

## **ISG Land Grab A Bad Deal**

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Letter to the Editor

It is a little too easy to paint the ISG Steel land grab as a conflict between desperate unemployed workers and uncaring purist environmentalists. The fact is a wealthy foreign steel company finds it more convenient to take forest preserve land than to clean up the mess on its own property. The ISG plant could be expanded onto its own property by moving parking lots and redeveloping ISG's now abandoned industrial land. ISG already grabbed the mill out of bankruptcy for the 'bargain basement' price of just \$65 million. Now big steel wants a hand out.

Lets not support a theoretical 'what could be a good deal if done right' when what ISG offers now is simply a bad deal. ISG offers 31 acres of former industrial property that they say is not contaminated. It is across a river, unconnected to any Forest Preserve holdings. It is not in the Forest Preserve's land acquisition plan and it is in poor ecological condition. If this land was on the open market the Forest Preserve wouldn't buy it. So the offer is junk even if it is bigger junk. In exchange they demand 21 acres of Whistler Woods that is directly connected to the Forest Preserves that holds wetlands and old trees. The land buffers the picnic groves and driving range in Whistler Woods. It is near the Little Calumet River, offering size and habitat to the rare birds that make the Lake Calumet Region their home. So what they want is valuable.

Fortunately, destroying our woods is not an alternative of last resort in this case. ISG should look to its own lands before they start trying to take the public's land. Specifically, they could relocate a parking lot or build immediately to the northeast of the operating mill. Further, the Forest Preserve should not be making bad deals with known polluters. This plant already puts out hundreds of pounds of lead compounds, and during the '90s at full production, it put 80000 pounds of toxins into the atmosphere annually. It put thousands of pounds of toxics into surface waters and millions of pounds of toxics were shipped off site for land based disposal. We are not dealing here with a clean industry of the future.

Styling this bad deal as a jobs vs. environment conflict highlights the conflict of interest in having the Cook County Board sit as the Forest Preserve Board. As the County Board they favor economic

development, as the Forest Preserve Board they should look to the interests of the Forest Preserve. DuPage County separated its Boards because of this conflict of interest. Perhaps, as the County Board, Commissioners could structure some alternative economic incentive rather than destroy the public woods.

Some people who oppose this bad deal worked in these mills and lost jobs and changed careers when the steel industry had bad times. We are not uncaring purists, but we are not chumps either! Rather, ISG needs to look to its own lands - industrial lands now sitting idle - before putting a squeeze on the Forest Preserve.

Don't kid yourself - the ISG land grab is a bad deal for our Forest Preserves. Bad deals like this are exactly why the Forest Preserve has a land protection policy.

In the end, its not surprising that a commissioner can be bought off by the promises of industry. Its surprising that they can be bought off so cheaply.

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