

QUESTION 2: The Maine Clearcutting Permits Initiative, also known as Question 2, was on the November 7, 2000 ballot, where it was defeated 459,239 (71.66%) to 181,643 (28.34%). The act would have required permits for clearcutting practices that would have limits based on the potential ecological harm done by the practice in a specific area.

DELIGHTS OF DEMOCRACY

Chris Potholm

Arrogance: A fable

Once upon a time in the Great Northern Forest of a parallel universe far, far away, there was a cute but annoying little hedgehog who insisted on building a boat for all the creatures of the forest whether they wanted one or not. Some of the forest creatures said he would lead them to the Promised Land, but others said he wanted to build the boat just so he could be its captain.

But none of this mattered because the hedgehog had the time and the money and the inclination to build a boat every year if he wished. So he went ahead and built the boat, never consulting any of the beavers or woodpeckers or any other creatures who worked with wood for a living. "What do they know?" he said. "Besides, I'm too pretty."

It was, if the truth be told, a strange craft. The bow was wider than the stern and there were a number of weird appendages dragging in the water, the motor was located on the side and one of the sails was upside down. From the beginning it looked quite odd. It even called for a crew of nine, none of whom had ever owned any boats. "But that way they won't be biased," he said.

Three owls who watched the boat being launched shook their heads. "If he'd taken my boat-building class, I'd have flunked him," said one. "I don't think he's taken anybody's class," said the other. "I think he's in a class by himself," said the third.

Soon the boat was launched with considerable fanfare and lots of forest creatures were lured on board even though there were many questions about just how river-worthy it was. A magnificent legal eagle said, "That boat won't be able to get to 'bank' once it gets going," and the chief forest ranger said, "This is a very bad

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idea; I watched it being built and it will be a disaster."

"Dupes, dupes," cried the hedgehog and his followers. This set in motion a highly amusing scenario in which anybody who had any questions about the boat, the captain, the crew or the destination were all called "dupes" no matter who they were or how much they knew about boat building.

Well, as soon as the boat started down the river, there were problems. It began to leak and careened wildly from rock to rock. Soon many of the passengers were "sprawled" all over the decks. Some of the smarter and quicker forest animals began to abandon ship crying: "This isn't going to make it. I knew something was wrong when the crew kept looking back off the stern instead of the bow, but they said that was the way things were going to be done from now on."

But the hedgehog stayed at the wheel, having the time of his life yelling: "I'm on the bridge. I'm in command." He especially liked it when some of his young supporters, not yet in long pants, kept chirping: "It's a wonderful craft, it's a wonderful craft, they're all

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jealous." His first mate got very emotional and cried at the drop of a hat, tears running down her cheeks, "I love the forest. I love the forest."

But at just the moment the boat was definitely sinking, out of the woods came a whole troop of steely-eyed, gerbil-looking creatures who were chattering like a bunch of monkeys.

"It's the stern gerbils, it's the stern gerbils," cried the forest people. The stern gerbils were well known in the forest for always telling everybody else what to do and acting high and mighty and giving directions and being cross with anybody who asked them "Are you sure you're right?" They were quite a nuisance to just about everybody in the forest, although they had a very high opinion of themselves. They would get

crew and they'll fix it just the way we want."

"I wouldn't hold my breath for that. I think the stern gerbils have worn out their welcome with the governor," said one of the owls, winking at his friends.

The boat finally sank under the swirling current. Things had turned out pretty well for the dupes and pretty bad for the stern gerbils and the hedgehog.

Still, one of the smarter, if more cynical, stern gerbils said as he swam to shore: "Who cares, we'll raise a lot of money off this fiasco and sign up some new gerbils.

By nightfall, all was quiet once again in the forest.

The hedgehog was already at work on his new boat, "an herbal submarine." But before he really got

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quite mad if anyone criticized them or ever pointed out that some of their statements were wrong.

"My god," said one of the owls, "the stern gerbils are swimming toward the sinking ship. You seldom see that."

Not only did the gerbils swim toward the ship, they quickly clamored aboard. Chattering loudly, they ran madly around the ship bumping into the hedgehog's crew and shouting: "Do this. Do that. Stop the engine. Pull up the sail. Turn around." The head gerbil even raced up onto the bridge and tried to grab the wheel from the hedgehog. "Let me try. Let me try," he said.

But the hedgehog wouldn't let go the wheel of his ship, although while they were struggling the boat started to turn sideways. "Dupes. Dupes," the hedgehog kept yelling at the onlookers as the boat lurched down the stream. The crew tried to

going, he went to his library and ripped the covers off all his nature field guides and pasted on new ones. Then he stood over his coffee table and admired his handiwork. "The Dupe Society Field Guide to North American Birds," "The Dupe Society Field Guide to Mushrooms," "The Dupe Society Field Guide to the Northern Forest."

"I'll teach them to oppose me," he said. "Maybe next year if I have more time, I'll write my own guides. I know a lot more than they do about everything in the forest."

For their part, the head stern gerbil and his troop went back to their cave (which was appropriately named "The Cave of Absolute Doom and Gloom") and into the special "Parts Per Billion" room, where all their key decisions were made. He and his followers sat around and tried to think of how to keep their names in the forest papers so the

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keep the stern gerbils from getting control of the pumps and the sails and the motor, but it was hard because the gerbils were running everywhere as if the boat was theirs.

Then, undeterred at not being able to take the wheel, the head stern gerbil began bellowing toward the shore. "Sure it's broken. Sure it's sinking. We all know that. The hedgehog should have consulted with us before he built the thing. But don't worry, come back on board and once we get around the next bend, out of sight, we'll fix it."

Hearing that, the forest creatures began to shake their heads. "Say what?" said one.

"Does he think we just fell off the mushroom truck? It sounds like a risky scheme to me. Although the stern gerbils make a lot of noise, they often get things wrong — remember the highway they didn't want built and that fine heating plant they want to shut down for no good reason."

"That head stern gerbil is a hoot," said one of the owls.

And lo and behold, the forest creatures seemed to have a point because the boat took on more and more water.

All the while the hedgehog kept shaking his fist at the shore, yelling "Dupes, dupes," and some of the gerbils were shouting "It's broken but we can still fix it."

Another of the stern gerbils cried, "It's not over. The governor of the forest will fix it, he'll appoint a new

other animals wouldn't forget who they were.

"We've lost four in a row," said one of the newer gerbils, "maybe we should rethink our goals." "Or our methods," added another. "Or our attitude," chimed in yet another, adding, "the other creatures of the forest didn't look all that sad when we got pitched into the water." "Yeah, a lot of them were even clapping," said one.

But before that discussion could get up much of a head of steam, the head stern gerbil and his "council" had all three dissidents banished to the gerbil's re-education camp at the Kampuchea miniature golf course on the edge of the forest. This was the same miniature golf course where, it was believed, the stern gerbils got most of their information about the real forest.

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