

Lewis C. Snell, PhD
Waco, TX 76708
lewissnell@yahoo.com
254-722-3862

To think that a company could use an easement for part of railway that had been unused for 50 years and then use eminent domain to acquire the remaining portions of the track is an unfortunate way to acquire a rail system. This company requested to bypass the environmental surveys that are typically required and then provided false information regarding the quality of the land and the watershed that serves as a source of water for the creeks and streams that will be affected by this rail system.

My family has owned property in Burnet County for five generations and has farmed, ranched, and hunted on this property dating back to 1849. There was never any mention of an easement for railroad tracks. While due process has been followed to improve the roadway or for powerlines to run across the property, the normal communication channels were not followed in this case.

From my personal experience or from the stories that have been passed down for approximately 180 years, I can tell you that Mesquite creek has been a favorite spot for the Alexander homestead and currently the homestead for Duwain Snell. I have heard the stories of mountain lions traveling in the area and the more common bobtailed cat being identified as well.

Currently deer, turkey, and hogs are prevalent, but this ranch has seen a lot of different mammals and birds in the eight decades that my uncle Duwain and father John utilized the land. Additionally, Mesquite creek was once a continuously flowing creek and was teaming with catfish and bass.

More recently, I witness river otters in Mesquite creek as well as numerous species of hawks and owls. If needed, we can provide photos of coyotes, foxes, and the often talked about but rarely identified porcupine.

And while all these animal species should be considered as well as many others, the biggest factor that should be evaluated is the impact a rail system or any other disturbance to the natural habitat is the 200-year-old oak tree that is currently in the path of the proposed railway. This tree is rumored to have hosted Indian peace talks and is as beautiful as it is old.

This land has served as the homestead for a number of Alexander family members and a rail system would impact at least a dozen current family members that either live on the property full time, have a part time residence or anticipate retiring to the area in the near future.

I am in favor of following due process and completing a full environmental assessment that considers waterways, wildlife, livestock, and quality of life for the families that currently live in Burnet County. We would be remiss if we did not consider the impact a train system would have on mammals, reptiles, amphibians, birds, and fish as well as plant species that are common in this region, but unique to this habitat. Burnet and Lampasas counties take on qualities of the Hill Country and Post Oak Savannah and should be considered as unique as the old oak tree and porcupine that can be seen but not heard.

Signed,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Lewis C. Smith". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the "Signed," text.

Lewis C. Snell, PhD
Waco, TX 76708
lewissnell@yahoo.com
254-722-3862

Sulphur Creek is well known in Lampasas County for providing great opportunities for fishing, canoeing, and enjoying nature. More specifically, the region where Cooksey Creek joins Sulphur Creek has been a favorite gathering place for local residence for over 100 years. Growing up, I was told stories about fishing in the creek, hunting deer, and using hunting dogs to hunt racoons and the occasional ring tail cat. As a child, my many cousins would ride horses and my Dad would host camping trips for his many friends. These camping trips included running trot lines and a fish fry on Sunday. I would spend my adolescence hosting my own camping trips and later my family would move to the property where my Mom has spent forty years living on Sulphur creek.

From the wildlife to the wild stories that were told, the Cooksey Creek and Sulphur Creek union provided a location for our family to gather for holidays and for generations of Snell descendants to grow up.

We raised chickens, goats, and sheep on the land. My Dad trained horses and consistently cut and bailed hay on the property for as long as anyone can remember.

This stretch of the creek has seen a lot of change over the years in terms of habitat diversity. There was a time when freshwater eels were prevalent and later there were large freshwater clams. The yellow catfish were once the most plentiful were primarily replaced by channel catfish and more recently multiple species of bass as well as carp are now very plentiful. Throughout this time span, multiple species of gar were consistent.

Also along Sulphur creek, there are a number of bird species that are common and enjoyable to watch. From the egrets to cormorants and occasional kingfisher, the creek is a host to many bird species. Migratory ducks are common with the wood duck standing out when spotted. There is nothing quite like seeing a blue heron and potential mate standing in the shallow water of Sulphur creek.

With all that said, there have been countless Lampasas residents that have mentioned fishing or hunting on the Snell property or how beautiful the land was on Sulphur Creek

During all this time, I took for granted that arrowheads could be found after a soft rain and that visitors often left with an Indian artifact. Many amateur enthusiasts would stop by to visit and we had multiple arrowhead displays in frames in our house. What I failed to realize was that this specific region was a perfect location for the indigenous people of the region to make their home.

Within the last ten years, the land has been visited by the Gault School of Archeological Research and allowed a new population of individuals to visit the land and conduct dig sites for experts and volunteers alike. Artifacts dating back 8,000 years have been identified with the possibility of older items still in the ground. Over 1,000 samples have been collected over the last 30 years including points, scraping tools, and small fishing points. Bison teeth have also been excavated. Possibly the most interesting find has been burnt middens which signify prehistoric food processing activity. These heat fractured rocks are common along the creek and in this area specifically.

The stories and memories shaped my childhood and have a lasting impact on me and my appreciation for wildlife, nature, and the culture and history of the land.

I can only hope that future generations will have the same opportunity to enjoy one of the most unique locations in Lampasas County. The creek and land surrounding it deserve to remain intact and allow the wildlife, livestock, and people to flourish.

Signed,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Lewis C. Small". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the "Signed," text.