

Friends of the Black River Forest Speech at the Bernie Sanders Rally, Sheboygan, 4/1/16

Good Afternoon. Thank you to Senator Sanders for providing this forum for local people to speak about issues important to us and Thank you to the Sheboygan County Democrats for allowing me to tell you about The Friends of the Black River Forest's fight. Who in this auditorium, in this County in this State wants to take on a billionaire, Scott Walker and a corrupt DNR? We do. Who better than you, supporters of Bernie Sanders who has spoken truth to power his whole life, to stand with us in our David and Goliath fight?

A billionaire wealthier than Donald Trump, owns 247 acres of rare dunes, wetlands and forest along Lake Michigan in the Town of Wilson, right here in Sheboygan County. The land shares the same ecosystem with the adjacent Kohler -Andrae Park, the second most visited park in the State. This billionaire wants to build his 5th championship golf course in Sheboygan County on this land.

Why should the residents of our Town and YOU care about this? It's his land right?

Should we care about a billionaire in the top 1% consuming our water, polluting our Lake and river, deforesting 150 acres (of the 247), filling in wetlands, changing the entire ecology of an area on the lakeshore for his own profit and the recreation of the 1%? YES WE SHOULD.

Should we care about this billionaire taking 4 acres of OUR State Park land to use for his own profit? YES WE SHOULD.

Should we care that this billionaire's agents collude with the DNR? That political appointees to the DNR have blocked access to records we requested? YES WE SHOULD.

We are reminded weekly of the groundwater crises throughout our state. Lakes, streams and rivers and aquifers are being depleted from the over-pumping of high capacity wells with too many permits issued by the DNR. Unfiltered toxins flow into our aquifers as the DNR allows wetlands to be filled in at an alarming rate. Wetlands are filled in for profit, and forests which are the sponges of filtration are clear cut for profit.

Kohler-Andrae Park has the 8th worst beach quality in the state, a huge mass of clodophora algae floats just north of here near Whistling Straits.

Into this environmental mess comes Herbert Kohler, Jr. whose company touts water-saving toilets, to create destruction that is almost unheard of in this time of environmental degradation. Shockingly the Kohler Company bills itself as a Steward of the Environment.

I would like to clarify that we have said from the beginning of FBRF that the Kohler Foundation and family's contribution to the jobs, the arts, to scholarships to the Sheboygan County community is appreciated. However this does not entitle the company to destroy our ecosystem for its own profit.

What Steward of the Environment cuts down a forest in 2016 for a golf course? What Steward of the Environment eliminates animal habitat shared with a State Park? Who installs 5 high capacity wells in a Town entirely dependent on wells, bringing its golf course water consumption to over 250 million gallons a year--IN THE MIDDLE OF A STATE GROUNDWATER CRISIS?

Who fills in rare wetlands, covers dunes with clay and cuts down a major migratory bird route?

What Steward of the Environment asks the Natural Resources Board to change the State Park Master Plan so he can have 4 acres and build a rotary entrance at the main entrance to the park?

AND what Steward of the Environment asks the DNR to help him in converting public land purchased with Federal funds to private land for his own profit?

Herbert Kohler, Jr. does. To top it off, he and his company say there won't be much of an impact.

We are fighting a billionaire whose legion of lawyers has held the threat of litigation over those who oppose him. Right now they are strong- arming our Town to accept their choice of environmental consultant and stick to what the DNR says without studying long term impact.

The only response we have to that is, This DNR? The one whose passes to the Kohler Company are well documented? The one who has let go its top scientists and reorganized to fast track permitting for business? Are you serious?

We need your help to mount legal challenges to the DNR. We need your help to send a resounding message to Scott Walker. "Scott, THIS political donor of yours will not force his way into our Town. We will not go the way of towns throughout our state whose resources have been sold off to the highest bidder for the benefit of the 1%.

Should we all stand together against any billionaire's consumption and pollution of our resources ? YES WE SHOULD. Tell Kohler, Play by the rules. You are not entitled to destroy our environment. We are the Friends of the Black River Forest. You can follow us on Facebook and you might consider donating to help us save our resources. Thank you for your attention.

friendsblackriverforest.org

Friends of the Black River Forest on Facebook

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