

Dear Editor,

Don Glynn's recent column about unmowed grass along the gorge parkway was interesting, sometimes revealing, but then detoured into fiction as he attempted to insinuate his way into an argument that removing the parkway is a bad idea.

He reveals his notion that the gorge rim should resemble "grass like that around your home." That's an idea, not a good one, but something with which a person could agree or disagree. The Niagara Heritage Partnership (NHP) believes natural landscapes should be preferred in this location, so we disagree. We do agree with Glynn when he says much of the so-called regeneration area looks neglected, unkempt, in a word, terrible. That's because it has been neglected. It is, indeed, full of unchecked growth, undesirable weeds, and alien or invasive plants, as well. Some of the aliens seem to have been established on purpose by the Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation (OPRHP).

There may be several reasons for this ragged appearance: perhaps the experimental plots initiated by the prior parks administration have not been enthusiastically accepted by the current one; perhaps OPRHP lacks the funds to properly monitor the areas; perhaps they don't have the time or expertise in-house; perhaps it's a combination. But common sense suggests that after nearly 10 years, there may be valuable native trees and other plants establishing themselves in these areas, and identifying them, if they actually exist, might be a better idea than wholesale mowing or bush-hogging.

While the current appearance is less than desirable, the overall vision is further confused by the tulip beds and other ornamental plantings at Whirlpool and Devil's Hole State Parks, a pathetic gesture that mimics the English flower garden design that the Canadian parks have refined. Glynn may like this because it's closer to what might be found "around your home or business." But we either understand Olmsted or we don't. If we do, we should start showing it. If we don't, then OPRHP and others who promote treatments and activities in parks should stop using his name as if it's a magic charm to hold "tree huggers" at bay. Tulips and daffodils in Niagara parks would make Olmsted vomit.

"Tree huggers" is a term Glynn uses to disparage parkway removal advocates, as well as, inexplicably, the "Sierra Club of Northern California." "Tree huggers" is a tired, behind-the-times attempt at insult. Most of us wish a few thousand tree huggers had been carrying signs in Washington ten years ago, insisting on triple safeguards for deep-water oil drilling procedures. Why he zeroed in on this distant Northern California Sierra Club chapter is puzzling. We sincerely hope that it wasn't a snide reference to that chapter based on its membership being comprised of gay and lesbian Sierrans. That would reflect very poorly on our region. Why does he single them out? The NHP has welcomed their support for parkway removal as we have all the other chapters. Glynn should recognize we have the support of the Sierra Club, Niagara Chapter, and the Sierra Club, National. If he thinks it's "fair to ask" why they all support removal, he should read the Sierra Club, Niagara Chapter resolution posted under "Resolutions" at www.niagaraheritage.org. The question has been answered for 10 years.

Support for parkway removal continues to grow, both locally and internationally: the Chilton Avenue Block Club, Niagara Falls, NY, has signed on. In Canada, three new groups favor removal--the Niagara River Restoration Council; Friends of Niagara Falls; and Preserve Our Parks. The online petition where individuals can offer support

continues to collect names.

Glynn's description of the "pudgy woman" wearing "orange sneakers" and carrying a "Close the Parkway!" sign seems to be a fictional character based on the real-life Betsy Potter, who told me she has never in her life worn orange sneakers--or indulged in chanting, for that matter, as Glynn implied she had. We don't believe there is anything wrong with orange sneakers and chanting, but Glynn seems to be using these details in an attempt to create a picture of a passionate parkway removal advocate as an object of ridicule. Neither is she "pudgy," unless any young woman over 102 pounds falls into that category for Glynn. And the sign read "Total Removal," not "Close the Parkway!" Potter walked the parkway edge, with the sign, once weekly for 6 months through the winter of 2001-2002, and kept a journal of her experience. Her picture, with the sign, and some of her journal entries can be found on the NHP website under Recent Postings, as "Button Girl Photo" and "Betsy Potter Gorge Walk Journal."

Potter remains a tree hugger, which should be a term of praise. During the last week of May 2010, she identified two nesting pairs of grasshopper sparrows in the Wildlife Refuge on the Lewiston Plateau, as well as meadowlarks. The grasshopper sparrow is a "species of concern" in NY State. (NHP notes that restored grasslands along the gorge rim would be potential habitat for such birds.) Potter is also an artist with a special interest in the natural world and her work will be on display in the Lewiston Library, along with that of others, 2-29 June, with an opening reception on June 5th at 11:00 pm.

Given the history and present condition of the gorge rim, we should all welcome the Wild Ones, Niagara study, entitled, "Regional Economic Growth Through Ecological Restoration of the Niagara Gorge Rim." This study has been found consistent with greenway goals by The Niagara River Greenway Commission and funded by the Ecological Standing Committee. It will be conducted by the accomplished firm of Environmental Design and Research.

This will be a comprehensive study extending along the river from Niagara Falls to Lewiston, NY, which has never before been done. Work has already started. We look forward to the foundational scientific evidence this study will provide to shape our decision-making in the years ahead.

Sincerely,
Bob Baxter
NHP Conservation Chair