

Briefing and Statements to Oakland Township Board

Thursday Aug 12th, 2021

1. Personal introduction.

My name is Jon Keller, my wife Tina can't be here today because our daughter had surgery Monday morning and one of us needs to be present with her and take her daily to the clinic. To say I'd rather not be here is an understatement, but this is a critical time for our community, our environment and our personal safety.

We have had our place at 28877 E Yellow River Rd for about 8 years – this property is part of the EYRRLA. We also acquired raw land property in several adjacent parcels on Woodland Pass and French Rd that were 2011-storm damaged and clear cut in order to do fire risk mitigation and habitat restoration, pollinator habitat, and provide a healthy forest area in our Township that is rapidly running out of preserved nature – these forest properties are not part of any association. As you know French is a township road but both Woodland Pass and E Yellow River Rd are private roads that have for years been, and still are, properly posted No Trespassing.

I'd like the Board and the community at large to know that we are not "anti-campground", that's not our purpose here. In fact, our time in NW Wisconsin started in a campground, in Polk County. We had a seasonal lot there before we purchased our current location. We also own two businesses in Burnett County that benefit both directly and indirectly from the simple fact of having more traffic in the area. So, to reiterate we believe strongly that there is a place for limited size, well-run campgrounds as part of a balanced and diverse tourism industry in Burnett County.

I'd also like the Board and community to know that there is nothing at all personal here with Dufour's or the owners – we don't know them at all, have nothing against them personally, and understand when people are running a business some of them choose to put that bottom-dollar above all else, that's totally ok and we don't wish anything negative on any individual.

This is all very simply about personal safety, protecting property and our environment, and using the processes we have to do the right thing for our community. You will see that even after multiple problems since the expansion as stated by the neighbors' testimonies in your packet and here tonight, culminating in a horrific fire that frightened everyone and caused significant property damage, and both the adults and juveniles from the campground admitted this to law enforcement, Dufour's still did not contact neighbors or us as landowners, or take any actions to remove problematic individuals. The pattern is clear, the law breaking is factually established, and our neighbors in Oakland Township cannot sleep at night. We're tired, and we need your help.

2. Background of problems starting immediately after the granting of the Conditional Use Permit and expansion of the Dufour's campground.

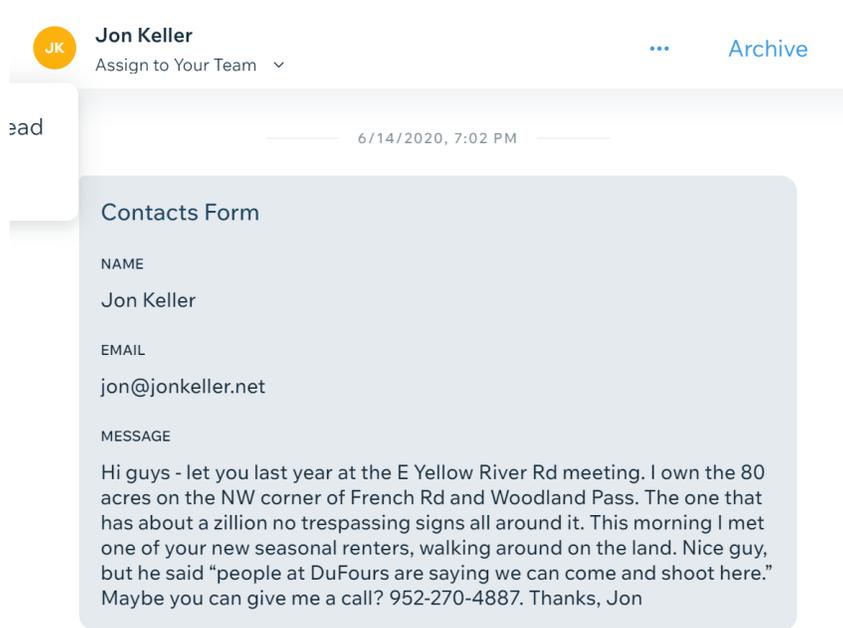
Prior to late 2019, I cannot recall a single incident or problem with any of the campers at Dufour's. It was limited in size to the west side of the area near the river. There were always conversations about use of the private road to enter the campground and helping pay for the maintenance, but as far as behaviors go, we never had any negative experiences or had any trespassers on our roads or land, and we also didn't hear of any second-hand from neighbors.

This changed rapidly starting in early 2020. The traffic of ATV/OHVs on Woodland Pass and E Yellow River Rd increased to levels never observed before, and our security cameras on the property started recording property destruction and trespassing on the land itself – keep in mind this is land that we were and are putting large investments in to create this preserved habitat.

By late May and early June 2020, we were starting to get truly frustrated – I personally had multiple conversations with these Dufour's people, was polite, and always explained that “just like all these signs say, this is private property”. I finally reached out to the new owners of Dufour's after a particularly shocking conversation with some of their renters on my land, here's how that went:

My daughter and I were driving down Woodland Pass and approaching our large main gate (picture shown – can any human possibly not realize this is a private gate that is posted?) and a truck was parked just outside the gate. We stopped there, and I got out. Two adult males were inside the property with guns, having walked right around the gate, and I asked them what they were doing there. They replied “target shooting”. As usual, I explained “like that gate and the signs say, this is private property you need to leave.” The one then said “but at Dufour's they said this is where we can come and shoot.” They left after I said I was calling the Sheriff's office, and this is when I first personally let Dufour's owners know there was a problem. John Jacobs was kind enough to send me a screenshot of what I sent them on June 14th, 2020, as you can see below. However, I NEVER received any response of any kind from this communication, nor at any other time until now.





From that point in early 2020 forward it has been pretty consistent incidents of (1) driving down our private road and seeing circles/donuts/road destruction from ATVs; (2) absolutely continuously finding garbage and beer cans along the side of the private roads; (3) going thru and around gates to trespass; (4) when approached or questioned responses of vulgarity and name-calling when people are asked to stop trespassing.

As 2021 started, however, a new threat emerged. Fireworks. With the drought and extreme fire dangers this whole spring and summer, it is perplexing, but these Dufour's people have chosen this year to treat our private roads and lands as their fireworks launching pads. I started to document this on June 26, 2021, as shown here. As you can see from this example, directly at one of our signs, spent, aerial fireworks and of course just left there for someone else to take care of.

Then on July 31, 2021, it finally happened. Our family was on what was meant to be a vacation trip, but in the late afternoon that day my phone starting ringing. There was a fire on the land, a real fire. A very scary fire. It quickly jumped one of the roads and started heading towards permanent, full-time dwellings. But for the luck or providence that one of our neighbors was happening to go down the road right then, this would be an even more tragic situation, but two things happened because of that luck of witnessing it: (1) the fire departments and authorities were immediately called, along with engaging some additional neighbors to run out there quick and help, and (2) the perpetrators to who did this, who FLED the scene, were identified by the distinctive golf cart they were in and being part of Dufour's before they returned back to the scene.

It doesn't end there. Some of the individuals from Dufour's, during this incident, while brave firefighters were battling this fire, both adult and under-18, behaved in a manner that can only be described as despicable, towards our neighbors and our law enforcement. You'll have to hear more about that directly from the victims of those interactions during this event.

Then, even after all this, the VERY NEXT DAY, August 1, 2021, one of those adult individuals was BACK trespassing again, and again behaved in a totally unacceptable way to Linda Marion, a very great and kind person who lives in the neighborhood and confronted him, and again the statement of “everybody knows this is where you come to do fireworks” stated. She can’t be here tonight but has included a written statement.

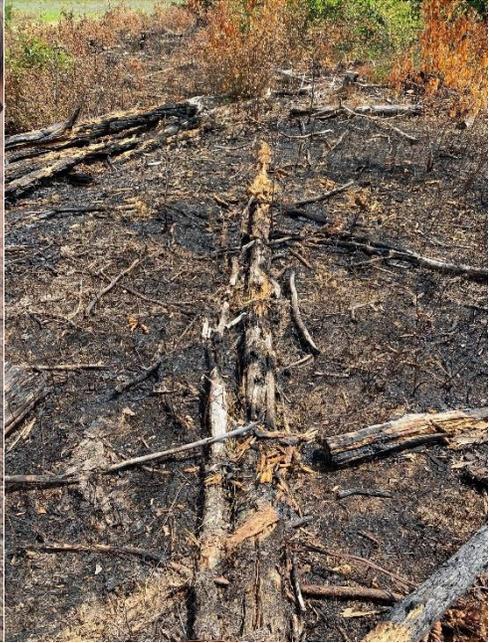
Photo of the vehicle owned by one of the Dufour’s incident individuals the very next day, Aug 1, trespassing again:



Included in your packet is the full Sheriff’s office report, the names and DOB of individuals are redacted as the criminal and civil property damage cases are in progress, below are the pertinent excerpts that conclusively and unambiguously establish that the fire at that time was 80-100 yards wide, trespassers lit the fire, with fireworks, and they were from Dufour’s:

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BRUSH FIRE WOODLAND PASS APPROXIMATELY 1/2 MILE PAST FRENCH ROAD ON THE WEST
SIDE
16:45:54 07/31/2021 - L Wertz
LOTS OF SMOKE 80-100 YARDS WIDE
16:46:29 07/31/2021 - L Wertz
CALLER STATED THERE WERE SOME YOUNGER KIDS OUT IN THAT AREA
16:49:39 07/31/2021 - P Preston
WFD PAGED REC'D
16:52:11 07/31/2021 - P Preston
THE JUV'S WERE ON 4 WHEELERS
16:58:32 07/31/2021 - L Wertz
WOODLAND PASS NORTH SIDE OF ROAD
17:05:26 07/31/2021 - P Preston
*EDITED* GOLF KART 17 FEMALE 10 MAL GOLD OR YELLOW IN COLOR
17:06:25 07/31/2021 - M Peterson
WEBSTER FIRE 10-23
17:06:59 07/31/2021 - P Preston
*EDITED* 17:06:59 07/31/2021 - P Preston
17:26:03 07/31/2021 - P Preston
REC'D 911 HANG UP FROM [REDACTED] CALLED BACK UNABLE TO L/M IT MAPPED TO HIS
LOCATION OF THE FIRE
17:30:05 07/31/2021 - P Preston
FIRE UNDER CONTROL
17:37:18 07/31/2021 - P Preston
*EDITED* [REDACTED] CALLED BACK POCKET DIAL
17:38:26 07/31/2021 - G Chafer
[REDACTED] M1 STARTED THE FIRE WITH FIREWORKS
17:39:25 07/31/2021 - G Chafer
[REDACTED] PASSENGER IN GOLF CART
17:39:50 07/31/2021 - P Preston
519 10-10-1 MALE TO DEFOREST CAMPGROUND
17:40:06 07/31/2021 - G Chafer
[REDACTED] M1 PASSENGER IN GOLF CART
17:43:08 07/31/2021 - P Preston
519 SUBJECT DROPPED OFF BACK 10-76 TO SCENE
17:47:49 07/31/2021 - P Preston
WEBSTER FIRE GOING TO SCENE
18:02:05 07/31/2021 - B Staples
released from scene
18:02:05 07/31/2021 - B Staples
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Actual pictures of the law enforcement encounters, trespassing, and firefighting, and subsequent property damage here:





3. The days that followed this event.

As any reasonable person would imagine, and what the pictures of all this clearly show, is that it is indisputable that this occurred, they were trespassing, they started a fire that two fire departments had to respond to, charred our land, put the physical safety of every resident and their property at risk, and caused actual property damage.

To date, not a SINGLE individual, not the owners of Dufour's, and not any of their renters, have even said so much as "I'm sorry this occurred". Not even that. I did finally hear from John Jacobs, for the first time ever, on Saturday, Aug 7th, 2021, only after I requested this Board's help. That email is included in your packet, and you may find as I did, that there is no apology, there is no acknowledgement that we were victims, there is no notion of any specific action being taken, or caring about us in any way. There is only an attempt to discredit the letter I sent to you Oakland Township leaders by claiming I never contacted Dufour's, again that is has been disproven in fact. That speaks volumes as to the priorities of the people we are dealing with here.

As a courtesy, I took a phone call with John Jacobs at 12:40pm on Aug 7th, 2021, in which I indicated that I simply needed those people evicted immediately – remember already 7 full calendar days and 5 full business days had passed at that time – because we are fearful for our safety and can't use our own property – would you send your daughter out there knowing that the people who did this are still here? Those campers know we're pressing charges, they've demonstrated their total disregard for the law and property, and they are NOT evicted, 7 calendar days later, and 5 full business days later – that was my only request. I was told No.

4. So where are we now?

We are here tonight as a community, all of us who live and work and have our life savings right here. Right here in Oakland Township. Right here in this couple of square miles. And I think we've learned a lot in these couple years of experimenting with a Conditional Use Permit of a high-density campground expansion with no onsite owner supervision. I think we've learned that this model simply does not work for the community.

When atrocities like this happen and people are not immediately evicted.

When the "burden of proof" of documenting trespassers and abhorrent behaviors is on the local residents, and even when clear proof is abundant, no actions.

When long-time landowners cannot send their children out to play on their own land for physical safety concerns.

Conditional Use Permits and Township Licenses are issued with the information known at the time. We have much more information now. And we know for sure those Conditions are not being met, and as demonstrated here we now know that the community and safety is simply not a priority for this experiment. Board members have an unbelievably tough and thankless job. There are many people here that serve and have served on boards, holy smoke it's hard. But it's a service the community needs, and this community needs this Board – the Oakland Township Board – to do its part sending the message that the community matters, not just the business interests of a couple people who don't live here.

We need you to revoke the Township licenses, and send a letter of recommendation to Burnett County to revoke or re-examine the 2019 Conditional Use Permit of Dufour's campground, so that we can all sleep at night, not worrying about being burnt in a criminal forest fire, accosted by inebriated grown men using abhorrent language, what we will wake to in the morning of torn-up roads, how much trash and beer cans we have to pick up on Monday mornings, and be able to spend our time with our loved ones and friends, not writing briefs and spending countless hours trying to fix a preventable problem.

Thank you for your time and your service to this community.

Jon & Tina Keller