

TREES RUSTLING AT SEVEN HILLS IN CENTRAL ILLINOIS AN ACT OF INFAMY

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10/3/2020

In the Old American West, one would hear and read about “Cattle Rustling.” In the shadows of the Covid-19 pandemic conditions, this has apparently evolved into “Trees Rustling” in contemporary Central Illinois, USA.

An act of infamy and a slap on the face of environmentalists, conservationists, and tree devotees, which we all are has occurred. Following the fall equinox on September 22, 2020, shady operators furtively moved on Thursday, September 24 and Friday September 25, 2020 on a Soil Conservation feature as a line of trees nurtured over the last 30-plus years by now senior landowners at the Seven Hills location, immediately west of the Lynn Grove cemetery in Central Illinois.



Figure 1. Black Walnut trees logs were cut, trimmed of their branches, and shaped into lumber dimensions, fallen on adjacent soybean field damaging the existing crop. Tree logs were promptly removed to an undisclosed location using heavy machinery after pictures were taken.

Trees instead of being planted, became the target of phantom destruction. The rustling target is not cattle anymore in the land but stands of valuable lumber in the form of Black Walnut trees. The illicit monetary profit motive is transparently obvious. The stand of trees was nurtured through loving care by planting and pruning by the landowners themselves, the local Road Department as well as the local electrical utility over the last three and a half decades.

The tree stand was added on a four-star farm as classified and inspected by the Illinois Water and Soil Conservation District, as a conservation and land stewardship feature. The tree line extends on the west and south sides of the farm. The south part of it is targeted. It was meant and succeeded in stabilizing the water erosion and topsoil loss in a hilly region of the land for the last 30-plus years.

In addition to being a conservation land-stewardship feature, it reduced the hazard and added to the safety of the parallel adjoining road as it prevented mud carried by flash flooding in the occasional heavy rain events from covering the road and possibly leading to unfortunate loss of life incidents to the local drivers under slippery conditions, particularly at night. Old timers still recount flip-overs of speeding cars driven by teenagers falling into the adjoining ditch. Tragical loss of life in car accidents did in fact occur along this stretch of road.



Figure 2. Tree line still threatened by Lumber Rustlers. The rustled tree logs are among 28 out of a total of $28+70 = 98$ Black Walnut 9-13-inch, 35-years old trees that were rustled on Thursday, September 24 and Friday September 25, 2020. These trees logs were removed within an hour of discovery and stoppage of the rustling activity.

The shady operators callously targeted with heavy machinery the native black walnut trees at an age of 30-plus years with diameters around one foot (9-13 inches) and converted them into

logs ostensibly suitable for veneer and furniture making (Figure 1). They promptly carried the valuable cut logs away for potential selling to other associated and favored associates and accomplices. They cut the remaining stumps to the ground level as a way of hiding their malfeasance, missing two stumps out of the 28 trees stumps in their hurry. They distinctly spared 7 evergreen Norway Spruce trees in the same tree line as Spruce tree's wood is probably substantially less valuable than Black Walnut lumber.

In response to distressed calls by the helpless landowners in the face of heavy rigs and machinery, the reality of the nefarious ongoing situation was understood by responsible cool-headed individuals who promptly stopped the ongoing rustling event. The stoppage of the destruction unfortunately occurred after the wanton merciless destruction of 28 healthy trees at the most critical stretch of the tree line (Figure 2) from the perspective of soil erosion right west of the Lynn Grove cemetery. The Lynn Grove cemetery historically is reported as a previous Black Walnut tree grove that the early settlers of Champaign County in Central Illinois used as an initial resting camping site. Now Lynn Grove cemetery will be recognized in the annals of the conservation and environmental movements as a last location of repose for both humans and trees.



Figure 3. Evergreens along the same tree line were left untouched by as they probably have a lower economical value than the Black Walnut trees. The rustlers attempted to hide their action by removing the stumps to the ground level. They missed the removal of the stumps of two black walnut trees shown in the picture out of the 28 rustled.



Figure 4. Thirteen inches in diameter $D = 13$ in, implies a circumference of $C = \pi D = 3.14159 \times 13 = 40.84 \approx 41$ inches for the rustled trees.



Figure 5. Rustlers' heavy machinery speeding away from the site of the rustling operation, turning south from the Bongard Road onto the Sidney to Longview slab road.

In the picturesque location of Seven Hills, affectionally named after the seven hills on which Rome, Italy was built and that attracts horse lovers, the protective environmental and conservation action of the tree line has now vanished. From Wikipedia:

“The seven hills of Rome east of the river Tiber form the geographical heart of Rome, within the walls of the city. The seven hills are: • Aventine Hill • Caelian Hill • Capitoline Hill • Esquiline Hill • Palatine Hill • Quirinal Hill • Viminal Hill. The Vatican Hill lying northwest of the Tiber, the Pincian Hill, lying to the north, and the Janiculum Hill, lying to the west, are not counted among the traditional Seven Hills, being outside the boundaries of the ancient city of Rome.”

Topsoil is expected to resume being lost, damaging the adjacent agricultural land productivity and posing a driving accidents hazard on the road in heavy-rain events. On that road, young drivers suffered cars flip-overs falling onto the adjoining ditch according to old timers, and some unfortunate tragic deaths indeed occurred. The lumber rustlers would have blood on their hands as such tragedies now become possible with the disappearance of the line of trees protective function.

The tree rustlers left behind untouched seven evergreen Norway Spruce trees which supports the assertion that they were targeting only the more valuable Black Walnut lumber. The 28 so-far rustled trees, with probably more in sight, in a tree line of 98 Black Walnut trees (Figure 2) are valued at more than US\$4,000 each in the lumber market, which amounts to more than $28 \times 4,000 = \text{US\$}112,000$ appropriated from the rightful owners in two days of rustling action, with more probably in the planning stage. This amounts to several times the value of the soybean crop grown by the farmers on the adjoining farmland. In addition to the environmental damage, the lumber rustlers denied the elderly couple owners or their heirs a deserved substantial part of their retirement funds if they would have chosen to harvest the Black Walnut trees themselves. They appropriated their possible nut production income. According to Amazon, the potential nuts crops from these trees would amount to a potential US\$22.19 for a 3 lbs bag.

Black Walnut trees have been reportedly targeted in criminal activity by lumber rustlers at other locations. Circulating stories relate the hijacking of such trees from woods and forests using helicopters in the state of Wisconsin, threatening them with extinction. Such occurrence in the State of Illinois appears to be an expansion of their destructive activities. According to Wikipedia:

“*Juglans nigra*, the eastern American black walnut, is a species of deciduous tree in the walnut family, Juglandaceae, native to North America. It grows mostly in riparian zones, from southern Ontario, west to southeast South Dakota, south to Georgia, northern Florida and southwest to central Texas. Wild trees in the upper Ottawa Valley may be an isolated native population or may have derived from planted trees.”

“Black walnut is an important tree commercially, as the wood is a deep brown color and easily worked. The fruits, walnuts, are cultivated for their distinctive and desirable taste. Often, trees are grown for both lumber and walnuts simultaneously and many cultivars have been developed for improved quality nuts or wood.”

“Due to its value, forestry officials often are called on to track down walnut poachers; in 2004, DNA testing was used to solve one such poaching case, involving a 55-foot (16-m) tree worth US\$2,500.”

As the elderly group of the American citizenry became disproportionately targeted by the Covid-19 virus, they become also targeted by another virulent attack from fly-by-night Lumber Rustling operators. As a crime against humanity, they concurrently destroy trees that the American People and other citizens of the world are trying to increase and preserved under the conditions of climatic change.

Whereas a project of planting a trillion trees is pursued in the USA Congress using American taxpayers' money as H.R.5859 - Trillion Trees Act 116th Congress (2019-2020), the effort is negated by the unscrupulous tree rustlers:

" ... to promote planting, management, and regeneration of new trees in pursuit of the targets for increased total domestic wood growth established under section 101 of the Trillion Trees Act."

“The Trillion Trees Vision is only achievable through concerted action by all sectors of society. It means doing what must be done to stop climate change,

whilst also maintaining our planet's other vital support systems, including biodiversity, and supporting sustainable development for local people.”

“Assuming 400 trees per acre, the level of funding contemplated in the Trillion Trees Act would, at maximum, be enough to plant 220 million trees each year. That sounds like a lot, but at that rate ...”

“The Trillion Tree Campaign is a project of Plant-for-the-Planet to plant a trillion trees, a development and continuation of the activities of the earlier Billion Tree Campaign, instigated by Wangari Maathai, who founded the Green Belt Movement in Africa in 1977.”

“Trillion Trees is a joint venture between BirdLife International, Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), and WWF, founded on a vision of a world where tree cover is expanding not shrinking. We focus on three imperatives: ending deforestation, improving protection, and advancing restoration.”

“More than two dozen companies, cities, and organizations are embracing a pledge to help plant 1 trillion trees, a tactic to curb climate change that has even President Trump's blessing.”

“The World Economic Forum launched the One Trillion Trees project in January. As it noted in a press release (January 22, 2020): "Nature-based solutions - locking-up carbon in the world's forests, grasslands and wetlands - can provide up to one-third of the emissions reductions required by 2030 to meet the Paris Agreement targets.”

“The (one trillion) 1t.org U.S. Chapter launched on August 27, 2020. At the time, 26 U.S.-based companies, nonprofit organizations and governments pledged to conserve, restore and grow more than 855 million trees by 2030 and commit to supporting actions, such as mapping technology and carbon finance, worth billions of dollars — all as part of the global trillion trees platform.”

The landowners were advised by counsel that the removed trees were meant as anti-erosion control features, and thus are not allowed to be destroyed. In the State of Illinois, theft above a monetary value of US\$500 is a felony. The felony theft of the valuable Black Walnut tree logs, independent of the cutting down, is legally considered as a felony. Punishment is restitution and up to a 2-5 year jail term. Such log theft is a serious matter. Intentional cutting of trees in Illinois per 740 ilcs 185 Wrongful Tree Cutting Act is punishable by paying three times the property value in addition to the remediation costs in preventing soil erosion and planting replacement trees. The power company appears to have played a role that was promptly stopped so far by responsible authority and the evolution of the event is being internally investigated as promised to the landowners. The trees were trimmed at least once in the past as a maintenance feature, and the line of trees is safely positioned at a customary 15 feet from a distribution line which is sufficient for maintenance activity and does not justify tree removal. Any common citizen would work for years and years to earn an income equal to the appropriated lumber that rightfully belongs to the farming landowners. One wonders how widespread this wrongful practice is within the land.

Humanity, landowners, farmers, conservationists, environmentalists, tree lovers and all people of good will, beware: another nation-wide epidemic is spreading where monetary crime has merged with environmental crime.

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