

THE PATRIOT NETWORK

1401 19th Street
Huntsville, TX 77340

Reception 936-295-5767
Fax 936-294-0233

e-mail: ghr@cyberclone.net
internet: www.patriotnetwork.org

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ATTN: OP-ED EDITOR

DESTRUCTION OF SCENIC HIGHWAYS

For Immediate Release

Contact: George H. Russell 936-891-5245
or 936-295-5767

Hundreds of ancient magnolias, oaks and pines are being destroyed at taxpayer expense by Texas Department of Transportation (TxDot) along FM 224 in San Jacinto County in an alleged “safety” program.

George Russell, Forest Practices Chair, Lone Star Sierra Club was alerted by residents of Cape Royale, a development on the shores of Lake Livingston, that is accessed via FM 224, and who were upset by what they described as deception, dishonesty, and pig-headedness on the part of TxDot officials, when they pleaded with them to preserve the beauty along the road to their homes.

Russell was able to obtain a short stay of execution while the project was being revisited by TxDot functionaries but the stay was lifted on Wednesday morning, May 19, 2004, and the destruction of the trees began anew in spite of efforts by State Representative Jim McReynolds to call a halt to the wanton killing.

An on the ground investigation by Russell revealed that many, if not most of the trees posed no safety hazard whatsoever and that in many cases the trees were on the opposite side of bar ditches, inside curves, or at the top of steep embankments making it impossible for a drunken or other impaired driver to ever reach the trees. Russell, who is also the Executive Producer of videos on driver safety and substance abuse and is a former U.S. Army traffic safety officer described the project as being based on biased, distorted, and even bogus data.

An analysis of the collision data used by TxDot to justify the destruction of the trees discovered that 100% of the accidents were single vehicle, which would indicate high speed, or physical or mental impairment from alcohol, drugs or sleep deprivation. Of the 14 accidents that occurred during the four-year analysis period from 1997 through 2001, 72% were related to fixed objects other than shrubs or trees. One involved a fence, two involved utility poles, one involved a mailbox, one an embankment, one, another fixed object, two listed “no code applicable” and in another case a person fell.

“The trees are obviously being convicted and condemned to death under false pretenses and on fabricated charges,” fumed Russell. “Why should Texans be forced to drive down ugly, hot, denuded

highways just because some impaired or speeding drivers hit some mailboxes and utility poles? Removal of the trees destroys the serenity of the roadway will just cause drivers to drive even faster around the 35 mph curves and more citizens will be injured or killed”, Russell continued.

According to nationally accepted valuation guidelines developed at Texas A&M University featured historic trees that beautify scenic roadways carry values far in excess of the timber values. Valuations of individual trees based on size, location, species and condition, often exceed several thousand dollars. Thus, it can be estimated that the trees destroyed by TxDot were worth millions of dollars to the citizens of Texas in addition to the economic values from tourism and property values that will be reduced or lost. Russell calls the destruction senseless and believes that it should be considered “criminal vandalism of taxpayer owned assets” and that the bureaucrats and functionaries responsible should be punished and forced to make restitution to the taxpayers. TxDot has a program called “Don’t Mess With Texas” that is obsessed with picking up candy wrappers and soda cans. According to Russell, TxDot is guilty of extreme hypocrisy since the killing of millions of dollars worth of ancient trees is far more damaging to the beauty of Texas than the presence of a soda can.

Apparently this federally funded program of mass destruction of Texas’ part of “America the Beautiful” is being carried out along other scenic highways and byways across the State. Russell hopes that citizens across Texas will ask their representatives to join State Representative Jim McReynolds in attempting to force TxDot to halt to the wanton destruction of the forested beauty along our Texas Highways.

George H. Russell
American Patriot

George H. Russell, an outspoken opponent of the death penalty, is a resident of Huntsville, Texas, known worldwide as "The City of Death."

He is founder of The Patriot Network, and author of its 35+ web sites located at www.patriotnetwork.org, as well as founder of The Universal Ethician Church, an interfaith ministry with a worldwide following via the church's 275+ web sites located at www.salvationnetwork.org.

Russell, 59, is an educational video producer, environmental activist, historic preservation specialist, photographer, art and antique collector, philanthropist, American patriot and ethician.

Additional biographical information may be found in Who's Who in America, through Internet searches, and in other publications. Images of Mr. Russell suitable for downloading for publication may be found at www.salvationnetwork.org.