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Can we hold onto nature here?

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The photo, submitted by a reader of our nature columnist Jerry Walls, was amazing. There, perched on a branch in a tree near the Conroe Police Department Firing Range in late January, was a majestic bald eagle, erect against a brilliant blue sky, his piercing gaze fixed on something off in the distance.

Nature still presents itself to us at times here in Montgomery County, "red in tooth and claw" as the poet Alfred Lord Tennyson wrote. Just this Saturday I had to run one of my sons on an errand off the beaten path, on a long drive down a less developed part of the county where there were more trees than homes or pastures. It's was a nice drive in the country. But for how long?

Increasingly, residents and local officials are dwelling on that question.

The county is growing, relentlessly, having roughly doubled in population in the last decade. Keep that rate of growth going and it won't be long before amillion people will be make Montgomery County their home. What will become of the trees, the wildlife, the bald eagles?

That's a question that occupies Glenn Buckley, one of the members of the East FM 1488 Association who are working on something called the Lake Creek Green Belt project.

Buckley is among several residents along the FM 1488 corridor who are working to develop a coalition of like-minded people to turn what are currently undeveloped tracts of land along Lake Creek into a green belt, nature trail and recreational area that would preserve stunning stretches of nature for future generations.

Buckley and other members of the project realize that the trees and wildlife we take as a given in Montgomery County are not a given. Like the middle-aged father who wakes up one day to discover his children are all grown up, he and others fear that Montgomery County residents someday will wake up to find most of nature gone, plowed under to accommodate families seeking a better life here in out county.

Modeled to an extent after the Spring Creek project in south Montgomery County, Buckley and fellow members hope to secure support from property owners and local governments to set aside large stretches of land along Lake Creek for use as a green belt, with nature trails, recreational areas, and mostly, large areas of native Montgomery County, where, Buckley told me in a recent visit, you can spot 15-foot-tall Palmettos that have been growing undisturbed, nearly untouched in certain remote areas along Lake Creek.

They are not alone. In addition to the Lake Creek Green Belt project and the Spring Creek project, others such as development consultant Roger Galatas and the city of Conroe are hoping to preserve what's left of nature along the Carter Moore Drive/FM 3083 corridor.

Time is marching on, and every new resident means the hope of holding onto nature will be just that much more difficult. Buckley has produced a PowerPoint presentation that shows Montgomery County's land use forecast from 2005 to 2035. In short, residential and commercial development appears to nearly swallow up what's left of undistributed nature in Montgomery County.

That bald eagle by the firing range was a beautiful reminder of nature. Without a plan, it's likely that our relentless development will send that powerful symbol of nature packing.

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