

Rader, Jeff

From: John Wegner Jwegner@emory.edu
Sent: Friday, August 22, 2003 7:40 PM
To: Walldorff, Gale; John Wegner (E-mail)
Subject: Trail system
Attachments: jogging path.JPG; jogging trail2.JPG

Dear Gale,

I enjoyed meeting you yesterday and learning about the proposed trail system along South Fork Peachtree Creek. I have thought about the proposal some more and thought I should should put those thoughts on paper. Also, I talked to Howie this morning and he told me that I had to make my position more clear because he felt I was too 'soft' yesterday afternoon. I find myself so often in the role of wet blanket that I was trying to be merely a damp one yesterday.

I must admit to you that I have encountered PATH trail proposals before and I am not a big fan of the design criteria that they use. If a DeKalb County bike lane is four feet wide, I am very perplexed why a multi-use trail needs to be 12 feet wide. Trails this wide, particularly ones that pass through forest, can have ecological impacts that last long after the trail is constructed. Research that I have done with students in Canada shows that trails act as dispersal corridors for invasive non-native plants. Privet, japanese honeysuckle and other invasives prefer growing along the edge of a forest. The gap in the canopy that this trail could produce would be sufficient to entice these and other invasive species along it.

In addition, the ecological impact of the trail during construction would be much wider than 12 feet. Even if the trail winds through a forest, more trees would be removed than you might expect. Recently, I helped site a walking trail in a forest on campus that will be 4 feet wide. Even with creative design, we will have to remove many trees during construction. This tree removal will exacerbate the canopy gap effect.

Let me address the specifics of the trail proposal as it relates to the Emory University environment. This afternoon, I took some time to walk in the forest behind the Emory Conference Center - that forest that I call Wesley Woods. As always, my walk was a magical experience. From the baby box turtle to the bloodroot, doll's eyes and hepatica to the 'swarm' of tiger swallowtails to the fox and beaver tracks along the creek, it was just a wonderful, but arduous walk. This forest is a biodiversity hotspot and under no circumstances should a trail pass through it.

The other serious factor against putting a trail in this location is topography. The hill leading down to the creek is very steep with granite outcrops in many locations. This area is just plain unbuildable.

The trail for this portion of the proposal must be relocated.

On further reflection, the challenges in Lullwater are almost as great. When Emory University built Starvine Way (the road between the Clairmont Campus and the main campus), the president promised that there would be 'no further incursions' in Lullwater. A PATH trail in Lullwater would be perceived by many as further incursion and thus would be deemed inappropriate. Paving a trail of any width is unlikely to be viewed favorably by the Committee on the Environment (CaE). The committee always looks for compromise, but I am pessimistic that one can be found here.

Putting a trail in the floodplain, as is proposed for the portion of the trail in Lullwater on the south side of the creek, is ecologically inappropriate and would be a maintenance nightmare. I have attached to this email two pictures that show the area between Candler Lake and the creek after a 1.5 inch rainfall event. In one picture you can see the path disappearing into the water. In the other picture, you will have trust me that there is a jogging trail there someplace - it was under two to three feet of water at the time. Flooding of this magnitude has occurred at least a half dozen times this summer. The debris and sediment that would be left behind after this sort of flooding would take considerable effort to remove.

For that portion of the trail proposed for the north side of the creek, I see two important difficulties. First, COE recently approved the construction of a suspension bridge across the creek. As part of the motion, the committee stipulated the width of the trail (4 feet I believe) and that the trail would never be widened. This stipulation was

made to minimize the impact of the trail on the forest. The second challenge is the presence of the longterm monitoring project that the Biology department has on that side of the creek. A new trail would pass through the study area.

Finally, I have two suggestions for you. First, if you haven't already done so, it is imperative that you share the proposal with the university administration as soon as possible. We shouldn't be discussing appropriate modifications to the trail until the concept of the trail has been endorsed by the administration. It was premature yesterday to discuss presenting the project to COE when the administration has not approved the project. Second, I invite you to walk with me on the portion of the proposed trail that is on Emory University property. A line on a map can be deceptive. When you actually see where the line is on the ground, the challenges will be more apparent.

Thanks for your time,

John

John Wegner
Campus Environmental
Officer Facilities
Management
Environmental Studies
400 Dowman Drive
Emory University
Atlanta, GA
30322
404-727-4206
fax 404-727-4448