



LAURA McKENZIE/Herald-Zeitung

Sandra Carey, president of the Carey Wildlife Preserve, and husband Star Carey stand Thursday near the intersection of Farm-to-Market 306 and South Access Road near one of their "Shop Sattler" signs. The sign, which is painted green and is mostly covered by a bush, prevents others from installing large billboards nearby.

Commissioners to join fight against billboard light pollution in county

By Greg Bowen
The Herald-Zeitung

A Canyon Lake man fighting billboard blight and its associated light pollution asked Comal County commissioners Thursday to help him take his battle to the Texas Transportation Commission, which regulates outdoor advertising.

Star Carey requested that commissioners pass a resolution next week asking the TTC to adopt a rule requiring lights on new outdoor advertising to be directed downward rather than toward the sky.

He said billboard lights now shine into homes at night. "The billboards are close to houses, so people from across the street say there's so much (light) spillage, that it comes in. We're trying to stop this."

He's also heard that lights shining into the skies at night might even affect migratory bird patterns, he said.

A suggested resolution submitted to commissioners by Carey states the National Geographic has estimated one-fifth of the world's population can no longer see the Milky Way.

Carey said he and his wife Sandra moved to Canyon Lake in the mid-1970s and have watched as billboards have proliferated.

"You see a lot more new signs," Carey said. "Especially on FM 306 out by Canyon Lake." Texas Highway 46 is also a problem, he said.

He said sign companies operating in Comal County "haven't always followed the rules. The Transportation Commission needs to be told about this, so that's what we're doing."

The Careys have recently held meetings of like-minded citizens in Canyon Lake and New Braunfels to inform people that they can fight billboard blight.

"Everybody complains and no one knows what they can do. Our message is that we are not completely powerless. We actually can do something," Sandra Carey said.

The Careys have given out cards that residents can send to the Transportation Commission informing it of "certain signs in the county are not legal and giving the reasons," Star Carey said.

"We certainly support your position and will do whatever we can," County Judge Danny Scheel said.

Commissioner Jay Millikin said commissioners established a "dark sky zone" a couple of years ago around Camp Bullis in western Comal County, where night-sky light pollution from commercial development was causing problems with military medical training using night-vision goggles.

But it's not only an issue with the military, Millikin said.

"People generally move out into the Hill Country of this county not to see the night skies all lit up like daylight, but to be able to enjoy the moon and the stars and to have a little bit of romance in their life," he told Carey. "So we've gone down this road a little bit in our county, and we ought to go a lot farther with it."

Millikin thanked Carey and others who support those efforts.

The couple also are gathering names on a petition that Star plans to take to the transportation commission along with the proposed resolution from Comal commissioners.

The Careys are also using state regulations to help fight billboard blight.

"If you put up a small sign, you can block a large one. There's a rule that a big sign has to be 1,500 feet from any other sign," Star said.

"So if you put up a one-foot-by-one-foot sign, then that protects 3,000 feet of frontage — 1,500 feet both ways. So we're trying to tell people that — and I've done it in a couple of places."

One of his small signs is at the intersection of Farm-to-Market 306 and South Access Road.

"It's a 4-by-8 sign, a green sign with black print, that says Shop Sattler. That means they can't put up a big sign for 1,500 feet both ways."