



RIVER FIELDS

An Open Letter to the Citizens of Greater Louisville:

Steve Shaw's "Burned Bridge," which appeared in LEO's November 11 issue, correctly recognized River Fields as one of the oldest, largest, most admired and celebrated river conservancies in the nation. This is no accident. River Fields' performance of its mission has made it a model for organizations as diverse as the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Land Trust Alliance and the Cultural Landscape Foundation.

While "Burned Bridge" focused on River Fields as an advocate, it is important to remember that in its 50-year history, River Fields has preserved 2,200 acres of open space for the public to enjoy forever. Land preservation is popular and non-controversial. Advocacy is more challenging. There are at least two sides to every controversy, and the rough-and-tumble of debate in a democracy can be unpleasant. There are probably a few of River Fields' 2,100 dues-paying members from 104 zip codes who would prefer that unpleasantness be avoided.

Why does River Fields risk the kind of name-calling its advocacy can create? Because advocacy matters. River Fields' founders believed that our community needs an organization with the skill and resources to hold our government accountable to the law and to the best interests of all our citizens, even if that role is occasionally unpopular. We also believe that true public interest is best accomplished through fact-based decision making. We apply this vision to ourselves. Adherence to facts is a core River Fields value. We will not take a position until we have researched the facts and the law. And we also believe that public issues should be debated civilly, without attacks on the motives of those who disagree with us. We believe that name-calling is both offensive and useless in fact-based discussion.

"Burned Bridge" focused on two of River Fields' advocacy projects, both of which have resulted in very vocal criticism of River Fields' motives and position. We wish this name-calling would stop. Since it has not, we are answering those charges with the facts.

The Truth about River Fields

River Fields' mission is the protection, preservation and enhancement of the natural and cultural resources, including agricultural and scenic resources, on both sides of the Ohio River between Westport and West Point, Kentucky, for the benefit of the public. We work throughout the bi-state region to conserve land and water, natural and cultural resources.

The Truth about the Board

Those who say River Fields Board members are largely landowners on River Road haven't done their homework: of the 18 trustees, only three live on River Road. Nor is a majority of the Board directly impacted by the eastern bridge. The proposed eastern bridge is more than a mile away from the home of the closest River Fields trustee. The River Fields Board of Trustees is passionately unified in its commitment to the mission of the organization. The mission and the organization's policies and positions are the responsibility of the Board. The Executive Director does not have a vote.

Like any fortunate non-profit, we have some wealthy donors, but many are everyday, working people who live from West Point to Westport, Kentucky, and in Indiana. Many have been members for over fifteen years, faithfully giving their \$25 to \$50 annually. They are a cornerstone of the organization.

Reflecting this diversity, River Fields has represented area citizens for decades in partnership with local citizens and neighborhood associations in all parts of our community, from the City of West Point to the West Jefferson Community Task Force. River Fields provides technical assistance, advocacy, guidance, input, and legal expertise for the

concerns and initiatives for all our citizens.

The Truth about the Ohio River Bridges Project

Some of River Fields' critics seem to think that River Fields created the bridges project and the proposed downtown bridge. Contrary to what some think, the idea for a downtown bridge actually came from proponents of the eastern bridge in a series of studies, most of which were committed to demonstrating that the eastern bridge was essential. In contrast, no study has ever demonstrated that there would be any significant traffic or safety improvement on the Kennedy Bridge and in Spaghetti Junction without an additional downtown bridge.

The proposed eastern bridge, on the other hand, offers no significant traffic or safety benefits and causes significant environmental harm, threatening the groundwater aquifer along the Ohio River at Transylvania Beach and adversely affecting historic properties and neighborhoods. The Natural Resources Defense Council has called it "one of the most environmentally destructive" highway projects in the United States.

Based on these facts, we continue to believe the downtown project, which solves traffic and safety problems, should be funded and sequenced first. Contrary to what you may have read, River Fields' board has been unanimous in support of this position and on the steps River Fields has taken to advance it.

The Project Remains Unfunded

The real problem with the project's future is not River Fields or the challenge of litigation, but funding. The initial estimate in the Environmental Impact Statement of \$1.6 billion has now ballooned to over \$4.1 billion. The federal funds promised by elected officials in the 1990s never materialized, and in 2009, there is still no funding plan. Tolling, the only plan for funding left, may not even be legal and would easily double the cost of the project because of the cost of interest. And at least two project studies have shown the eastern bridge alone cannot support itself with tolls.

In Conclusion

River Fields believes in mutually respectful, honest conversation based on the facts and the law. We welcome dialogue with anyone who agrees with these ground rules. While everyone may not agree with us, we ask you to respect that we are working for what we believe is in the long-term, best interest of the community.

We invite all members of the community to visit the River Fields website at www.riverfields.org, where you can learn more about our initiatives and mission, where you can sign up to receive email alerts from River Fields, and where you can become a member of the organization. Members of River Fields receive invitations to wildflower walks on conserved properties and to tours of cultural landscapes and conservation easements, as well as regular publications. We also invite you to visit Garvin Brown Preserve, a nature preserve on the Ohio River, owned by River Fields, which is open to the public year-round. Learn more at www.riverfields.org/GarvinBrownPreserve.htm. This open, green land is a perfect embodiment of River Fields' mission and is a community treasure open to everyone.

Signed,

The Board of Trustees of River Fields

Robert E. Kulp, Jr., Dr. Hiram C. Polk, Jr., Paul J. Bickel III, Owsley Brown II, Stephen P. Campbell, Marea Clark, Lee T. Cory, Arnita Gadson, Matthew Boone Gardiner, Elizabeth Dodd Lococo, Hunter G. Louis, Debbie Linnig Michals, Kenneth W. Moore, Edwin H. Perry, Bea Rosenberg, Inez Segell, Jane M. Townsend & Ann C. Wells

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