

**PINE RIVER SUPERFUND CITIZEN TASK FORCE
COMMUNITY ADVISORY GROUP
ST. LOUIS, MICH.**

IDEAS FOR THE PLANT SITE

June 26, 2002

We present these ideas in a spirit of rejoicing that the time for concrete plans for reclamation of the plant site has come. As a CAG, we have discussed for almost five years possible uses for the plant site acreage. Some of us in the community have envisioned for 20 years how that land could enhance the life of the community, instead of sitting fenced and tombstoned like a graveyard. So it is with joyful hearts that we commit to paper what we have seen in our minds for many years.

COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The CAG considers the area closest to M-46 on the north side of the road in St. Louis, and the small area located in Pine River Township on the south side of the road as prime areas for commercial development. We are in favor of seeing a restaurant, hotel, bait shop, canoe rental, storage units and other businesses locate in these areas—commercial businesses that will generate tax dollars for the townships and the city. With this idea in mind, we believe M-46 should be widened with turn lanes, and that the M-46 bridge should be raised so that boats and canoes can pass beneath it. Perhaps 6-10 acres of the site would be dedicated to commercial businesses. Since businesses tend to have roads and parking lots with water run-off and salt for de-icing, we are in favor of a “moat” system around the edges of the businesses to capture contaminated run-off for de-contamination in a water treatment plant before it returns to the river.

RIVER RECREATION

Three generations of people who live near the Pine River have known that body of water as something to be avoided at all costs. It is perceived not as a living river, but as a lethal flow of toxic waste. The CAG has begun to restore a healthier perspective of the river by promoting a yearly fishing derby. Even if Pine River fish are banned from consumption, still we can have fun catching them and dream of the day when the fish population will swim in clean waters and be fit to eat. The CAG has promoted the idea of someday having the river clean enough to swim in. Some of the elders of the community, in their 70s and 80s, remember swimming in the river before industry polluted it. Having them tell their stories to the younger generations makes the idea seem closer to reality. If it happened before, it can happen again.

The CAG is in favor of several forms of river recreation using the land area of the plant site:

River Beach

We envision a beach area where people can swim in untreated fresh water, and experience the sensation of the river's current. A small building with a few changing rooms, showers and lavatories would compliment the beach. Also in this area, we envision a large picnic shelter and playground equipment.

Boardwalk

We envision a boardwalk along the river's edge where walkers and joggers can enjoy being close to the water, yet not in it. Once again pedestrians in this community could enjoy the fragrance of a clean, living river as they stroll. Benches and small gazebo-style shelters would allow sitting at intervals.

Fishing Platforms

We envision fishing platforms that jut out over the water to allow those who fish to see down into the flowing river as they wait for the fish to bite.

These three forms of river recreation would restore to the community the joys of a living river through touch (feeling the current), smell (enjoying the river fragrance), and sight (seeing down into the underwater world of the river). We've missed enjoying our river in these ways!

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

The CAG believes many children and adults in this area do not yet see the big picture when it comes to the environment. They may recycle and drive a smaller car and still not understand why tiny invertebrates in the river are necessary to sustaining an ecosystem. They may believe it's wrong to litter, and not understand why picking wildflowers (when it's just a few just for them!) can wipe out a population of flowers just as surely as our ancestors wiped out the Passenger Pigeon (and they, too, were surprised when it happened, because there were so many of them!).

Wildlife Museum

We believe a natural history museum featuring displays showing how small acts effect the big picture would help educate adults and children in this regard. We believe the old, the young, and the middle-aged can and must learn to see the importance of sustaining the lives and habitats of all living things in the earth. Even the mosquito.

One display would show how DDT was developed with the idea of wiping out insect populations, and how it upset the balance of life in populations of birds, particularly when DDT was trumpeted as a way to eliminate the mosquito population in neighborhoods. In Michigan. Some of us remember our neighbors having their yards sprayed for mosquitoes, and seeing our playmates run around in the white powder left on the grass. A museum display could honor the pioneering biologists who sounded the alarm about DDT's devastation on life, including Michigan-native Dr. George Wallace of Michigan State University, who suggested a title to Rachel Carson for her now famous book, "Silent Spring." To stock the museum with interesting specimens, we could draw upon those stored at Alma College, whose collection includes a stuffed Passenger Pigeon, mastodon bones, an albino white-tailed deer and much more.

We envision a museum building that includes display areas, classroom areas, and a large meeting room/lecture hall, with audio/visual capabilities.

Wetlands Walk

The CAG envisions an extensive wetlands area, stocked with frogs, turtles, snails, salamanders, and insects of all kinds to seed life into the newly made marshes. A trail through the area with interpretive signs would enable many visitors to learn the importance of wetlands in the ecology of the earth. This would be especially instructive for people in Gratiot County, which was a marshy area of the state before farmers and county drain workers dried it out to make more land available for raising crops. We envision small bridges and boardwalks over the wettest areas, and wood-chip covered trails in the dryer areas. The interpretive signs would point out plant specimens, habitat for certain creatures, and general information about the importance of wetlands in the "big picture" of life on earth.

Garden Walk

On higher ground, the CAG is in favor of elaborate garden areas, with perennial flowers, flowering shrubs, native grasses, and shallow rooted trees laid out in pleasing groupings, with trails meandering among them. From formal English gardens, to amazing beds of tulips, to swaying grasses, to abundant roses—it all sounds good to us. Again, interpretive signs would help instruct visitors. Students learning horticulture at the high schools or colleges could practice their art in these gardens. An attraction for children in this area of the park could be a corn maze. Each year corn plants are planted quite densely; then, when the green corn is up at knee height, a maze is cut into it; when the corn is tall enough, children (and adults) can try to find their way through the maze and out the other side.

Bird Sanctuary

Since the plant site has been fenced, Canada geese have discovered a safe haven inside. Thousands of geese congregate there and raise their young. The CAG is in favor of continuing a bird sanctuary on a portion of the plant site. Perhaps the area would be fenced. It would definitely feature habitat appealing to certain bird populations, especially migratory birds. We would like them to find a resting place full of their favorite foods on their flights north and south. We envision visitors with binoculars coming in spring and fall to watch the birds fly into and out of this area of the park.

COMMUNITY GATHERING PLACE

In the Victorian years into the 1930s, the community was viewed in a positive light concerning its waters—specifically, the Magnetic Springs. A well drilled in the 1870s let loose copious waters that were found to magnetize metal objects. Healing properties were also associated with the well waters. Around that discovery, a mineral spa was born. People flocked from great distances to partake of the waters in St. Louis, Michigan. An underground pipe was laid to the railroad depot and water was piped directly into tanker cars and taken to Saginaw, where it was bottled under the name of Shay's.

The CAG envisions a return to positive thinking about the waters in St. Louis. We envision a clean river, and also advertising extolling the magnetizing waters from the famous well. The well is owned by a family who would have to agree to its use. Once they agree, the well water would be piped to the park where it would fill an indoor and outdoor swimming pool, where it would run in a drinking fountain for sampling its taste, where it would be sold by the owners of the well as bottled water, and where a pool of the water could be used for demonstrating its magnetizing properties. Certainly people would pay once again to drink and bathe in the famous water. Even more importantly, the reputation of the area would climb as people flocked to enjoy the magnetic water, and the Magnetic Waters Park in St. Louis, Michigan.

Band Shell

A band shell in the Victorian style would attract community members and visitors all summer with outdoor concerts and would be used in the winter for Christmas carolers and manger scenes.

Sledding Hill

The hill that is now on the plant site could be enlarged and made into a fine sledding hill. Ithaca, a nearby city, formed a sledding hill a few years ago, and it has become a winter gathering place for children of all ages. We would like to see that happen in St. Louis, too. In addition, the outdoor pool could become an ice skating rink in the winter.

Events

The CAG envisions the Magnetic Waters Park as a year-round gathering place for the community. Fireworks displays, sledding contests, fishing derbies, and music concerts are all envisioned as events in the park that will draw the residents of the Pine River area into closer association with each other, and with the river itself.

Chapel

The CAG believes a non-denominational chapel on the site, appropriate for weddings and other prayerful gatherings, would be right and proper. Guest ministers on Sunday mornings is a possibility. The River of Living Waters chapel seems a fitting name.

IDEAS REJECTED

The CAG has rejected ideas that involve lots of roads, parking lots, and lawn areas. Soccer fields and other sporting fields tend to receive lots of chemical fertilizers, which we fear would end up in the river. Parking lots and roads tend to receive salt for ice and again, we fear the salt would end up in the river. Also, cars leak oil, gasoline and other fluids that would end up in the river.

Also, sports fields focus the attention of visitors on the game being played.

The CAG emphatically believes that the attention of park users should be focused on the restored Pine River and on natural landscapes that enhance the river. That has been our focus for the last half a decade, and we would like to see it be the focus of everyone in the area for decades to come.

Thank you for considering our vision for the former plant site of Michigan/Velsicol Chemical Corporation in St. Louis, Michigan.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Pine River Superfund Citizen Task Force
Jane Keon, Chair