereas it's always tempting to stand up and scream, but not get anything accomplished. Sara James deserves credit for helping to expose the State's effort to sell oil leases under the State Park. Those who stood and screamed should be appreciated too; they make it easier for people like Julie to be heard. Later on, the oil industry struck again with the aid of our governor, Mr. Engler, and part of the DNR. It seems that slant drilling and oil leases are all the rage now, regardless of possible consequences.

The problem common to both of these events seems to be an attitude on the part of some of our governing bodies that doesn't agree with people who value life and nature, and think it should be preserved. Some leaders don't mind putting stuff in our back yards. A compromise should be sought.

EVENTS

Annual Meeting: This is your big chance to gain fame and office. Become respected by the industrial giants of the day! Run for office in AFFEW, or just go to the meeting and tell those dedicated officers what to do with trash and polluters and stuff like that. The meeting will be at 7PM on Thursday, September 25 at Pat Willick's castle, 6532 Virnetta, in Ludington. That's off Washington Ave, north past the famous Northside Market. Pat may even have some cookies left from the Cartier Park cleanup.

Adopt-A-Highway has been de-trashing the usual two miles of US 31. The last dates for the year are from September 20 to September 28. Call Julie at 845-0053 to find out details.

There are some very low-level rumblings of people wanting to have AFFEW conduct another public forum about the whole oil drilling, piping and detoxifying effort. It is rumored that the county extension service is interested in helping out. Keep an eye out for this one.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Pat and Stub Willick's cleanup of Cartier Park had an amazingly large turnout of dedicated, hard working people, and the place looked a lot better after the dust died down. Maybe there was something in those cookies that attracted and energized people. Several high school kids drove out at lunch time to see the progress, and they looked a little depressed to see all their littering effort gone to naught. Way to go, P & S.

Household Hazardous Waste Day collected less stuff than in some previous years, but that may be because people are finally getting their basements detoxified. Donations totalled \$126.50, all of which is appreciated.

Earth day came and went, and the annual canoeing attempt was blown and frozen out again. We all had a good burger at the Grand Hotel (Hilton South), which is soon to become the gem of the waterfront. As Che said, if you can't move the restaurant to the water, move the water to the restaurant. This is not meant to imply floods in the restrooms.

Pat Willick has taken over the job of depositing checks, which should make a big difference in the speed with which they are cashed. Your treasurer was always amazingly slow about this. He had no valid excuse; sometimes he'd claim all his time was taken up doing mosquito counts. The only problem here is that the expiration date on your newsletter address is going to be out of date unless Pat and the writer of news get better coordinated. It may mean that some of you get a free newsletter.

THE ENVIRONMENT

We spent a few days at a cottage on the Lake Michigan beach north of Manistee a couple of weeks ago. The place had a fireplace, but no furnace, no electrical outlets (but it does have electric lights), no radio or TV, and there is almost no light at night coming from other buildings. As a result, we looked at the night sky for the first time in months, and were reminded of what we've been missing. The first night there we saw a fairly bright, baby-blue show of the Northern Lights, and it lasted for hours.

Our society has forgotten all about this stuff. I've heard that the ancients were much more in tune with their surroundings than the average American is, largely because they had to live in conditions that exposed them to the elements. There are no air conditioners or headlights on a horse. When home lighting was much dimmer, most people slept at night, but those who were outside saw the stars.

The early beginnings of celestial navigation were developed by the Arabs who had to navigate the deserts with some precision in order to find oases. These people were very familiar with the night sky; it

was a part of their lives that they used regularly.

Now most of us can identify about two or three constellations at night, and if we're lucky we may be able to identify a planet or two. We're isolated from our natural environment, partly because of our technology and partly because there are so many people on the earth, that there's not as much open space per person. So on an average day, we just don't tend to think about the natural world around us. Look at the people who will drive fifty miles in a blizzard to see a movie because they really don't believe the weather will stop them, and don't bother to check the weather report. They probably don't carry a warm coat in the car for emergencies, either.

There are dozens of examples that would show that most of us don't consider the environment to be a ruling part of our lives. I think that this may be part of the reason why we, Americans especially, are so slow to consider the impact that many of our actions have on the world. It's really not arrogance on our part as much as it is lack of exposure. It's hard for people to worry about things that have never affected them. For example, most of us rarely think about global warming, or about its effect on us. The Pacific counter-current called El Niño is really going great guns this year. It looks like it will be stronger than ever before, with ocean temperatures as much as 9 degrees above normal in a large part of the equatorial Pacific. Last time it was this big there were fairly large climate changes all over the world. There were weeks of storms in California, and the winter here in Michigan was exceptionally mild. We went canoeing on Hamlin Lake the day after Christmas. Crops failed in many parts of the world, causing hunger in some of those areas. One climate research group has been able to predict significant changes in the harvests in east Africa one year after an El Niño.

I'm not sure anyone is willing to bet that the El Niño effect is increased by global warming, but there are some indications that the two are related. And I'm totally convinced that the global warming is related to the fuel-burning activities of mankind, even though there have been other warm periods in the past, before we began using so much fuel. One person told me that El Niño is related to the eleven-year sunspot cycle, but I've not heard that from any other source.

One of AFFEW's most important functions is to keep people reminded that we, the people, are changing the world. Most changes are very gradual in human terms, so it's hard to keep them in mind, but gentle reminders now and then will help keep the population from forgetting totally. With any luck, these reminders will help people act more responsibly.

Individual actions don't do much on a global scale, but our influence can be felt. One legislator has said that twenty letters in his file on an issue are enough to make a difference in his thinking, largely because most people won't write letters. One legislator may not be enough to make the governor change sides on an issue, but it may not take too many to create some positive changes in our leadership.

So believe it; you can throw your weight around and it will have some effect. Write your legislators, and come to the AFFEW annual meeting. You'll be glad you did.

Go hug a tree.

Dave Hall

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