

Does the concept of "the commons" still exist?

Does Nature have any rights? By Auggie

About ten years ago, the Tooby Ranch Flat, a beautiful part of the 13,000 acre Tooby Ranch came up for sale. Very close to the town of Garberville, the flat is about 300 acres of prime agricultural land surrounded on two sides by a gentle curve of the wild and scenic Eel River and on the other sides by upsloping hills, one grassland, the other wooded. Many people over the years had been interested in acquiring part or all of this land; real estate developers, farming groups and individuals. The community donated \$650,000 in the year 2000 to rescue Tooby Flat from real estate development and conserve it as a park. However, the very first "community meeting" was a shocking lesson in the privatization of the commons. The community was introduced to the pre-appointed park board. There were lots of incomprehensible maps of the park all over the walls so the public could make suggestions. Then a board member began to talk about The Summer Arts Fair at the Park, and the people at the meeting began to see where this was going. Pressed with questions, the Board said that they were a "private" non-profit and after hearing what the community wanted they would go behind closed doors and decide what they wanted. The community members at that meeting made it very clear that this park should not become a concert venue. At a second Park meeting, charmingly called a "charrette", the Summer Arts Faire was again brought up, and this time housing on the Park land was proposed. We all thought that was a really bizarre suggestion, and made our repugnance known to the Park Board. I believe this is the reason that the park board stopped having public meetings, or making their board meeting minutes available as they had promised to do. Since then, Ten to Twelve or Twenty to Thirty events a year have been proposed on conditional use permit applications filed by the Park Board with the county but never completed. There is a great deal of controversy over this. The boogie agenda is unacceptable to the neighborhoods surrounding the Park, since it is a natural amphitheater and high decibel handstand noise is too loud even four miles away, traffic can be very dangerous on the narrow winding road from Garberville to the park, and cars are parked on the old orchard site where we want to replant orchards. The county received complaints about unpermitted events in 07 and 08 and eventually shut them down. It is unfortunate that the Park Board had to keep pushing so hard, since the park is a good place for small local gatherings of 350 people or less. Now there is a fight over the Park Board's effort to eliminate the Agricultural Zoning of the Park in order to develop concert promotion legally.

There are other issues of concern regarding this park, for example increases in gravel extraction and open cut shale mining, acquisition of the most beautiful area of the park for the purpose of private development into residential estates by the founding director of the Board, and some disturbing water wells in the river.

Many of us who are neighbors or contributors love the park as it is; quiet, naturally beautiful and wonderful for many types of community recreation that are compatible with stewardship principles; conservation of wildlife habitat, protection of riparian corridors, and food and orchard growing potential. Walking or bicycling on trails, birdwatching, picknicking, hiking are some. We have enjoyed the benefits of community supported agricultural farm there.

We do not know how to bring the Park Board to the table except by resisting their efforts to fast-track a rezone through the general plan update, which also only provides for a general no-cost Environmental Impact Report. We want a Park-specific EIR to bring in the local community's comments and we also want the Park Board to negotiate with affected neighbors. Or we want a new board committed to conservation first and foremost.

Those promoting the concert use agenda are characterizing those of us speaking out for stewardship and agricultural protection as obstructionists and saboteurs who hate the Park. When we donated money for the Park's creation in 2000, we believed the promotional literature that spoke about protecting open space and prime agricultural land but left out big events, concerts and housing.

Though many citizens of Garberville, Redway and the outlying hills are sympathetic, people are shy about being out in the open about this, which has spidery tendrils reaching into the park from the Peoples Production and Mateel Community Center blowup over Reggae on the River. There continues to be fallout from that community debacle. There is fear of social ostracism in our small town. Yet,

some of us feel compelled to speak out for nature, quiet, open space, sensitive agricultural soils, the river and the creatures. Some of us believe nature deserves a footprint.

Are non-profits that have no membership potential tools for privatization of the commonwealth? Could it be happening at our Park? As a 501(c)(3) non-profit charity for public benefit, they are required by law to make available their 990 tax forms but they are not required to have transparency, nor are they under any obligation to negotiate with the public or the beneficiaries of their charity. There is a kind of idealization of non-profits, which serves well when seeking county approval for their agenda, though the Community Development Services Department also considers them private landowners! Citizens, even those who are impacted or who contributed money are viewed as ungrateful for asking pointed questions of an elite non-profit, yet the Board's reason for refusing to answer is that they are "private" and they don't have to.

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As a rule, this means that everyone has an equal say on decisions that concern them. So the form of an anti-authoritarian group depends on the purpose of the group and what its members agree on.

Anarchist organizing is anti-authoritarian, but each of the groups mentioned below and their members don't necessarily subscribe to Anarchism. They may just be organized to perform a function with whomever wants to help.

For starters, Food Not Bombs was founded on anarchist principles of self-organization and mutual aid and a desire to turn resources that would be thrown out into great meals and promote life over noxious war and domination. See their website at <http://www.foodnotbombs.net/>

Roger Baldwin and Crystal Eastman heard Emma Goldman speak on civil liberties and free speech in St. Louis, MO, which inspired them to found the ACLU. This is one group that consistently defends peoples rights from the government.

The Industrial Workers of the World was co-founded by Anarchists and other radicals in 1905 on the principles of worker self organization, self management, direct action and solidarity and the abolition of wage slavery. Lately you may have heard of the Starbucks Workers Union (now international) from the bean pickers to the barista. The IWW is involved most everywhere organizing with workers from any industry (the IWW has no political alliances only class alliances).

You can find plenty of Anarchist political groups in the north, south, east and, well, any more west and your in Japan. We know Anarchists are there also. Although, we in Humboldt Grassroots don't speak the language, (one of us does have the "Learn Japanese in 30 days" CD) the sites that translates news for you is what we're working with.

Hopefully this article has been some help, it's sure been tricky to write, but we've learned a lot.

Definitions and further explanations

*the State = the mechanisms that centralize and protect power and privilege.

Example: Police in Argentina tried to eject workers from the factories they took over. Bosses wanted factories empty because they were moving operations overseas. The courts ended up allowing the takeovers so the government wouldn't be overthrown (thus protecting power and privilege).

* "Government" and "State" are used interchangeably by Anarchists.

*Nestor Makhno was the leader of a libertarian peasant and worker army and insurrection in the Ukraine which successfully fought Ukrainian nationalists, the Whites, the Bolsheviks, and the bourgeoisie, and put Anarchism into practice in the years following the Russian Revolution.