

The ripples on Wolf River

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It leaves the plateau. Not in a rush or even a long, slow glide as the interstate highway does. It leaves in little jerks, jumps, and twitches, as a deer would leave the plateau. Later it begins to glide as it winds through the hills.

On sunny days, as the sun tops the rim and tendrils of smoky sunlight filter through the hardwood leaves and glance off the water, it winks and smiles. It seems as though it is always looking back at you and watching as you sight it through the trees. It talks to you.

I have heard it whisper as it glides around a bend and slithers over the rocks. I have heard it giggle as it laughs its way over the long stretches of shallow gravelly bars.

Occasionally, after a heavy rain somewhere up on the plateau, I have heard it burp from gorging on too much rainwater. It is a hun-gry stream. Maybe it is actually a creek but they call it Wolf River.

In the spring, it gobbles up curves and founders on the clay banks. It deepens its belly and changes its mind about where it is going and how it will get there. It is a predator, preying on the loose soil and exposed trunks of small trees and giant cottonwoods that line the banks. Still, it is a friendly stream.

Early in my formative years, I wondered about its origin. I craved to explore every stretch as it moved downward toward the big river. I crossed and re-crossed at foot logs and on moss covered rocks. I marked possible deer stands and camping places. In the fall, I revisited these places. I hunted, fished and camped on the stretches, banks and bottoms of the Wolf River.

It came to be my second home. I was there when the first wild turkeys returned and saw the

deer proliferate.

One day, as I rounded a bend, I saw a solitary fisherman casting a fly in one of my favorite riffles. I felt almost as if he had invaded my home.

Then, one year, just as I reached the approach to the long deeply rutted road that led to the river, I saw a sign --**“For Sale-5,000 wooded acres.”**

There was a phone number to call if interested. I felt a disturbing feeling in my inner self. One day, I called the number. “Yes,” the woman told me, “they had that listing. Asking price was four million dollars. However, a few years went by, the sign faded and peeled, and I forgot about it.

The road became more deeply rutted and I began to feel comfortable and secure again.

Big, yellow, noisy and destructive. They began to crawl slowly toward Wolf River, their farts leaving the stench of diesel fuel. Behind them lay barren ground, open to erosion and baked in the sun. Surely, they will leave something behind. They did.

They left a better road and piles of litter, used oilcans, and saw dust and wood chips. Three or four years would pass before the deer and turkey would once again flourish in the hills above the Wolf.

And the river. The river began to change. Now, it often ran in shades of tan and brown. The fishing declined and siltation made it possible to cross in places without getting the top of your shoes wet. The river did not laugh much now and did not shimmer and ripple as it had.

Then, maybe at night, some men came. They were a loud boisterous crew and they wore orange vests and carried not guns or bows or even fishing rods but transits and flags and maps and stakes and hammers. They staked out lots and the signs read **“For sale- 5-acre lots.”**

The Wolf River does not laugh at all now. It never winks back at you. On rainy days, it has a bad odor. It no longer has a canopy of trees to hide behind. The deer and turkey are gone. The five-acre lots became one-acre lots and the people came. The sewers came. Paved roads and streetlights came.

Now, the wildlife is gone. Sold for four million dollars and the lure of progress. Gone like the ripples on Wolf River.

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