

Why Redbud Woods Must Not Be Destroyed

Redbud Faculty Working Group

July 1, 2005

A large number of Cornell faculty members (about 375 at last count) have expressed opposition to the cutting of Redbud Woods for a parking lot. Recently, about forty of us have formed a working group to research and discuss alternatives in an effort to persuade the administration to reconsider its decision to pave the wooded lot. A group of highly intelligent, dedicated, and idealistic students from biology, city and regional planning, government, English, and other majors have given even more of their time to this effort. Since the movement in the 1980s to get Cornell to divest its holdings in South Africa, no other issue has so galvanized students and faculty.

It is a movement inspired by love of nature, the value of this wooded tract for teaching and recreation, appreciation of the history of the Treman estate (and the vision of its designer, Warren Manning), and the glaring inconsistency between woodland destruction and Cornell's commitments to sustainability, wise and open decision-making, and respect for community land-use concerns.

Destruction of Redbud Woods would be met with great resistance. An attempt to remove the students by force would be widely condemned and generate terrible publicity. It would create, at the beginning of the term of the interim president, an atmosphere of hostility and mistrust that would negatively affect recruitment of students and new faculty, as well as a new president. We sincerely hope that the administration will fully weigh these costs in making its decision.

In lieu of this potential damage to Cornell's reputation, we offer a positive alternative that will generate respect for the university and an enthusiastic response from faculty and students. It would also help greatly to repair the damage that the parking plan has caused to our relationship with the community beyond our campus.

A Nature-friendly Plan that Draws on our Intellectual and Natural Resources

Cornell is a campus of unparalleled beauty and the workplace of world class scholars and teachers. We can enhance and protect the former by taking advantage of the latter. Our working group (which includes among its members biologists, and experts in forestry, horticulture, and city and regional planning) has conceived the beginning of a project to preserve Redbud Woods and connect it with other nearby green spaces in a remarkable urban woodland that will

1. Offer a place of tranquil beauty close to the new West Campus dorms and comprising an enticing, people-friendly natural border between campus and town.
2. Be a place for teaching. Students will come to this convenient location to study the older growth and newer plantings supervised by the Plantations. They can analyze the process of reforestation in urban areas, catalog species found there, and assess the valuable “ecosystem housekeeping” functions provided by even small forest tracts (for example, absorbing, filtering and vaporizing rain water and runoff, absorbing atmospheric carbon, producing oxygen, cooling the atmosphere, and so on). Other subjects of great contemporary interest in urban forest ecology, horticulture, and biology can easily be illustrated here.

We propose to create this urban woodland in the area between University Avenue and Llenroc, as a part of a broad, comprehensive plan to demonstrate the significance of local sustainability efforts, as well as to enhance the intellectual experience of the West Campus residences. We believe it would be a marvelous learning site for Cornell graduate and undergraduate students, most of whom will be going from Cornell to live in urban environments. We believe it will inspire a love of nature in our largely urban student body that more distant and abstract environmental efforts may not accomplish. Our enthusiasm about this project is so contagious that we have managed to raise over \$30,000 in pledges for the Redbud Woodland in a very short time.

We have attached a separate document containing specific proposals for many of the logistical problems presented by increasing demand for on-campus parking. We believe that these efforts will free up far more than the 176 parking spaces planned for Redbud Woods. Further, they are consonant with Cornell’s educational mission and environmental commitments. We believe that the multi-faceted efforts we propose will unite the campus, provide very positive publicity for the university, and help to attract the very best students and faculty. Razing Redbud Woods makes very little sense.

In order to continue the dialog started by Tom Eisner and Susan Murphy, we very much hope to have the opportunity to talk to you as soon as possible to discuss the next phase of the moratorium envisioned by Tom and Susan. A subset of us would be very happy to meet with you at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Redbud Faculty Working Group

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Ti Alkire, Romance Studies
Kora Bättig, Romance Studies

Lourdes Beneria, City and Regional Planning
Abigail Cohn, Linguistics
George Conneman, Emeritus, Applied Economics and Management
Roy Colle, Emeritus, Communications
Stuart Davis, English
Brett de Bary, Asian Studies and Comparative Literature
Tim Fahey, Natural Resources
Martin Hatch, Music
Jane Marie Law, Asian Studies and Religious Studies
Lois Levitan, Environmental Risk Analysis Program, Communication
Joanna Luks, Romance Studies
Barbara Lynch, City and Regional Planning
Jane Mt. Pleasant, American Indian Program
Kenneth Mudge, Horticulture
Judith Pierpont, John S. Knight Writing Institute
Trevor Pinch, Science, Technology, and Society
Carol Rosen, Linguistics
David Rosen, Music
Paul Sawyer, English
James Siegel, Anthropology
Aaron Sachs, History
Elizabeth Sanders, Government
Nava Scharf, Near Eastern Studies
William Trochim, Policy Analysis and Management
Margaret Washington, History
Anke Wessels, Center for Religion, Ethics, and Social Policy
Thomas Whitlow, Horticulture]

Proposals for Reducing the Demand for Parking (and Obviating the Need for A Parking Lot in Redbud Woods)

Immediate Steps:

1. For parking places below West Campus that are deemed essential, there are other locations that are already paved or contain only grass that might later be restored if/when the parking space is no longer needed (as at present on the ag quad). It is obviously a bad idea to destroy decades of forest growth for temporary construction needs. Parking for construction vehicles might further expand on Lib Slope, and there are 30-40 spaces available using extra spaces at the 660 Stewart co-op and the Kahin Center, as well as parking on the rutted lawn at the latter location. Construction workers who drive to campus in individual vehicles could park at the A or B lots and share rides to the site. At night, faculty could use the 660 and Kahin Center spots to have dinner at West Campus.
2. The new West Campus dorms are intended to emphasize intellectual community engaging both faculty and students. The administration has cited its desire to attract faculty to lunch, dinner, and other activities as a major reason for building the parking lot in Redbud Woods. Not only are we working to increase faculty presence on West Campus, but we propose to include an enhanced urban woodland in the intellectual mission of West Campus, using it as teaching space and an attractive and restful place for informal student-faculty interaction. We do not believe that a parking lot down the hill from the new dorms would add to faculty visits. (Why would faculty members want to walk to their cars in other lots, drive to the Redbud Woods lot, and walk up the hill to the dorms?) However, to accomplish the purpose of greater faculty involvement, we propose:
 - a. A mini-bus or (eventually a fleet of small, fuel-efficient vehicles) that could drive faculty to West Campus, leaving every five minutes during the noon hour, from perhaps two locations on campus (say, from the parking area beside Bailey Hall,

and the Johnson Museum), ferrying faculty to and from lunch at the dorms.

- b. Further, we ourselves pledge to eat lunch or dinner on West Campus as often as possible, and to give talks and participate in other activities there. At this date, over 40 faculty members have pledged to do this WITHOUT driving our cars, as a part of our alternative plan to save the woods. Tom Whitlow proposes to have his students take on the Redbud Woodland as a class project. It should be noted that several members of our group have been involved in the planning of the West Campus initiative, and are strongly opposed to the replacement of Redbud Woods by a parking lot.

Medium-term Steps (over the next year):

1. Restore the ban on freshman parking for 2006-7, with attendant education and publicity about our sustainability goals and how these actions fit into a larger vision. (Along those lines, we should emphasize Cornell's unique natural setting and beautiful places to walk and reflect in natural areas on and near campus. We could also tie the de-emphasis on driving to increased student physical fitness. After a year or so, we may be able to show that at Cornell freshmen gain less weight than at other institutions, since they are enticed to walk along beautiful paths to class!)
2. Expand and publicize current mechanisms to encourage faculty to carpool and share parking spaces, and to consider giving up their parking permits or making partial use of them. (The working group sent out such an appeal yesterday, just to petition signers, and has already elicited a number of positive responses to this proposal).

Give public recognition to those who forego parking spaces for environmental reasons and take up fitness-friendly walking/biking to save Redbud Woods. The first 300 to give up parking permits on campus might have their names on a plaque to go in RBW, or the West Campus foyer. The names could also be published in the Sun and the Cornell Chronicle.

3. Coordinate with the city to see if we could take better advantage of the new, as well as older, multi-level facilities downtown, so that some who must have cars can park there at their own expense and take the bus (the existing #10 bus that comes up the hill might have its route expanded to make a circuit) or walk up.

Longer-term proposals (over the next two or more years):

1. Expand the existing Omni Ride program (which gives free bus passes to faculty and staff without parking permits) to students without permits. (We call attention to the recent

experience of UCLA, which registered a 20% decline in demand for parking spaces in the first year of this driving-reduction effort). The existing and expanded program will need considerably more publicity than the Omni-Ride program has received in the past.

2. Build safe bike and walking lanes and sidewalks along major routes. There is a glaring need for bike lanes on Judd Falls, Forest Home Drive, University Avenue, and Court Street. To encourage walking and biking, they have to be safe.

Magazines like *Health* and *Organic Style*, or *Science Times* may well be interested in doing a special feature on the decision to save Redbud Woods as the beginning of a new commitment to local sustainability. As the Redbud Urban Woodland fundraising demonstrates, donors may be eager to contribute to these new initiatives. We can, of course, name any new walking or bike paths for donors.

3. Draw spaces in existing lots smaller in the more accessible portions of the lots (to privilege smaller cars, and discourage large SUVs. The latter would have to park in the less desirable parts of the lot. This way more small and energy efficient cars can be accommodated in existing lots.

4. Build UP on existing lots. This is the obvious way to accommodate more parking without continual paving. Even adding a single deck to a flat parking lot, which is relatively inexpensive, can double the amount of parking spaces with minimal additional environmental impact. In making decisions about paving of green space, planners should be mindful that when over 10 % of the surface area in a watershed (like central campus from the Vet School down to Stewart/University Avenue) is covered with impervious material, the paving begins to have a destabilizing impact on streams and the land's accommodation of runoff; erosion is exacerbated, and the danger of flooding increases. The Redbud Woods is a vital part of an existing green belt that plays an important water containment role. Clearly, beyond the issue of automobile pollution and greenhouse effects, continued paving of campus green space without consideration of these cumulative effects would be a serious mistake.

5. New buildings should have underground parking facilities.

Proposals for A Better Process for Land-Use Decisions with Significant Natural Impact

In order that important environmental decisions be made with sufficient deliberation and vetting of alternatives, we urge either the expansion of the mission of the extant university planning committee, or the creation of a new faculty committee (to include student representatives in its meetings) to address local sustainability questions. This committee would interface with staff, community, student assembly, and administration, bringing faculty expertise to bear on important university studies (e.g., the upcoming transportation study), and major new projects affecting green space. The sustainability

planning committee should advise the Faculty Senate and administration on the linkage between local and global sustainability issues. The existing "Sustainability Task Force" (of which Tom Eisner and Nelson Hairston in our working group are members) might have a role to play in designing the new structure for land use planning.

A newly constituted sustainability committee is important for the university-wide effort to reduce parking demand and enhance environmental stewardship through coordinated individual efforts and education stressing greater reliance on public and campus transportation (including new small scale hybrid/energy efficient vehicles), walking and biking. An important aim of this committee would be to reduce individual automobile use, and make better use of existing parking lots. The committee would take this mission into our departments for a new university-wide education and awareness campaign...toward the recognition that what we do here is part of a much larger picture. It is incumbent on a great university, in a country that produces over a quarter of all greenhouse gasses, to lead the way in this educational mission and to develop and apply new knowledge to local best practice.

In sum, the planning process should not proceed in a narrow or piece-meal fashion, but should harness Cornell's scientific expertise in the review of university physical plans that have significant land use/sustainability implications, especially those that threaten green space. Its mandate should give high priority to securing compatibility with our stated sustainability goals, and with global values of reducing greenhouse gasses and soil erosion, and protecting trees and habitat. Many campuses, and a number of large corporations, are proceeding rapidly in this direction (see addendum below) and it is incumbent upon Cornell, given its status and historical mission, to step to the forefront of this process.

Addendum:

Colleges Compete to Shrink Their Mark On the Environment

By Juliet Eilperin

Washington Post Staff Writer

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BEREA, Ky. -- Professor Richard K. Olson's voice swelled with pride as he reached the final stop -- the bathroom -- on a tour of Berea College's newest student housing.

"The throne!" he declared, displaying a massive, cream-colored composting toilet.

With its state-of-the-art wastewater treatment system, recycled wood cabinets and low-energy fluorescent lighting, Berea's \$10 million "Ecological Village" represents the cutting edge of environmental architecture. And while this small southern Appalachian college still consumes plenty of natural resources, it has spent several years trying to preserve its surroundings by conserving energy and shifting to recycling.

While Berea has gone further than most, it is hardly alone. After decades of inertia, American colleges and universities have begun to recognize that they have lagged behind the corporate world in tackling energy conservation and efficiency, greenhouse gas emissions and trash generation, and many are taking new steps to minimize their environmental "footprint."

From the College of the Atlantic's zero-waste graduation this month in Maine to Ball

State University's biodiesel-powered shuttle fleet in Indiana, schools are moving in ways large and small to cut energy use and carbon dioxide emissions.

They are driven by everything from the rising cost of natural gas to student activism, and the consequences can be significant for local air pollution as well as energy markets: Yale University emits as much as 2.3 million tons of carbon dioxide each year, more than 32 countries, but that's a 13 percent drop from its 1990 levels. Harvard University, meanwhile, now ranks as the country's second-largest university buyer of renewable energy.

"Those of us who study the environment but don't incorporate what we know into how we operate as an institution, we are failing in our educational task," said Berea College President Larry D. Shinn, who has made environmental sustainability central to his school's mission. "Most of us humans, especially Americans, don't understand what a precarious situation we're in relative to human-nature interactions."

It is difficult to gauge how green academia has become, because no one keeps overall statistics on this aspect of the 4,100 U.S. schools' operations. But across the country, college administrators are vying to outdo each other in environmental consciousness, sharing their strategies and boasting about their accomplishments. They are hiring "sustainability coordinators," negotiating new purchasing contracts and building more energy-efficient laboratories and dormitory rooms.

"It's almost like an episode of 'Can You Top This?' " said Princeton University dining services director Stuart Orefice, whose cafeterias serve cereal grown without pesticides and ship students' unused food to local pig farms. "It's a good-natured competition, if you will."

"Every college and university should be doing this," said Walter Simpson, university energy officer at the State University of New York at Buffalo. "There's no excuse for sitting on your hands and not engaging in energy conservation."

Tufts University committed six years ago to meet or beat the emission reductions outlined in the Kyoto Protocol, an international climate change treaty that the Bush administration disavowed in 2001. In 2003, Tufts President Lawrence S. Bacow went even further by pledging to cut its emissions by 10 percent below the 1990 level by the year 2020.

Tufts now trades its carbon emissions on the Chicago Climate Exchange, where participants can "trade" allowances of greenhouse-gas emissions. Because some polluters produce more emissions than are legally allowed, they can go to the exchange and, in effect, buy from other participants who fell short of their cap on emissions

"We're greener than Harvard, without a doubt," boasted Sarah Creighton, project manager

for Tufts' Climate Initiative.

Tiny Berea plans to reduce its energy consumption 45 percent by 2015 by retrofitting its buildings and shifting from an old coal-fired plant to a gas-fired one half the size. It has embarked on a massive renovation project that will eliminate the need to heat or cool its administrative offices at least three months of the year.

The 1,500-student college's most radical project is Ecovillage, a complex of 32 townhouses, a day-care center, community house and teaching facility where single mothers, married couples and a few other students live. The sunny apartments feature energy-storing concrete floors, recycled carpeting and low-flush toilets. Residents hold workshops on green cleaning products.

Many of the students who live there have become environmental proselytizers, telling friends back home that conserving energy does not mean forgoing showers.

"I'm not afraid of the concept now," said Carrie Watson, 23, a senior from Cincinnati who lives in the Ecovillage with her son, Tzuriel, 2. "That's so liberating."

In interviews, a number of university administrators said they felt an obligation to educate their students about the environment, because graduates will become consumers and policymakers.

"We have a profound responsibility to lead society, and one that is very long-lived, that's not determined by the marketplace, that's regardless of what the political leaning of the administration is," said Leith Sharp, director of Harvard's Green Campus Initiative.

Administrators offer several explanations why academic institutions have often acted more slowly than their corporate counterparts. Schools sometimes lack the money to invest in new technology, and some worry about how donors will perceive these expenditures. Berea officials, Olson said, were concerned whether Ecovillage housing would "look too weird" when it was being built.

"I don't think America's colleges and universities are leading the way," said David Krueger, who teaches business and environmental ethics at Baldwin-Wallace College in Berea, Ohio. "American businesses have been [faster to adopt] environment management systems."

But now many colleges and universities are rushing to catch up, and their influence is spreading. Princeton now demands 100 percent postconsumer recycled paper as well as sustainably caught fish from its suppliers, and says it does not pay significantly more for them.

Less wealthy, smaller schools can sometimes pivot more quickly. College of the Atlantic

-- where all 280 students major in human ecology -- used utensils, bowls and cups made from compostable starch-based materials for its June 4 graduation. Once graduates and their families finished eating, students and staff threw these items -- along with all the leftover food -- into a campus solar composter built from recycled material.

As a 150-year-old institution that espouses social justice -- it was the first interracial, coeducational college in the South and charges no tuition in exchange for 10 hours a week of campus work-- Berea's officials and students see environmental sustainability as critical to its survival.

Universities do have one advantage over corporations, said Princeton vice president for facilities Michael McKay, because they can afford to think long-term.

"We expect to be here for another 500 years at least," McKay said, "and we'll live with our mistakes as well as our successes."

Staff researcher Karl Evanzz contributed to this report.