

The pork-paved bike path

In the last edition of the Delta Sierran, this column informed readers about the antics of Jefferson Parish elected officials in their vain attempts to rid the east bank side of the parish of the scourge of nutrias. This month we will continue our study of the environmental-political behavior in East Jefferson with a look at the proposed Mississippi River Levee Bicycle Path. For the uninformed: the east bank levee from St. Charles Parish to the City of New Orleans (Orleans Parish) has a one-lane road on the top. Although this road is not paved, many years of clam shells and crushed limestone, driven over by police cars and other levee-district vehicles, have made the roadway hard and firm. It is a popular path for riding horses, for hikers, joggers, runners, walkers, and cyclists. Because it is well-patrolled and off limits to vehicles with motors, it is safe for everybody.

So popular in fact that the Jefferson Parish Council, in collusion with the Regional Planning Commission, wants to pave it. The proposal is for a paved bike path from the St. Charles Parish line, through East Jefferson, all the way to Audubon Park in New Orleans, a total of over 13 miles. At a hearing before the parish council, several citizens asked the obvious but apparently politically irrelevant question: Why do we need to pave the levee?

Someone who identified himself as the vice-president of an organization he called the New Orleans Regional Bicycle Awareness Committee said that the project was "widely supported." Well, I, who bicycle regularly on that levee, had never heard of the New Orleans Regional Bicycle Awareness Committee, which shows either that I'm stupid or that "widely supported" has different meanings to different people, and I find myself wondering why we need a committee to make us aware of a means of transportation that all of us have used since childhood.

There is support for crowning the levee with asphalt because, someone pointed out, the path is part of the federal government's goal of getting people to choose alternatives to commuting by automobile. The proponents of the path say that the completed paved path, at a total cost of \$1.2 million, will encourage people to ride their bikes to work. One person told the council that he definitely would use the path to commute to his job at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers's headquarters near Audubon Park

in New Orleans. He did not say whether he was now commuting on the shell-filled road. However, it turns out that the Corps of Engineers is the federal agency sponsoring the bike path. It also turns out that the levee is blocked by a security fence a half-mile before Audubon Park because, surprise! the Corps of Engineers's local headquarters straddles the levee there.

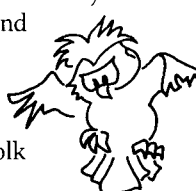
Lest we forget, the Corps are those same wonderful people who developed the plan to dig a barge channel in the West Pearl River, a scenic and protected stream, to benefit the paper mill in Bogalusa. It seems as though the Corps was looking around for something else to do. By calling the project part of a grand plan to encourage people to go to work on bicycles, the Corps can find the money in a bureaucratic pocket meant to do something other than cover the top of the levee with asphalt. I began to wonder about which paving contractors would benefit from this environmentally sensitive project and whether the "PAVE OUR LAKE" bumper stickers weren't serious instead of a spoof. Here we have a classic civics lesson in old-fashioned "pork-barrel" politics: an unneeded government project to spread taxpayers' money around to road builders.

I think I can come up with a plan to put harnesses on the nutrias in the East Jefferson canals and train them to tow boats carrying commuters. Of course, I'll need some federal transportation funds to start this environmentally important project. . . .

— Earl Higgins

Legacy

What will yours be? You joined the Sierra Club because you are concerned about the well-being of the Earth. Continue your involvement by remembering the Sierra Club in your will. For more information and confidential assistance contact John Calaway, Sierra Club Planned Giving Program, 730 Polk St., San Francisco, CA 94109, (415) 923-5538.



WE KNOW WHY YOU'RE READING OUR NEWSLETTER



Chances are, you're already interested in the outdoors. That's why you're reading this publication. As a Sierra Club member, you'll share that love of unspoiled wilderness and adventure with over 500,000 members who, like you, care about the wild places on the earth.

As a Sierra Club member, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you are part of a vital and growing effort to preserve our natural heritage.

Join the Sierra Club Today!

Yes, I want to join! I want to help safeguard our precious natural heritage. My check is enclosed.

New Member Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ ZIP _____

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES

	INDIVIDUAL	JOINT
REGULAR	<input type="checkbox"/> \$35	<input type="checkbox"/> \$43
SUPPORTING	<input type="checkbox"/> \$50	<input type="checkbox"/> \$58
CONTRIBUTING	<input type="checkbox"/> \$100	<input type="checkbox"/> \$108
LIFE	<input type="checkbox"/> \$750	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1000
SENIOR	<input type="checkbox"/> \$15	<input type="checkbox"/> \$23
STUDENT	<input type="checkbox"/> \$15	<input type="checkbox"/> \$23

Annual dues include subscription to *Sierra* (\$7.50) and chapter publication (\$1). Dues are not tax-deductible.

Sierra Club

P.O. Box 53968
Boulder, CO
80322-2968

W 3500
FRIP No.