

# Shooting range plan should be shot down

**F**inding peace and quiet amid natural areas in the Chicago area is increasingly difficult. That's why we're so fortunate the General Assembly in 1915 established forest preserve districts.

Since then, as growth has gobbled up huge swaths of land, the region's districts have bought and protected thousands of acres of open space.

Most preserves are pristine oases where one can observe nature or just get away from the buildings, pavement and vehicles.

Some regional preserves include active uses, like bicycle trails and golf courses. None, however, have a shooting range, a far more environmentally degrading use suggested by a DuPage County Forest Preserve Commission member.

In October, Commissioner Joseph Cantore of Oakbrook Terrace floated the proposal at a meeting of the Recreational Committee he chairs. He said citizens came to him promoting the idea.

Often, government does step in to make recreational programs available to more people, as forest preserves have done with golf courses.

And whatever opinion one might have of guns, it is important hunters have a safe place to practice. Hunting, particularly downstate, is needed to keep deer and geese populations in check. Likewise, it's also important law enforcement personnel have a safe place to practice marksmanship, which brings us to the second proposal to introduce a shooting range on DuPage Forest Preserve District land.

Last month, Administrative Bureau Chief Tom Janaes of the DuPage County sheriff's office suggested a county site southwest of Route 53 and 75th Street, near the east branch of the DuPage River, be used for a shooting range and 250-space parking lot. To accommodate both uses, part of the Greene Valley Forest Preserve, which abuts the site on three sides, would have to be used. That proposal was made because the sheriff's office might lose its current range on DuPage Airport Authority land in West Chicago.

Hunters and police clearly need a place to practice, and forest preserve districts sometimes do provide active recreational areas, but shooting ranges in or near preserves just isn't appropriate.

Imagine the reactions of humans and animals — perhaps including endangered species — to the sound of gunshots in the preserves. Also think about the effect of tons of lead penetrating pristine lands.

The good news is that after a public outcry against the shooting ranges, the proposals face a political firing squad.

Forest Preserve District staff has done little to explore sites for a public shooting range, said Mike Palazzetti, director of operations.

"I personally cannot support putting a gun range on Forest Preserve property that was acquired for open space," Commission President D. "Dewey" Pierotti Jr. added, saying such a use might be appropriate in an industrial area.

And Dan Wagner, County Board Chairman Robert Schillerstrom's top aide, said Schillerstrom opposes the proposal put forward by the sheriff's office.

"It's not going to go anywhere," Wagner said.

So, good riddance to a couple of bad ideas.



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