

The Tug-of-War for Moraine Hills State Park by Judy Wooderson
Synopsis of THE HERALD Articles - a series by Brad Brekke published in 1971

Lake Defiance is located off of Lily Lake Road near the 94 acre McHenry Dam State Park. In 1971 it was described to be in an isolated part of the county, primarily zoned for farming. It had no highway access, only a "gravel path" known as Lake Defiance Road which was "strewn with trash". For 40 years the property was owned by Dr. Urban Comes and known as "Urbandale Farm", but had recently been sold. Below are the titles of the seven article series printed in The Herald debating the hotly contested future of the total of 1,515 acres of land that thankfully, ultimately became Moraine Hills State Park.

"Business of Pleasure? State Fights to Acquire Lake Defiance for State Park" - March 26, 1971

"Girl Scouts Adamant About Protection of Their Camp" - March 29, 1971

"High Gravel Dollar Yield Eyed: Land Will be Restored" - March 30, 1971

"Says Mining Best Possible Use" - March 30, 1971

"Will Gravel Pits Help Economy?" - March 31, 1971

"Death of an Ancient Lake" - April 5, 1971

"A Politically Motivated County Board May Turn 12,000-Year-Old-Lake Defiance into a Gravel Pit"-April 5, 1971

Illinois Governor Richard Ogilvie explained, "Because the land in this area is so easily adaptable to nearly any use, we must act now to preserve it for the public before the cost becomes outrageously prohibitive."

- The State of Illinois proposed buying 1,515 acres to create new park to be named "Lake Defiance State Park".
- 322 acres of that acreage, surrounded and included Lake Defiance
- It was expected to take 3 years and cost \$3MM (\$2000/acre)
- The State's 1969 open lands project was designed to aggressively expand Illinois's state parks; this was part of that effort.

322 of the acres were owned by two parties:

90% owned by the Lake Defiance Development Corp (LDDC) purchased in 1969 from Dr. Urban Comes for \$500K (\$1553/acre)
Owner Frank Sheahan of Highland Park had a 20 year plan to dredge & mine the lake for gravel.
Plan included doubling the size & deepening from 16 to 50 ft, digging a second lake north & draining marshes.
1st in McHenry to plan to rehab mine for ultimate recreational use (with McHenry Regional Planning Commission).
Intended to improve Wegner & Darrell Roads to handle 50 trucks/day.
1971 LDDC received a 3yr conditional use permit from McHenry Board of Supervisors by a 23-0 unanimous vote.
Claimed \$200,000 of annual income to the county & in 20 years the property would ultimately provide an improved recreational area.

Illinois Shore Girl Scout Council (a merger of 6 councils) purchased 40 acres on Lake Defiance from Dr. James Lewis.

Mrs. Robert Erickson - Wilmette was the Council's spokesperson.

"Camp Lewis" was used by the girl scouts for swimming, canoeing and ecological studies. The summer camp consisted of a few cottages and a beach.

The Council lobbied to prevent the mining of Lake Defiance due to concern over upsetting the lake's ecological balance.

STATE's STRATAGY and ultimate outcome: Get the land condemned and have the court decide the value of the land as LDDC's asking price is several million. (The land had been selling for \$1,000/acre rising to \$2,000 after the State announced its interest.)

Henry Barkhausen, Dept of Conservation Head was quoted in The Herald: "We'll be taking the lake. We are going in there. We are making the title searches and appraisals now."

'A scouting team of forestry and park personnel rated Lake Defiance "outstanding" for public multi-use (fishing, hiking, picnicking and camping)...[it will become] part of an arch of parks around the Chicago metro area.'

'[It will take] two years to acquire all 1,515 acres followed by a third year to develop the park.'