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From: Ed Suij <edsuij@rockisland.com>
Sent: Friday, April 15, 2022 11:18 PM
To: Vacation Rental Comments
Subject: Here is my comment on the Vacation Rental Issue, take your time and read it!

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Orcas your House is on Fire.

The time around Earth Day is a great time to sit in a comfortable chair in front of your favorite tree or shrub and watch the leaves appear. Wait a minute you will say, that will take some patience. We know the leaves will appear, they have done it every year. And yes it will take an enormous amount of patience to sit there and see it happen. From not being there, they will be there. And even though we have been sitting there, we will not have seen it happen, but it happened.

The speed with which it happened is just beyond the human perception. And there are several things occurring at the moment that are happening just at that speed.

One is of course climate change. It is happening, but we don't really see it, or notice it. A few tenths of a degree warmer, a couple millimeters in sea level rise. We hardly notice, but over a lifetime it will be significant. The other example is the change happening to our home, Orcas Island.

Yes, Greta Thunberg is right. Our house is on fire. But we see no smoke, we see no fire, so we are not really concerned. But something is disappearing! Going up in smoke, burning up! The big fossil fuel screw-up.

How many groups of Islands are there along the West coast of this nation?

Not too many. The San Juans are called the Jewels of the Salish Sea. An amazing collecting of natural wonders millions of years in the making, and we get to experience it. We who live here should be the natural stewards of this place, to guard it from degrading, to keep the biodiversity, the abundance, the beauty and pass it on for the next seven generations.

But in merely one generation these jewels are losing their lustre! Call it modernity, uglification, development, progress or whatever, but what existed here when we visited these shores for the first time will be gone not too long from now. We have cut down the big trees, emptied the waters (see old pictures of the canneries in Anacortes), and are very busy paving over paradise with asphalt and concrete, even celebrate with ribbon cutting when another parking lot is ready!

There is a disease called "Shifting Baseline Syndrome". Every newcomer to these islands will consider it still better than the "mainland", because they have never experienced this place over the last 50 years. They will never know what it was like "before" they came.

All this is happening with that imperceptible speed. And no one is paying attention, because we don't see it happen.

Where is the collective memory of the Tribe? Where is the Council of Elders, the consciousness of the Tribe to guide us into the future. These Elders, chosen for their wisdom and experience, have seen it happen. They have seen "the snow melt", they represent the knowledge of the tribe over time.

We always talk how we want our children to have it better than we had it,

we work hard and sacrifice for their education, we hope they have a "better" life than we had.

But will your child ever know the world you once knew? The silence, the crow calls, the dark skies, the glorious big trees, the abundance of wildlife, birds, flowers, teeming wetlands, lush fertile meadows and farmland for our sustenance.

No they will not! So what is the point? Why are you doing all this?

Our children will ask: How did you manage to lose all the precious things that we have heard about? We will have to answer that we really didn't "manage" any of it. It was managed for us! We handed it over to the hired "professionals and the well paid consultants. People with no bone in the fight. People who "plan" for profit, who pull another map or little story out of their computer and put our name on it.

People who have no collective memory of how it was before, who are scrambling to just even keep up with the complexities and speed of change.

So let's step back and look at the stealing that is happening right in front of our noses. This remorseless pursuit of profit, this "off shore" exploitation of our natural resources. Call it the plundering (the disappearing without smoke) of the Commons.

What is disappearing, is the "rural character", the livability of these islands. The peace, natural beauty and quietness is being exploited, and we are not even being paid for it. Our air is being polluted, our water is fouled, our vistas are being spoiled. The silence replaced by the sounds of modernity, airplanes, chainsaws, leaf blowers, crowded roads, the cell phone of your neighbors. Our water access, our sacred sites sold off to the highest bidder. Call it what you want, but financial imperialism sounds right. If you can afford it, you can buy, own it, pave it, destroy it if you want.

Just imagine if the whole island was your home, that you could access the coast anywhere, probably on a trail that connected clam gardens, camas prairies, berry patches, and sacred sites, while slaking your thirst on cool creeks and springs. Imagine that your mode of transportation was by dugout canoe, requiring planning, cooperation, coordination and stamina.

Talk about the future in these islands often brings up the concept "carrying capacity". What is the carrying capacity of a lifeboat full of refugees in the Mediterranean, shoulder to shoulder, no lifejackets, water to the gunnels?

There will be a certain point where one more person pulled on board will sink the whole boat.

Everybody perishes.

We are testing the carrying capacity of the planet, and we are testing the carrying capacity of these Islands.

We are in uncharted waters, but the outlook at the moment for the planet and these islands are grim.

Just like the carpenter ants do, holes are being eaten in our "oikos", the Greek word for house. Our "ecological" systems are collapsing, the systems that regulate our home (this planet), our house, (these islands). Species are disappearing, biodiversity is diminishing, desertification is happening on a big scale. The chainsaws never stop, the cement and asphalt trucks are never idle.

Imagine the decisions the Tribal Elders had to make. Do we try to work on another clam garden this year?

When do we burn the camas prairies? Do we need to start thinking about a new dug-out canoe, as the old one is nearing its lifespan. It will take two years to make one and it will draw men from other tasks, how do we manage? Shall we barter a load of camas bulbs at the Canoe Barter on Lopez for salt, seal skins and flint this year? They apparently managed, as several tribes lived here for thousands of years and left us healthy ecosystems, beauty, abundance. They figured out the carrying capacity of these islands and had a lifestyle to go with it.

The planet is in trouble. We all know it, we can read about it every day. Is Orcas in trouble? It must be, we are part of the whole.

Is our lifestyle compatible with the longterm survival of the qualities we say we cherish? Or are we exploiting, mining, destroying, exhausting, diminishing our own nest? Is the Commons being monetized and sold off by a greedy few?

Imagine the decisions our County Council members have to make.

Shall we support building more and bigger ferries? Which roads shall we widen next? Where shall be the next parking lot? How do we stimulate more "growth"? Shall we divide more of the islands up in "one acre" parcels? Shall we allow 300, 600 or 1200 vacation rentals?

One idea: let's create this "Council of Elders", to advise the County Council members, some of them have barely lived here for ten years. Are they reading up on all the issues of the old Comp Plan? Are they talking to the seniors who have been here 50-60 years, and have seen the dramatic shift?

Already I know people who would love to support their local farmers, but will not go to Eastsound on Saturdays anymore, because it is just become "a zoo". Parking impossible, streets filled with strangers. I know people who now consider a bicycle trip from the ferry to Eastsound a suicide attempt. Way too many cars zipping by at your elbows. No more spontaneous ferry trips, every move planned weeks ahead, boats always late.

So what can we do? Here are some suggested actions, as a community, that we can take today:

First of all a complete stop on vacation rental permits.

Existing permits will not vest with the land. Owners of a permit have to live on the same parcel. Rental unit has to be within 100 feet of the main house.

Every permit will be very expensive and have a time limit (2 years), and come before the Council of Elders, who can decide to renew or revoke. Fees for the permits will go towards a local housing COOP. Only 5 years of every 10 can a lot have a vacation rental.

Sorry, only Islanders (registered voters) can bring their cars to the islands. Tourists will be transported by electric busses to travel nodes, from there they will be shuttled to their destination by a network of local electric cars. There are islands where this is already in place, it can be done. No need for more or bigger ferries. Water taxis will shuttle passengers from Bellingham and Anacortes to Obstruction Pass, Rosario, Eastsound and Deer harbor. Free lying bike paths will be created from Orcas Village to Doe Bay.

Declare The San Juans a Regional Park, with sweeping powers to safeguard all that we hold dear. No more loss of wetlands and old trees. No more shoreline development. No widening of roads, no more asphalt. Carbon neutral by 2030, and absorbing carbon (sequestering) by 2040. Let's make it a special place. Shoreline access will be greatly increased, a "around the Island" trail will be established. No more uglification, strict rules about where and what can be built. We can be (and should be) an example of what can be done when people really care about a place.

A pipe dream you say? Well, if we can't save Orcas, we surely will not be able to save the planet. If we do not act NOW all will be lost. The lifeboat will have sunk, with all of our grandchildren in it!

Ed Sujj