


OBSERVER

Zoar Valley logging a ‘disservice’

Amherst contractor, Herbert F Darling, gifted New York state in 1963 a 1,425-acre section of the Cattaraugus Creek gorge covered in what now appears to be a timeless wilderness forest that had not been extensively logged for over 50 years prior to when Darling purchased it in the early 1950s from the power companies which abandoned Zoar as a hydroelectric project in the 1920s. At the same time, Mr. Darling gifted 86 acres of land adjacent to the Zoar Cattaraugus Creek South Branch canyon lands to The Nature Conservancy’s Deer Lick sanctuary.



In 1967 Deer Lick was recognized by the U.S. Park Service as a “*National Natural Landmark*” followed decades later, by the New York State Legislature recognizing the remainder of the Zoar forest and canyon land Mr. Darling gifted to New York State as a “*unique area.*”

This vast gorge land which the Darling family used as a hunting and fishing retreat was described in 1963 by The Buffalo News as an “*unspoiled gem*” when opened to the public with Darling’s wish: that people would discover, and use it in the same way he did: for undeveloped nature appreciation to be treated more as a living museum rather than a state park with extensive developed trails, park benches, lawns and sports fields. All of this was anathema to what Mr. Darling intended for Zoar.

For better or worse, Zoar Valley is now the last wilderness in Western New York and is overwhelmingly appreciated not only by the people of Western New York, but neighboring states and Canada. Zoar is so well recognized that Fredonia State named one of its residence halls “*Zoar.*”

Hiking in Zoar satisfies mankind’s spiritual, and psychological craving for a “*wilderness experience*”: a soothing natural escape from Modern Western civilization- the depressing urban sprawl and endless subdivisions many in western New York and beyond live in.

After preserving Zoar forests in an essentially untouched form for decades, as it was originally intended by the donor, the current generation of DEC leaders are on the verge of launching an experimental and highly controversial forest management technique where trees in various stages of reaching maturity are close to being “*clear-cut*” with the trimmings being gathered in 10-foot high furloughs: All this in the name of saving nationally declining stocks of partridge, woodcocks, and some warbler species — two of which are gamebirds and the warblers that are not threatened with extinction in Zoar.

The bottom line is that an essential part of a wilderness experience is generating a visual sense of remoteness from mankind: where it would be difficult to see anywhere any sign that Columbus ever

landed. This requires an extensive buffer surrounding the forests of the “*unique area*”.

Experimental logging on DEC lands between the highways where visitors park, and the “*unique area*” will require visitors to slog through acres of a war-zone-like eyesore: that will scar the landscape for generations to come ruining their Zoar wilderness experience. Disappointed visitors will instead be left with the impression of how insignificant mother nature is to mankind.

Over the past 60 years, the view scapes of Zoar have now become sacred in the eyes of the public. The DEC needs to move on from managing Zoar as a typical “*multiple use area*” where; logging it now will represent a disservice to the people of New York, the nation, and mankind.

The DEC should practice experimental logging someplace else.

Leave Zoar Valley alone!

William Cain is a Gowanda resident.

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