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“Ask not what the environment can do for you; ask what you can do for the environment”

My take off of this famous J.F. Kennedy inaugural quote is meant to remind us that, unfortunately, we do just the opposite. That is, virtually everyone in the developed world takes much more from the environment than they need and gives virtually nothing back. One of the most egregious examples is the inefficient use of land.

Wasting land in Wisconsin

Here in Wisconsin, according to 1000 Friends of Wisconsin, an organization dedicated to preserving the essence of the Wisconsin where we were raised, average size of new residential lots is one and a half acres compared to a quarter acre nationally. With Wisconsin population projected to grow by one million people over the next 25 years, if average lot size does not shrink, 1000 square miles of land, more than the total land area of Racine and Kenosha Counties, will be consumed just for lots. Adding roads, schools, shopping areas, and public buildings will gobble up a couple hundred more square miles. By then Southeast Wisconsin will look very similar to Northern Illinois. Wisconsin as we know it today will be gone forever.

Unprecedented Growth in Racine County

In the past few years Racine County has seen an explosion of development, with an unprecedented 1000 lots currently for sale. Racine towns without a conservation subdivision requirement have lot sizes averaging three acres or more. In Caledonia, Yorkville and Raymond, which have such a requirement, one acre is about average. Although still much larger than necessary, it is an improvement over the rest of the county. And each development is required to permanently protect 40% to 65% of the total subdivision area from further development.

How you can you give back to the environment?

K/RLT has already contacted Kenosha County, Racine County and Town of Waterford about attending their Smart Growth Plan committee meetings. We will be advising on the many economic and quality of life benefits which result from preserving open space in each development and especially protecting primary environmental corridors, like the Des Plaines River, Root River, and Honey Creek. We urge all concerned citizens to participate in these meetings. It is only through broad public support that the Wisconsin we know and love can be preserved.

Another way to give back, or at least reduce your foot print on Earth, is to live in a city or a conservation subdivision in a sewer district. Generally, such subdivisions have half acre or smaller lots and are closer to the places you drive each day. K/RLT holds conservation easements in several of these subdivisions. If you would like more information about them, contact us at the address or phone number provided at the end of this article. And if you do live in one, you will have another opportunity to give back to

the environment by planting trees, shrubs, and prairie plants in the protected open spaces which all the residents share. Plant about 1.6 acres of trees and by photosynthesis they will remove the 12,000 pounds of CO2 your car will emit each year.

If you are interested in helping K/RLT protect open spaces and natural areas, please consider becoming a member. To obtain membership information, including our Fall/Winter Newsletter and brochure, write to the land trust at P.O. Box 085153, Racine, WI 53408-5153 or call us at 262-552-6861. Additional information is available on the web at www.krlt.org.

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