

Date: Sep. 2, 2016

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Subject: Resolution File # 160183
Recreational Use of the 19,000 Acre Scenic Easement Portion
of the Crystal Spring Watershed, San Mateo County

Dear Members of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, and Mayor Lee:

I write to share with you a bit of Crystal Springs Watershed history, and the perspective of those who, half a century ago, led the intensely fought multi-year battle over the alignment of Interstate-280 through the southern portion of the Crystal Springs Watershed. The outcome resulted in 1) adoption of the present easterly "Ridge Route" alignment of I-280, and 2) the granting in perpetuity to the Federal Government, of a Scenic Easement to 19,000 northwesterly acres of the 23,000 acre Watershed, and a Scenic and Recreation Easement to a southeasterly 4,000 acres.

The California Department of Highways had proposed to construct I-280 through the heart of the southern portion of the Watershed, immediately adjacent to the eastern shore of the most southerly of the Crystal Springs lakes - essentially where Canada Road now lies.

James K. Carr, who had recently resigned as U.S. Under Secretary of Interior to accept appointment as General Manager of San Francisco Public Utilities, prevailed upon the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission to withdraw permission it previously granted to the California Division of Highways for the lakeshore alignment, arguing for an alternative Ridge Route. He argued that its alignment to be displaced as far as possible up the slope toward the eastern ridge of the Watershed.

Carr asserted that the accidents on a lake-side Interstate posed an unacceptable threat to the public water supply. He further declared, as principal guardian of the Watershed,

I want to make it plain that we consider a great part of the watershed to be of tremendous value because of its wilderness character.

In that battle I, as a deeply concerned citizen of San Mateo County supporting the Ridge Route, served as Crystal Springs Watershed representative/spokesperson jointly for the Sierra Club and the Committee for Greenfoothills. It was critical to earn the support of San Mateo County citizens and the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors. I lead educational hikes into the watershed, published articles, testified, and lobbied at the local, State and Federal level.

I wrote, at the time, in a letter to Fred Farr, Federal Coordinator of Highway Beautification, Bureau of Public Roads, Dept. of Transportation

The decision on the routing ... will determine for hundreds of years hence the quality of the scenic, aesthetic, spiritual, and recreational potential that will be realized in the almost completely primitive valley ... Mr. Farr, we believe we have an immensely worthwhile cause. The principal reward for the help you can give to us will be the gratitude of generations yet unborn."

My personal compelling passion in the battle was to ...

protect the beauty of the Watershed for those who cherish looking into it from outside, and to preserve for future generations of Peninsulans, who might be granted permission to enter the Watershed, the potential for tranquil nurturing of the soul within this spectacular semi-wilderness.

A 1964 poll conducted by the *Burlingame Advance-Star* newspaper regarding public access to the Watershed reported the following responses:

- 249 - Don't change Crystal Springs
- 16 - Open lakes to boating and swimming
- 9 - Allow picnicking on surrounding watershed
- 3 - Develop golf course on watershed

The paper declared, in summary, "Public clamoring more to stay out than get in."

The outcome of the multi-year battle was ultimately determined by action of the Federal Government. A week before President Lyndon Johnson left

office, U.S. Secretary of Transportation, Alan S. Boyd convened a high-level meeting in San Francisco for the purpose of declaring the position of the Federal Highway Administration regarding the freeway routing. Carefully summarizing the positions of both sides, it was declared to be the determination of the Federal Government that the 92 percent portion of funding it provides for interstate highway construction would only be made available for the Ridge Route.

Federal funding for the realignment was declared conditional, however, on the City and County of San Francisco granting to the Federal Government a Scenic Easement for 19,000 northwesterly acres of the Watershed, and a Scenic and Recreation Easement for a 4,000-acre southeasterly section – all of which Watershed, at the time, was zoned one-acre residential. San Francisco agreed, and the State, unable to afford the added cost of the Ridge Route without Federal support, acquiesced.

It is a given that no recreational activities can be permitted within the 19,000 acre Scenic Easement portion of the Watershed that elevate risk to the public water supply, or the health and integrity of the forest or wildlife.

My vision, a half century ago, was that, consistent with imperative protection of the water, forest and wildlife, a means might some day be identified whereby respectful, responsible individual members of the public would be permitted to enter individually on foot, to experience the restorative powers of this magnificent semi-wilderness. Such means has not yet been identified. Until such time, should it come to pass, docent-led walks have been put in place that have been demonstrated protective of the water, forest and wildlife, and still to enable a brief escape from the our mechanized world to experience the restorative power of this magnificent Watershed.

I appreciate and respect the desire of bicyclists to experience the stimulation and challenge of riding in beautiful natural mountain terrain, but urge careful consideration of three issues: 1) appropriateness, in principle, of mechanized recreation in the Scenic Easement portion of the Watershed; 2) risk of intrusion into hiking areas (my wife and I have multiple times been stunned, and narrowly escaped serious injury, while hiking in the Sierra foothills, by bikers racing downhill upon us around blind corners – an experience guaranteed to spoil a contemplative day's trek in the woods); and 3) permitting biking in an area where concern for Watershed protection imperatives has precluded more passive unescorted solo hiking.

Also see: 2) The Committee for Green Foothills project description <http://www.greenfoothills.org/projects/crystal-springs-watershed-highway-280-alignment/> offers additional detail.