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Subject: Citizen Comment - John and Margaret Green

October 25, 2017

To: Gearhart City Council, Gearhart Planning Commission, City Mgr, Chad Sweet
From: John and Margaret Green, PO Box 2597, 1250 N Ocean Ave. #206, Gearhart

As members of the Gearhart Citizen's Dune Vegetation Committee (DVC), we feel it is important to ensure that any misconceptions regarding the work of the DVC are dispelled. Letters and testimony to council have continued to perpetuate some of these misconceptions.

The most important and most often repeated is that the DVC did not consult experts in its studies. Most, if not all of the DVC attended the January Town Hall meeting featuring local experts on plants, ecology, and also our own Gearhart Police and Fire chiefs. The town hall was informative and brought forth concerns and also mentioned the rich and diverse habitat of the dunes. Findings of these experts were posted to the city website for review and study for all the committee members. The committee did a reasonable job of collecting additional information, given the limited time frame allowed (6 - 2 hour meetings) and the financial resources at its disposal (\$0). Web sites for many resources, such as USDA, US Forest Service, several universities, and Firewise, along with the previously presented data, were considered and used to draft recommendations on fire, safety, invasive plant species eradication, tree health and environmental concerns. A renowned expert on Northwest Coast ecology and author of "the Northwest Coast" was actually on the committee.

It is very important to note that the committee agendas were set and directed by the CREST facilitator. The first 3 meetings were focused on goals, committee makeup, and scotch broom ecology as well as member preferences. As it became apparent we were running out of time and still far from preparing recommendations, with the leadership of a skilled committee member, we began seeking consensus on issues. It has also been stated multiple times that the committee makeup was unfairly weighted toward a vocal minority with environmental concerns. In fact 5 of the 10 members reside or own property on Ocean Avenue, which is hardly representative of the majority of Gearhart's 1200 residents. But we all must recognize that this, in fact, was a volunteer committee, made up of citizens who care about the issue, and intended on doing their best to take all concerns into account.

The dunes are a diverse habitat and support diverse wildlife, including birds. Enjoyment of this habitat has been touted as a minority view. Bird watching is not a

hobby of minor consequence. The US Fish and Wildlife service published a 2011 survey found at <https://www.fws.gov/birds/bird-enthusiasts/bird-watching/valuing-birds.php> of which page 1 and 2 reports 47 million people engaging in bird watching and generating more than \$100 billion annual spending on the activity in the US. Some anecdotal statements support the interest in the dune habitat and its inhabitants: Walking the dunes nearly every day, we encounter many people enjoying the wildlife and the limited forest habitat. Visitors have been from Canada and as far flung as Pennsylvania and Florida; we are often questioned about the birds seen. In the last year we have observed 55 different species. Yes, all of these birds can be seen elsewhere, but not necessarily close to home on one's morning walk. Removing habitat is one of the most significant causes of bird decline, even of common species. Altering public parkland should be carefully considered, since the asset belongs to all and the Gearhart Comprehensive Plan supports protecting wildlife.

Contrary to many statements made that the DVC supports allowing rampant expansion of the forest, the DVC advocates maintaining the existing forest footprint of only healthy trees and also to allow its containment through the removal of all seedlings and smaller trees. The pruning and trimming practices recommended followed guidelines found through research.

The DVC has been criticized for doing nothing in regards to abatement and management plans. A separate subcommittee was formed to deal with noxious plant species and their management and control. That subcommittee created a "Best Practices" document for public education and use. Frankly, the allotted 6 meetings for the DVC had passed before any work could be done on a comprehensive dune management plan. It was not for lack of interest but rather lack of time.

Thank you for your consideration,

John and Margaret Green