



THE SCENE IS PEACEFUL, but the controversy which surrounds it is not. Linda Schwader, left, and Alison Schleiter walk through the Prospect Heights slough, oblivious to the ongoing debate about the land's future. Some wish to preserve it others want it developed.

Slough's future embroiled in debate

by DIANE MERMIGAS
It is difficult to imagine one of nature's quietest places in the Northwest suburbs, a marshy, 27-acre slough in Prospect Heights, being the center of controversy.

It is a tranquil place amid the surrounding development that provides sanctuary for a variety of creatures — fish, muskrat, frogs, fowl and insects.

There is life in the thick undergrowth, cattails and muddy waters. Nature's island in the sprawling suburbs is a place to spend peaceful moments fishing, boating and walking.

The area has been a center of controversy in the past. Disputes have arisen between residents and conservation groups wishing to preserve the slough and developers who would rather see it the focal point of a development.

Efforts are afoot by the Prospect Heights Park Board to preserve the area with the support of those who make their homes on its shores.

"They are tearing down so much today that they don't even realize the importance of leaving some open space to nature," said Barbara Harris, 104 Mandel Ln. and a resident of the newly incorporated community who is concerned about the future of the slough.

The wetland, just west of Elmhurst Road and spreading northward past Willow Road, has special meaning to

Mrs. Harris. Her parents have lived the past 28 years just a block away from the slough where she played as a child.

TODAY, MRS. Harris brings her three children to the slough to observe nature whenever she can.

The southern half of the slough, south of Willow Road and west of Hillside Avenue, is where Mrs. Harris and her childhood friends used to play. It is heavily vegetated and held by a trust at the Maywood Proviso State Bank, Maywood.

The Prospect Heights Park District filed a condemnation suit in 1974 to acquire that part of the slough. The district has received an Illinois Dept. of Conservation grant to help purchase the property if it is acquired. The suit has been delayed in Cook County Circuit Court and attorneys for the park district are not sure when the case will be resolved.

The northern half of the slough, north of Willow Road and bounded on the west by Hillcrest Drive, is known as Hillcrest Lake and is owned by the Hillcrest Lake Homeowners Assn.

Area residents purchased the 13-acre more than 10 years ago to keep it out of the hands of developers.

The park district has made advances toward purchasing the lake, but it has not filed a condemnation suit for the northern half of the slough.

The park district owns 13 acres adjacent to the southern half of the slough off of Elmhurst Road. The Prospect Heights chapter of the Inaak Walton League constructed an \$11,000 nature shelter there in 1975.

The league and other community groups, government agencies such as the park district and area residents have continually united to preserve the slough.

IT OFTEN HAS been a battle, not only against developers, but against the ravages of sewage overflow, soil erosion and dumping that could endanger the slough's wildlife.

Those with a technical understanding of the land say the slough is a "sponge" that soaks up storm runoff from the land around it rather than allowing the water to flood low-lying areas downstream. The slough is a link in the McDonald Creek tributary system that drains into the Des Plaines River.

But those whose homes border the slough say it is a place of tranquility that provides recreation and outdoor education.

"The people here are very concerned about the slough. It provides us with a magnificent view from our front rooms and kitchens. The small animals that crawl out onto our lawns once in awhile are more an asset than a 'liability,'" said Eugene Bachara, 9 Hillside Ave.

"BUT, THE MOST rewarding thing is that it provides little boys, like my own, with a Huckleberry Finn-Ten Sawyer place to go barefoot and fish and sail a raft," he said.

Park district officials say they would like to make sure children in years to come have the same chance.

"At most, we might put in a few simple piers, maybe a walking and bicycling path around the edge. But, the park district just wants to preserve the slough and protect it," said William Kuhn, park board commissioner.

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