

30 July 2010

WHAT FEDERAL AGENCIES CAN DO TO HELP PRESERVE

AMERICA'S GREAT OUTDOORS

Recently, the White House initiated the “America’s Great Outdoors” program. Several conservation organizations forwarded material on the program. Here are the questions being asked at fora across the US:

1. What challenges do you face when it comes to protecting the great outdoors?
2. What's working?
3. How can the federal government be a better partner?
4. What tools do you need to be more successful?
5. How can the United States better support private land conservation?
6. What should our priorities be for public land conservation?

Here is how EMR replied:

QUESTIONS AND SYNERGY RESPONSES

1. What challenges do you face when it comes to protecting the great outdoors?

We assume that the term ‘the great outdoors’ focuses on Open Land in the Countryside.

Therefore, the FIRST issue is this:

Most informed observers agree there is a need for intensive effort to preserve and protect Open Land in the Countryside by ALL levels of governance – including Federal Agencies. [Open Land is that land outside The Clear Edges around the Urban enclaves that exist in the Countryside.]

HOWEVER, action is ALSO needed by all levels of governance on OpenSpace. OpenSpace is the ‘green and blue’ land uses in the Urbanside, that is INSIDE The Clear Edges – both in the Countryside and in the Urbansides. Of special concern in the OpenSpace within the Urban fabric that makes up the Cores of New Urban Regions. New Urban Regions are where 85 percent of the citizens now work and where between 65 and 75 percent now live.

Since there is need for Federal action in both spheres of human settlement, the following notes reflect that fact.

Outside The Clear Edge

The most obvious challenge to protecting Open Land – as well as protecting and enhancing critical resources such as watersheds, unique ecosystems, historic resources, etc. – is **scattered Urban land uses** and especially **scattered Urban dwellings**.

The scatteration of Urban Land uses outside The Clear Edges is a serious problem. As noted in a recent letter summarized in a “Current Subjects / Recent Correspondence” at www.emrisse.com:

The fact is that, BUT FOR scattered Urban dwellings (individually and in orphan Dooryard-scale, Cluster-scale and Neighborhood-scale agglomerations), there would be NO market for strip centers and Big Boxes that surround the Urban enclaves in the Countryside such as Greater Warrenton. In addition, there would be far less demand for transport infrastructure to serve ‘commuters.

Most of the icons of what Enterprise Media calls “sprawl” are in fact the inevitable PRODUCT of the TRUE DRIVERS of settlement pattern dysfunction. See *The Shape of the Future* and *TRILO-G – PART ONE – ROOTS OF THE HELTER SKELTER CRISIS*.

Beyond the DIRECT impact of scattered Urban land uses, there is an even more pressing challenge:

The existence of SOME scattered Urban land uses in the Countryside has created unfounded speculative assumptions about the POTENTIAL for Urban development on the millions of acres of land outside The Clear Edges.

The illusion of a market for Urban land uses in the Countryside expand exponentially as use of the Automobile increased after 1900.

Here is a first-person rendition of conventional wisdom based on Automobile use:

“Any place to which I can drive my new car, I can build a get-away in the Countryside. BUT wait a minute, there is no reason that I cannot LIVE in the Countryside so long as I do not have to pay the full cost of my location decision.” [In the background please note the banker chuckling and whispering to a real estate agent: “THAT is why we chased Henry George over to England.”]

Thanks to “the luxury of externality” – the failure of scattered Urban land uses to pay their fair share of location-variable costs – the Myths that drive Urban dwelling scatteration EXPANDED

with the advent of Federal aide for roadways after 1920 and EXPLODED with the creation of the Interstate and Defense Highway System in 1956.

Municipal jurisdictions have exacerbated the Myth that Urban land uses could adsorb more than a tiny fraction of the land outside The Clear Edges. Municipal Agencies assess vast areas of Countryside based on the speculative value created by the fantasy that large areas of NonUrban land can be sold for Urbanside land uses. The fact is there are already more land devoted to Urban uses than can be sustained under current and projected economic parameters. See *The Shape of the Future* and THE USE AND MANAGEMENT OF LAND – *TRILO-G* – PART FOUR.

Municipalities have collected trillion of dollars in property tax on land that can never be sustainably ‘developed’ for Urban uses. In addition Municipalities have induced the development of millions of acres of land for scattered Urban land uses BECAUSE of the tax burden.

The illusion of vast potential for use of Countryside land to serve Urban use continues to be propped up by conventional wisdom but is not supported by the facts.

The Great Recession clearly illustrates that if all the land speculatively held for FUTURE Urban scatteration was put on the market, the price would plummet – because it HAS plummeted.

This reality documents the need for QUANTIFICATION of the amount of land ACTUALLY needed for Urban land uses as noted below. See THE CURRENT TRAJECTORY OF THE GREATER WARRENTON-FAUQUIER HOUSING MARKET (forthcoming), the First Law of Human Settlement Patterns ($A = \pi R^2$) and “STARK CONTRAST” in Chapter 49 of *TRILO-G*.

Inside The Clear Edge

The primary challenge to protecting OpenSpace inside The Clear Edge is the failure of the Urban fabric to evolve functional and sustainable components of human settlement patterns at the Dooryard, Cluster, Neighborhood, Village and Community scales.

The dysfunctional scatteration of Urban land uses generates unsupportable demands for Urban services. This fact is the key driver of the Mobility and Access Crisis. It is a very important contributor to the Affordable and Accessible Housing Crisis. This reality impacts ALL Agency costs from education to health to safety. Dysfunctional scatteration also compounds Agency efforts to secure sustainable supplies of potable water, viable strategies to treat waste water and recycle waste materials for Urban citizens.

2. What's working?

Those working in land conservation every day have different answers to this question depending on their role and their perspective. However, from SYNERGY'S perspective the answer is simple:

Not much.

It is important to understand that the answer is 'NOT MUCH' in spite of the effort and good will of 100s of thousands of citizens working in and through 10s of thousands of Agency and Institution programs and Household activities. However, on the ground at the Regional scale or from 50,000 feet, the cumulative result of all that good intent is dismal and growing less effective each year.

In the lower 48, the overarching goal for a sustainable ratio of Urban to NonUrban land SHOULD be:

- Five percent of the land devoted to Urban land use, and
- Ninety Five percent of the land devoted to NonUrban land uses.

The existing ratio is close to a 50 / 50 within 120 miles of every one of the 69 largest New Urban Regions in the US. This is due to the scatteration of Urban uses over, especially over the past 50 years. This scatteration has been exacerbated by the failure to:

- Fairly allocate location-variable costs,
- Clearly define Clear Edges, and
- QUANTIFY the amount of land needed for Urban land uses on a MegaRegional, Regional and SubRegional basis.

At first glance what appears to be 'working' best are tax incentives for granting conservation easements to protect Open Land. These programs at the federal, state and municipal levels provide tax incentives for those fortunate enough to have a large of tax liability. They also provide an escape hatch for 'land rich / cash poor' citizens faced with property and / or income tax burdens. While these tax incentives make conservation easements and similar tools to preserve Open Land attractive, they require careful evaluation and management to insure that the Open Land is in a desirable location and makes a positive contribution to functional settlement patterns.

3. How can the federal government be a better partner?

Fundamental Transformation of human settlement patterns – and preservation of America’s Great Outdoors – will not happen without Fundamental Transformation of governance structure.

Federal leadership is needed to start and support the process of evolving a Fundamentally Transformed governance structure. The response to the incessant drumbeat about the problems of ‘Big Government’ must be transformed to support for ‘Better Governance.’ See *The Shape of the Future*.

The place to start is to reallocate the level of responsibility and control to the level of impact. This applies to the protection of Open Land and to OpenSpace as well as to every other governance function.

This means evolution of MegaRegional, Regional and SubRegional governance structures but it also requires the evolution of effective governance at the Community, Village, Neighborhood and Cluster scales.

A key element will be to establish a fair and effective allocation of responsibility where there is significant impact at multiple levels of governance. There are from seven to nine levels of governance (depending on location and settlement pattern) between the Cluster-scale and the Continental-scale.

4. What tools do you need to be more successful?

A place to start is a functional governance structure and fact based citizen expectations about the amount of Urban land needed to support contemporary economic, social and physical activities.

5. How can the United States better support private land conservation?

- A. Support transition from current direct and indirect subsidies for dysfunctional human settlement patterns to a fair allocation of all location -variable costs.
- B. Support and encourage the evolution of a ‘Wright Plan’ (See 1926 New York State Plan by Russell Wright) for every MegaRegion, every New Urban Region and every Urban Support Region.
- C. Provide guidance and support that results in rational QUANTIFICATION of the amount of Urban land needed to support economic prosperity, social stability and physical sustainability in each MegaRegion, Region and SubRegion.

6. What should our priorities be for public land conservation?

- A. QUANTIFICATION of the real demand for Urbanside land uses.
- B. Implement the Open Land and OpenSpace components of Wright Plans for every MegaRegion, New Urban Region / SubRegion and for every Urban Support Region.
- C. Define the Clear Edge around every Urban enclave, especially The Clear Edge around the Cores of New Urban Regions. See “New Urban Region Conceptual Framework” a PowerPoint in Chapter 49 of *TRILO-G*.
- D. Implement fair allocation of all location-variable costs.

SUMMARY

At first glance these answers may seem abstract. An understanding of SYNERGY’s work cited above fills in the blanks. A review of www.emrisse.com will provide additional information and the definitions of Capitalized words and phrases used in these notes.

The primary reason SYNERGY took time to respond to these questions is that:

Unless the questions raised in the Great Outdoors initiative are addressed at the level of CAUSE, rather than at the level of surface effect, ‘Preserving Americas Great Outdoors’ will remain just a campaign slogan. See USE AND MANAGEMENT OF LAND – PART FOUR of *TRILO-G*.