

History and Prehistory at Risk on Canemah Bluff

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Permit me to set the record straight regarding Metro's creation of what I consider a post-Ice Age ecological theme park on Canemah Bluff ("Oak grove restoration on Metro's to-do list," Community News Roundup, *The Oregonian*, June 2). The article twists certain key facts, and omits others.

"Over the next year, Metro will remove firs that are gradually crowding out a small patch of Oregon City oak savanna," writes Steve Mayes. "The 15-acre patch of white oak and grassland that remains will give visitors a view (of) how the area looked in the mid-1800s...." Mayes then quotes Jonathan Soll, Metro's overseer of natural area restorations: "This is what the (early) settlers saw when they came through here."

This assertion is false. When my great-great uncle Absalom Hedges staked his Donation Land Claim at the head of Willamette Falls in 1844, the bluff was covered with old growth Douglas firs and a scattering of white oaks, ash and other trees. When my great-grandfather Joseph Hedges joined Absalom in 1852, some of the old trees were gone, but firs still predominated.

Then in March 2008, with no public process and no archeological or ethnographic oversight, Metro felled 200 firs and shipped the logs to its regional salmon habitat restoration projects, exposing sensitive Native American sites where, for centuries, diverse tribes camped during spring and fall salmon runs. For the better part of a year, the bluff lay unprotected.

Metro used Canemah Cemetery Road—dedicated solely for cemetery use—to run its heavy logging equipment. Damaged in the process was a virtually extant early-1800s wagon road that once carried Oregon Trail settlers south. Before that, Hudson's Bay Company trappers used the trail to portage around the falls. Still earlier, Northern Molalla and Klamath Indians used it to reach the falls to fish.

Metro would have us believe the last Ice Age ended in the mid-19th century, not 12,000 years ago when Bretz Floods receded, leaving the ecology Metro is seeking to recreate. They would have us believe the Cemetery Road has "no historical significance" —words that Jim Desmond, director of Metro's Sustainability Center, used to justify widening, straightening and grading the historic road. Ironically, instead of holding Desmond's feet to the fire, Metro promoted him.

Now, despite strong opposition from residents of the Canemah National Historic District, Metro intends to cut another 150 fir trees, further damaging the Cemetery Road and exposing more cultural resources.

Metro continues to escape scrutiny for actions which are, at best, questionable, and at worst, unconscionable. The public deserves better.

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