

Trustees probe logging at Geauga Lake

By JOAN DEMIRJIAN | Posted: Wednesday, June 7, 2017 11:45 pm

Logging on property owned by Cedar Fair in Bainbridge is being investigated by the township.

Trustees said on Tuesday that several residents reported that the trees were being cut on the property that by court order is to remain a natural buffer between homes and the Cedar Fair property, formerly the site of Geauga Lake Park, Sea World and the Wild Water Kingdom water park.

Bainbridge Trustee Jeff Markley said the loggers should not have been on the 44-acres of property. The zoning inspector's office also received reports from concerned residents about trees being cut down and removed. The trees were logged in the interior portion of the property.

"I would guess hundreds of trees were taken out including with the logging trail," Bainbridge Zoning Inspector Karen Endres said after inspecting the site. "Many trees were taken down and it is sad."

Bainbridge Trustee Lorrie Benza said a 2003 court judgment entry exists on the property that requires that the 44 acres be left in its natural state. That court order prohibits cutting of trees on the site, she said.

The incident was referred to Bainbridge police and to the Geauga County Prosecutor's Office to look into the legalities, Mr. Markley said of the deed restricted land apparently being cleared.

Sheldon Berns, attorney representing Cedar Fair, said on Tuesday that the logging was not approved. "Our client Cedar Fair did not authorize anybody to do any logging or to move any trees on the property." The company Elk River Export, never had Cedar Fair's or the township's approval, Mr. Berns said. "It was an error on the company's part." Cedar Fair would not have taken such action without approval, he said adding that his client is looking into the matter.

The property is in an area north and northeast of an unused railroad track and near Lori Lane. Bainbridge Police Chief Jon Bokovitz and Mrs. Endres inspected the site last week after receiving complaints from residents.

"The township does have some control over it," Mr. Markley said. It has been protected for 14 years as a buffer between homes in the Rivers Edge subdivision and the amusement park that was in operation at the time of the judgment entry.



Logging at Geauga Lake

Logging took place last week on property owned by Cedar Fair in Bainbridge. After concerns were voiced by residents adjacent to the property in Rivers Edge community, Bainbridge representatives investigated. They found the site north of of an unused railroad line is protected by a 2003 court order that requires the property to be kept in its natural state, serving as a buffer between the homes and activities at the former Geauga Lake property.

A sizeable number of trees were removed in the logging operation last week, Mr. Markley said. Residents were very concerned because a logging road had to be cleared to get to the trees to be cut down.

There is also another 23 acres that are protected by a conservation easement owned by Cedar Fair off Depot Road, Mr. Markley said. "Both properties must be left in their natural condition."

Adjoining the 44 acres are 63 acres owned by the township. That site is zoned for parks and is also covered by a conservation easement, the zoning inspector said.

Cedar Fair currently is trying to sell its 650 acres spanning Bainbridge and the city of Aurora.

Cutting of trees on the property is improper, Mrs. Benza said, "and we have taken the initial steps to correct the matter. Based on information we have now, if all is accurate, then this is exceedingly disappointing."

The restrictions on the land were thought of years ago, Mrs. Benza said, by former boards of trustees who wanted a buffer area between the residential area and the amusement park and high intensity uses.

Bainbridge Township Trustees at that time required a provision that certain parcels would remain wooded and in their natural state, so residents' concerns are now very legitimate," Mrs. Benza said.

While there are many trees remaining on the wooded area, it still totally changes the canopy and the growth pattern in the forest, Mr. Markley said.

Mrs. Endres walked the property Friday to establish where the cutting was taking place, and she confirmed it was on that property that is to be protected. "They cut a logging road into the woods," she said. The logging trail is about 15 feet wide, requiring extensive clearing.

She noted when she first received notice from the logging company of the intent to log on the property, it was indicated to her they had permission from Cedar Fair to log. She said that she made the company aware of the judgment entry and that the trees were not to be cut.

Mrs. Endres said she then began hearing reports from residents about felled trees.

She said she talked to the logging project manager who agreed to stop the operation. They were cutting trees of a minimum of 24 inches in diameter at their base.

Resident Dennis Silvia said the deed restrictions on the property were part of the original consent decree.

"The Township Trustees are to be commended for upholding the consent decree and holding Cedar Fair accountable," Mr. Silvia said.

"The tree buffering was part of a legal agreement and now it is being broken," Mr. Silvia said. While they have rights to their property, there are zoning and deed restrictions, "and they should follow the rules, like everyone else. The township has a duty and responsibility to citizens of the township to protect them from unreasonable use of the property."

Mr. Markley pointed out that the rest of the Cedar Fair property "is a wasteland" with buildings in disrepair and concrete debris and overgrown vegetation.