

Lip-Service or Real Values?

For decades we've said wildlife and open space are our top priorities. For just as long, our leaders have failed to put those values into action.

Joe Biden once said, "Don't tell me what you value, show me your budget, and I'll tell you what you value."

Since the 1980s town and county officials have made token gestures toward wildlife, habitat and open space. A resolution creating the Scenic Resources Preservation Program was signed in 1989. But the 2012 Comp Plan essentially disbanded the program.

Today, wildlife is almost always 'last' on the list of concerns. When government tried to introduce a new tax to establish a "Community Priorities Fund," the "priorities" consisted of public-funded housing and buses. Period. No money for wildlife. Nothing toward conservation.

Face it, government's #1 priority is and always has been growth. They claim a "wildlife friendly" agenda. But it's just lip service.

Traffic kills wildlife. And we are up to our eyeballs in traffic. The cause of traffic is growth, and the cause of growth is commercial development.

Wildlife is losing on many fronts.

Snow King expansion will displace more wildlife. The fringes surrounding the current Snow King boundaries are incredibly important habitat. But in the name of saving our town hill, currently owned by private interest millionaires, we are ready to sacrifice ever more habitat.

The new school eight miles from town invites development from South Park to Hoback. We'll soon have 12 miles of five-lane strip mall, car dealerships and cookie-cutter housing projects.

In the name of housing we've run deer out of town, and elk from the suburbs. In the name of transportation we've usurped a third of Karns Meadow. Is this the progress you want?

Even when we do something FOR wildlife, it isn't genuine. Building an ostentatious wildlife-viewing platform in the Elk Refuge was a gild-the-lily insult to wildlife.

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One citizen wrote: "We seem to be losing our inherent understanding of what makes the valley such a magical destination. It is not the manmade structures and the addition of outdoor art that

attempts to mimic the natural scene and wildlife."

Amen.

Another concerned citizen pointed this out to commissioners, who have been dragging their feet on natural resource protection, the NRO, for six years. "The problem is right now we have rural development consuming wildlife habitat and open space across our valley because our land use rules don't effectively protect wildlife habitat and open space. This is unacceptable and flies in the face of our community's values."

Double amen.

And another citizen pleaded, "This community is being destroyed by all the greedy exploiters with no payback or consideration of the environment, the ecology and the wildlife treasures."

Local citizens get it. We need to slow down. We need to rein things in, and show we're dedicated to maintaining our neighborhoods, wildlife, and open space.

Candidates for elected office are starting to declare. Let's make sure wildlife and open space get more than lip service when we vote.