

## SUPPORT FOR RESOLUTION 22-69, PIG'S EYE REGIONAL PARK FIX UP

**KATHY SIDLES, 1380 Winchell St., Saint Paul, MN 55106 651-771-7528**

I am an east side resident who has been walking once a week since April of 2021 at Pig's Eye Regional Park. I am writing to support Resolution 22-69 by Councilmembers Jane Prince and Nelsie Yang:

**RESOLVED**, the City of Saint Paul requests support from the State of Minnesota in coordinating our efforts to seek funding from the Federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (November 15, 2021) as well as state funds that could become available through the state budget surplus, to fund the cleanup and restoration of the Minnesota Superfund sites at Pig's Eye Lake.

As a park user here are observations and ideas I have had during my park visits for restoring Pig's Eye Regional Park for people and the plants and animals that are there now.

1. **SAFE AND MARKED ACCESS TO THE PARK IS NEEDED** - In April 2021 I went on a tour of the park area roads with Kiki Sonnen. As we drove down roads lined with industry, and parked at three park entrances I asked "Are we allowed to be here?" She said yes, these are public roads and a public park. My husband Paul and I go on a walk every day at different local parks for health reasons and for fun in retirement. When I brought him to Pig's Eye Regional Park for a walk at one of the entry places a sign said DO NOT ENTER. He refused to walk there so we had to walk at a different park. He did come with me to a tour event with other people but at that entry you have to drive past a big pile of pallets on park land waiting to be chipped, then park at a large pile of sewer sludge. The boat launch listed on the Saint Paul Park's web site at the SE corner of Pig's Eye Lake isn't marked and is overgrown and no one I have met knows how to access it.



2. **RESIDENTS ARE LOOKING FOR PARKING, WILDLIFE, PORT-A-POTTIES, KAYAK INPUT AND HISTORY INFORMATION** - I have hiked at Pig's Eye Park most Tuesdays at 9:30 AM since then at tour events, with Kiki Sonnen and Tom Dimond, driving past the pile of pallets, parking at the sewer sludge area, and walking on the truck trail to the small bridge across Battle Creek. I have met a few east side residents who found the park entrance and have been walking there for many years. I have met other people who have finally found the park after up to five tries. People see it on the map and for personal or professional reasons take it on themselves to find the park and explore it in

spite of the difficulty and rail road and truck traffic. Some people bring dogs for a long walk. Many people are looking for a place to put in a kayak. One person's father fished for walleye in the lake decades ago. One person was interested in aquatic species. Other people are birders like I am. It's fun to see birds in the prairie and lake I don't see in our east side neighborhood. Some people belonged to two different local hiking clubs.



Many people live in the area and like my husband and I are exploring our neighborhood parks. Kiki and I have a Facebook Page called Pig's Eye Park Friends. The explanation of how to get to the park from Warner Road across RR tracks and past the wood chipper to the sludge pile is a paragraph long. But I see people are happy to find this large park with a long trail, lots of history, and nature to observe and be in.

- 3. NATIVE BURNED PRAIRIE AND SHORT MOWED TRAILS ARE NEEDED:** Before the drought hit the truck trails that are used to get to the monitoring wells had high grass so lots of ticks drop off the grass on to hikers. A request was made to mow the truck trails but they were never mowed. As a flood plain this area is damp. Replacing the thick non-native Brome grass and other invasive plants that were planted at the last restoration with native plants, burning as was done historically, and staying on short grass are known ways to reduce ticks and Lyme disease spread from them. The high level of ticks in the habitat as it is now prevents people from returning. I have only heard of one tick being seen in my 20 years of being in east side parks and as a Saint Paul Parks volunteer at Frost Lake Park and the woods along the Bruce Vento Bike Trail. Being from southern Iowa and managing our family farm and doing the natural area work there for 18 years I know a lot about ticks. But most people in the city don't know how to dress for them. I think Stagecoach Prairie maintained by Belwin is a good example of a simple but easy to visit natural area park plan.



4. **BETTER TRAIN FUEL SPILL AND SAFETY PROTOCOLS ARE NEEDED:** In July a 360 to 720 gallon train engine fuel spill into Battle Creek through the park happened when the engine hit a train track mechanism. The railroad got booms and pads in place to soak it up but an email didn't go through so the state didn't know about it until hikers Kiki and Tom notified them. For the next few weeks I got to see how the oil kept coming down the creek into habitat where we had been seeing lots of Leopard Frogs, Blue Herons, Egrets, Robins and other birds in the weeks before. I brought some mason jars and scooped up water from the top inch near the oil that you could see. They smelled strongly of diesel fuel. Even when the last booms and pads were taken up they still smelled faintly of diesel to me. The next month more gallons were spilled north of Pig's Eye next to Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary when two trains - who didn't have electronic upgrades yet to prevent it - collided. I saw lots of Rail Road rocks put into trucks to take the fuel somewhere.



5. **WE NEED TO REMOVE NOT EXPAND SEWER SLUDGE, TREES, PALLET, AND SAND DUMPING IN THIS PARK TO NOT MAKE IT SO EASY TO AVOID WORK TO RECYCLE IT WHERE IT COMES FROM NOT OUR CITY**

**PARK:** As a Saint Paul resident I am interested in learning more about how we are living within and not instead of nature especially along the rich habitat of the Mississippi River. As I got more familiar with the park area it sure looks like even though the garbage from the old dump was removed and covered over it is still way too easy for people from far and near to keep dumping things from their area into our park. It looks like trees and pallets



(which often have chemicals spilled on them) are brought from far and wide and piled in our park waiting a long time to be chipped, and so is sewer sludge, and so is sand coming down the river going to be used to build islands in the middle of the lake to get rid of it more than to upgrade the lake. We should do our best to recycle things in place – trees should remain in parks as logs or chips for trails, sewer sludge should have chemicals removed closer to communities it comes from and be put back on farmland to grow more food, and sand wouldn't come down the river if we protect wetlands and creeks along it better.

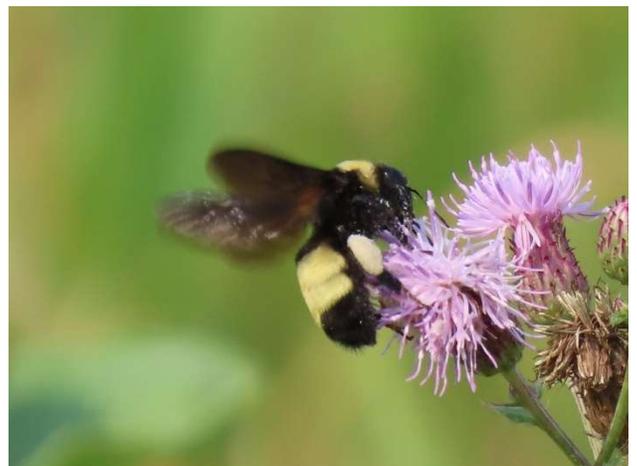
6. **DESIGNATED WETLANDS ARE BEING CROWDED BY TREE, PALLET AND SLUDGE PILES AND SO ARE ENDANGERED BY POLLUTION:** I attended a webinar put on by Master Naturalists for people in north metro suburbs about all the rules regarding designated wetlands on your private property. So I looked up the map to see where wetlands are designated in Pig's Eye Park. Since it is near the river and in a flood plain there are a lot of designated wetlands throughout the park on the map. It looks to me like with all the tree, pallet and sewer sludge piles that the additional wide areas around each wetland I heard in the seminar are required aren't being respected in the way homeowners have to do.



7. **SLUDGE AND PALLETS SHOULD BE STUDIED FOR MORE REGULATION DUE TO CHEMICALS IN THEM:** Sewer sludge and pallets contain chemicals. Those of us who put in pollinator gardens are encouraged to NOT buy colored wood chips since they are chipped pallets that have chemical stains on them so are dyed. I know pallets are a big industry in Minnesota. To be a good steward of the trees we should do better to prevent this kind of chemical contamination. We could require an electronic tag on any pallet with a chemical spill, and recycle them locally, in a Saint Paul Park. Allowing sewer sludge to be so easily piled in our parks where its chemicals leak into our park makes it too easy to avoid the remaining hard work of figuring out how to recycle it locally in one step, and get it back on farm fields to grow more food with it. I bet these are state-wide problems.



8. **THE PARK SHOULD BE MAINTAINED AS AN IMPORTANT PART OF A RIVER WILDLIFE CORRIDOR:** On each walk I count birds to upload when I have time to [www.ebird.org](http://www.ebird.org) for citizen science. I also take pictures of bumblebees and upload them to [www.bumblebeewatch.org](http://www.bumblebeewatch.org). I have seen 93 endangered rusty-patched bumblebees since 2016, mostly on the east side of Saint Paul! I know they have been seen near Pig's Eye Archery and in places farther south. I spent many hours scouting bumblebees south of



Albert Lea last summer for the first year of a five year University of Minnesota Bee Lab project to survey Minnesota bumble bees out of the cities. I spent many extra scouting hours but found way fewer bumblebees than in Watershed District and pollinator garden plantings on the east side, and just one rusty-patched bumblebee. This compares to 37 ID's at Bumblebee Watch, mostly on the east side this summer. I took pictures of them not far from Pig's Eye at Mounds Park and Swede Hollow, and also at Ames Lake, Lake Phalen, along the creek to Keller Lake and other places in spite of the drought. So far it looks like Saint Paul is an important caretaker of the remaining populations of endangered rusty patched bumblebees. Bumble bee genetics is such that they decline fast if they don't have nearby nests to mate with (the males only have their mother's genes, not both father and mother). Like the other parks in Saint Paul and south this park is a key part of the Mississippi River as a wildlife corridor. Pollution needs to be removed from the park and access for people added, but I think it's most important to restore and maintain it as native habitat, and to visit it within that context. I can see with industry and railroads every right of way and wetland and other creative solutions need to be in place for it to be a good wildlife corridor. While larger insects like bumble bees fly up to half a mile, from implementing family farm conservation programs I know smaller insects needed for a healthy land like lady bugs only fly 30 feet. Farm wildlife corridor programs require connected habitat and so should urban ones.

9. **PRESENT BUMBLE BEES, BLUE HERONS, MONARCHS, BEAVERS AND OTHER PLANTS AND ANIMALS SHOULD BE WORKED WITH AND AROUND DURING ANY RESTORATION AND MAINTENANCE:** When I mention seeing beavers in parks along the river people

want to see them. You don't usually see them since they are out at night, but you can see the trees they fell and their lodges, dams and channels. The US Fish and Wildlife Service has information on protecting any trees and culverts, and keeping dam water from flooding infrastructure that are easy to implement. They use fences, cages and tubing to protect trees and culvert entries and to keep beavers from hearing flowing water.



Studies show living with beavers greatly improves the diversity of habitat – they will do work we need for free. I have seen and heard of beaver activity in parks up and down the river including at Pig's Eye. On a bumblebee survey during the Third Annual Backyard Bumblebee Count last July I also saw lots of Monarchs headed south. I think there were too many and they were up too high to just be from the milkweed and goldenrod patches at Pig's Eye. Maybe the bluffs create a Monarch flyway so when the sun is right they can gather and head with a north wind down the river valley to Mexico

to overwinter. There is an important Heron Rookery at the SW corner of the park – the Herons will leave with too much boat traffic. The north end of the lake are filled with native sedge plants, not invasive non-native cattails. Restoration plans should be aware of and work around the importance of the area for bumble bees, Blue Herons, Monarchs, Beavers and other present residents of the park that may be there without us knowing. The park has been neglected and maybe never studied.

**10. FURTHER CONTAMINATION ANALYSIS AND WALKING PATHS SEEM LIKE THE SAFEST USES OF PIGS EYE PARK RIGHT NOW:**

It looks like from reports I've seen that its unknown where PFAS chemicals are leaking but it is known that some areas have not been checked. It could be over the last twenty years new methods for detecting PFAS chemical sources have been figured out. I went to the map showing where Super Fund and other chemical spill or special use sites are in Minnesota and zoomed in on Pig's Eye Regional Park. I noticed a letter sent to the company recycling trees and pallets there. The pallet company asked to do soil bores for equipment footings and the response was go ahead, but let us know if there are methane leaks or drums of chemicals show up. It seems to me that the safest thing to do in this park given that it was a former dump is to just walk in it, not allow more and more heavy truck traffic and dredging and more buildings to be built - like the new sewer sludge building - or long paved park roads that require bulldozing trees and hills.



**11. PIG'S EYE IS USED BY HELICOPTERS FOR SAFETY TRAINING TO REMOVE PEOPLE FROM DANGEROUS SITUATIONS:**

Twice when I visited the park we cancelled the walk since when we arrived a helicopter was lowering people to pick up dummies from park land near the Battle Creek bridge. Another time I saw the helicopter headed for the bridge so left the area before it could get there. This training is also done elsewhere in the river valley area. A less public place for this training and a way for park maintenance and users to know when this training is scheduled is needed.

