



February 24, 2021

Mayor Edwards and Commissioners,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Arkansas Audubon Society, a statewide organization committed to fostering a greater knowledge of the natural history of Arkansas and promoting conservation of natural resources in Arkansas. We encourage you to deny permitting to a huge apartment complex plus golf course across the street from Charlie Craig State Fish Hatchery.

Arkansas Audubon Society was established in the decade following that of the hatchery. Individuals from all over the state, including Benton County, were founding members. Starting in the late 1950s, students of birds, both professional and recreational, discovered and documented the important role of Ozark springs in creating habitats used by birds, plus other unique species of plants and animals. The springs are the mother-source of a rich and varied fauna that is not replaceable. The underground parts of this ecosystem that we cannot readily view have been well-studied. Numerous rare and unusual life forms live there. The impact of building a huge development right on top of spring recharge zones would be enormous. Permitting this to go ahead would be much like ignoring the reasons the hatchery was located where it is, and why.

Runoff from the parking for 1,000+ cars at Links at Centerton would be a killer for the recharge zones for underground springs. We don't see how this could be possibly mitigated. Adding 1,000+ people to the immediate hatchery neighborhood would result in considerable disturbance to the native wild creatures that increasing have no other suitable habitats.

After the National Audubon Society established the Important Bird Area program for the U.S., Audubon Arkansas, with support from Arkansas Audubon Society members, studied habitats all over the state potentially suitable for inclusion. Charlie Craig State Fish Hatchery was one of the first included. There is no other place in Northwest Arkansas with such well-documented use by our native birds. Private citizens have now documented almost 300 bird species. Records from the hatchery formed the core of our state's bird book, *Arkansas Birds*, which was published by University of Arkansas Press in 1986.

Of course Northwest Arkansas is growing. Of course people need a place to call home. But huge developments like Links at Centerton should not be constructed virtually on top of one of the most sensitive native habitats in the State of Arkansas. The promoters of this plan can find a place where the impacts will not be so devastating. Centerton can grow and prosper without further damaging crucial ecological resources at Charlie Craig State Fish Hatchery.

Thank you for your consideration.

Joe Neal
Representative of the Arkansas Audubon Society