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about 6060 words

A Tale Of Two Turtles

by Benjamin Erlandson

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The two-hour ride back from Charlotte to Glade Valley, North Carolina was not nearly as bad as it could have been. Luckily the timing of my flights coordinated well with the regular ebbs and flows of traffic patterns on Interstate 77 between Charlotte and Mooresville. I'm quite thankful I wasn't driving.

I'd just gotten home after connecting through Denver on a flight back from Missoula, Montana.

I spent six weeks out in Montana and Idaho. The impetus for the trip was the opportunity to present my Postropolis framework/platform project from the perspective of an overarching concept for lifelong learning, development, and research at the annual Immersive Learning Research Network (iLRN) conference, which was held this year on the campuses of the University of Montana in Missoula and Salish Kootenai College near Flathead Lake. I wanted the requisite plane flight (and inherent carbon footprint) to be worth the trip, and working remotely gives me the option to take six weeks to do just that. I'd never spent any time in Idaho, so I found ways to work and play there while exploring The Gem State in the slow fashion that I try to practice as much as possible whenever traveling.

While I was out in Montana and Idaho, I met many interesting people, and I had some excellent conversations, both informal and formal, about Postropolis as a platform and

framework—including folks with SpectrUM, Wilderness Watch, Friends of the Clearwater, and Montana Public Radio.

Back to August 1st.

I arrived back in our small mountain community, and basically, the first thing that happened once I exited the vehicle was my father telling me there is a snapping turtle in the lake that we need to kill.

At the behest of many of the people in our community—most of whom are vacationers present less than six weeks out of the year—those of us that are “year-rounders” had gotten into the habit of trapping and removing snapping turtles from the small lake at the bottom of the hill. We call this place Hidden Lake, even though pretty much everyone in the county knows where it is.

At first, we were relocating the turtles to nearby streams leading away from Hidden Lake to different food sources. Then, someone else in the community killed a turtle; one that had been caught in one of the traps set by my father and myself. Because my father and I weren't around to get the turtle and safely move it to one of our usual drop locations, another man shot the turtle, apparently requiring several attempts with a rifle.

This latest turtle, having been snagged earlier in the day, or perhaps sometime overnight or the day before, was still trapped, waiting for its fate to be administered by its human neighbors. And now, apparently, death was the precedent.

Knowing how dangerous it is to try to use a gun to shoot and kill a snapping turtle, my father and I scrambled to gather what we figured were proper tools to kill this latest snapping turtle by hand: a broomstick and a hatchet.

The turtle is trapped on a fishing line and hook baited with a chicken gizzard. It is hunkered down in the mud near the shoreline on the dam edge of the lake.

Arriving at the lake late that evening, Dad and I are communicating our plan to each other, so that we have an idea of what to do if certain aspects of the operation go awry. Then, we move in for the kill. Dad drags the turtle out of the water, pulling up on the line to create a gap in the turtle's mouth. It hisses at us as I jam the broomstick into its mouth, as far down its throat as I can force the handle. I need to ensure the turtle won't back its head into its shell while dad butchers it alive with a hatchet.

Crouched on one knee, I was concentrating so hard on keeping the broomstick jammed in the turtle's throat, I barely noticed the upswing of the hatchet in time to avoid being hit square in the face. It was a really close call, but I managed to dodge and not lose my grip. By this time, my dad had gotten in four swings, with three connecting true. Chunks of the turtle's shell had splintered off, and blood was oozing from several holes, air bubbles seeping out through the blood.

My father was convinced that the lungs had been punctured, and he stopped swinging.

We cut the line at the tree, using the remainder of the line to drag the shattered, wheezing turtle across the dam into a shallow grave already dug by another man in our community.

Dad and I buried that turtle alive. We knew it was going to die, but it was still alive when we covered it with at least two feet of dirt.

I wanted to scream and cry; I wanted to vomit. Tears and stomach acid were somehow kept in check.

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About a week later, I was enjoying some alone time, kayaking the perimeter of the lake, inspecting any number of natural factors, enjoying the quiet, the peace, and the sunshine. I came across another snapping turtle which I must assume was doing the same thing as I.

I know it's anthropomorphic and anthropocentric to imbue human constructs and attributes upon members of other species, especially since it is impossible for us to communicate directly with these creatures, and thus impossible to get inside their heads to attempt to interpret and understand their thoughts, assuming they even have thoughts. However, based on my observation of the snapping turtle's behavior, I must initially deduce that it was floating on the surface of the lake, legs extended, for some reason. My assumption is that one of many reasons has something to do with exposure to the sunshine and warmer temperatures of the surface water. As soon as I came within some trigger proximity of the turtle, it made a nosedive for a safer location. I certainly can't blame it for that. I'm the invader. It was here first, especially today in this particular part of the lake.

Later, I mention this experience to my dad, and he tells me he has noticed at least three different snapping turtles in the water since the killing. I quickly recommend we set up a trapline off a different point on the lake, closer in proximity to all our recent sightings.

Tears and vomit. Why trap more turtles?

I was concerned with what others in the community might do if they caught the turtles first. I figured the best option was to trap as many turtles as possible and relocate them to safer places.

Flash forward to August 14th, 2018. Driving back to the community from my office in the nearby town of Sparta, I notice my phone lights up with a call from my dad. I don't answer. I'm driving. Once I eventually come to a stop in the driveway, I read a follow-up text from him.

We had caught another turtle in the new trap location. I don't think it was the same one I encountered floating in the sunshine the week before.

During the ensuing phone conversation with my father, it becomes clear the other members of the community want the turtle killed. I don't do anything about the situation just yet. Once my dad arrives, I let him know I'm a conscientious objector and I refuse to kill any more turtles. He agrees to help me move the turtle. We load up my truck with a large plastic garbage can and two shovels and head down to the lake.

Three neighborhood men followed us down when they saw my truck arrive at the dam. What were they expecting? Did they want to watch my dad and me kill the turtle? Maybe a trapped turtle is simply more exciting than anything else that was happening in the neighborhood at the moment.

This snapping turtle is much smaller than the one we had killed two weeks prior. Dad looked at the other men in the group and made up a nice excuse about the small size of the turtle as the reason we were not killing it. I secretly rolled my eyes, yet smiled, as I moved the gear toward the turtle. Good one, dad. Way to think on your feet.

Everyone else watched with a little less interest than before as the two of us scooped the turtle into the can with our shovels. I tried to remove the hook from its mouth with pliers, and nearly got bitten. I guess I would have gotten what I deserved if the turtle had bitten my finger off. I quickly snipped the trapline instead, and we loaded the canned turtle into the back of my truck. We took the turtle as quickly as possible to an undisclosed location off the Blue Ridge Parkway. I released the turtle into a fast-flowing stream, and it was gone in seconds.

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Is relocating turtles better than killing them? I certainly think so, but I don't know with any reasonable level of certainty which is the best strategy. In the long run, is relocation more harmful to the species than the death of a few individuals? In the specific context of this interspecific situation, how should we define harmful?

As individuals, as a community, as a species, how should we humans really decide what happens to a snapping turtle, or any other species, whether our focus is an individual member or a population? Perhaps we should start by looking at evidence, and collecting more evidence if we don't have enough to look at already. Perhaps we can make consensus-oriented decisions based on logical, evidence-driven argumentation.

Perhaps we can finally take the advice of Donella Meadows and practice systems wisdom. One of her principles of systems wisdom asks us to expand our time horizons, so let's start by stepping back and exploring a brief history of Hidden Lake, or NoName Lake, as it's designated on many maps.

The parcels of land of which the community is composed was originally one big plot owned by Dr. Johnson, who was the father of Phyllis, who was until recently the major landowner in our community, having since sold her land and Dr. Johnson's original vacation home to a relative of one of the other community members. Phyllis is still considered to be the matriarch of the community, and with all due respect has the rights to occupy her old home whenever she'd like until she chooses not to.

It's not clear the order in which it all happened, or the impetus for which came first, but, essentially, in order to build a dam to create a small lake at the bottom of the hill back in the late 1950s, Dr. Johnson sold off several lots of land to several other doctors in the region, raising the

funds necessary for construction. Each of these new landowners then built a small bungalow on their lots. It's not clear why Dr. Johnson wanted a lake, or whether it was a group decision. Did a few of Dr. Johnson's friends convince him it was a good idea to sell them (and a few others) parcels so a lake could exist?

In any case, a manmade lake was brought into existence in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and a community formed around it. The purpose of all of this was to have a good time up on the mountain and get away from the hustle and bustle of life down in the foothills and piedmont—or as others have put it so eloquently: to come up to the mountain to drink and screw!

Back to the snapping turtles. If you build a lake in their territory, they will come and use it to eat, live, grow, and reproduce, regardless of whether or not their use of the lake is part of the human plan for that lake. We don't have a way to negotiate with members of this species, we must simply tolerate them, disturb them on occasion, and, unfortunately, choose to kill them on occasion. Again, is it better to relocate or tolerate? What's one way we could make consensus-driven decisions based on logical, evidence-driven argumentation? Let's consider the Postropolis Simulation Relationship Assessment (SRA) framework as a way to understand interspecific interactions—and patterns of these interactions—as transactional and relationship-based evidence for argumentation, decisions, problem definitions, solutions, and resulting (in)actions as ongoing behavioral adjustments within these interspecific interactions. What are interspecific interactions, you might ask? Interspecific interactions are interactions between members of at least two different species: humans and snapping turtles, cats and dogs, vultures and roadkill.

Postropolis Simulation Relationship Assessment (SRA) Framework									
	Person (P)	Machine (M)	Information (I)	Animal (An)	Plant (Pl)	Fungus (Fu)	Atmos (At)	Hydro (Hy)	Geo (Ge)
Person (P)	P-P	P-M	P-I	P-An	P-Pl	P-Fu	P-At	P-Hy	P-Ge
Machine (M)	M-P	M-M	M-I	M-An	M-Pl	M-Fu	M-At	M-Hy	M-Ge
Information (I)	I-P	I-M	I-I	I-An	I-Pl	I-Fu	I-At	I-Hy	I-Ge
Animal (An)	An-P	An-M	An-I	An-An	An-Pl	An-Fu	An-At	An-Hy	An-Ge
Plant (Pl)	Pl-P	Pl-M	Pl-I	Pl-An	Pl-Pl	Pl-Fu	Pl-At	Pl-Hy	Pl-Ge
Fungus (Fu)	Fu-P	Fu-M	Fu-I	Fu-An	Fu-Pl	Fu-Fu	Fu-At	Fu-Hy	Fu-Ge
Atmos (At)	At-P	At-M	At-I	At-An	At-Pl	At-Fu	At-At	At-Hy	At-Ge
Hydro (Hy)	Hy-P	Hy-M	Hy-I	Hy-An	Hy-Pl	Hy-Fu	Hy-At	Hy-Hy	Hy-Ge
Geo (Ge)	Ge-P	Ge-M	Ge-I	Ge-An	Ge-Pl	Ge-Fu	Ge-At	Ge-Hy	Ge-Ge

The Postropolis SRA

The SRA framework/matrix supposes that we're living in a hybrid simulation, considering our nearly constant reliance on a simulation layer (internet, social media, mobile devices, etc.). In its current iteration, this matrix catalogs interactions between people, machines, information, animals, plants, and fungi, as well as atmospheric, hydrologic, and geologic phenomena. The idea is that this extensible framework can be used to initially categorize and standardize xAPI data created to document interactions (transactions) between these types of elements, leading to a more efficient human-readable pathway to understanding patterns of interactions

(relationships)—a pathway that is also equally machine-readable. In simple terms, xAPI is an “actor-verb-object” data model, such as “person did thing” or “machine created information” or, yes, “person killed snapping turtle”—which, according to the SRA matrix would be a Person-Animal (P-A) interaction. “Snapping turtle hissed at person” would, in turn, be an Animal-Person (A-P) interaction. So, when attempting to analyze data to suss out patterns (relationships) relevant to the current argument, discussion, problem definition, solution, etc. we would be able to filter available behavioral data according to the types of interactions we’d like to compare over time. Such a filtering process is only the tip of the iceberg of analytical possibilities.

Assuming these data are not readily available in this format, as they have not yet been translated into any standardized xAPI repository (also called a learning record store, or LRS), we can move forward with a “nice to have” scenario exemplifying how such data might be used to investigate the argument surrounding snapping turtles in Hidden Lake, and what is best for us (as individuals, a community, and a species) to do about them, if anything at all—especially if we’re all able to put our emotions aside and think rationally about the present, past, and future of our interspecific relationship.

I know this is asking a lot of ourselves. As a species, we’re not very good at this kind of thinking.

So: Has there ever been a case of a snapping turtle instigating interaction with (e.g., attacking) a human being in Hidden Lake? Nobody has any recollection of any such occurrence, and I find that such an instigation would be highly unlikely, so I think it’s a safe assumption that none has ever occurred.

What about across the world throughout time? Has a snapping turtle ever attacked a human without provocation? A relatively thorough internet search didn't produce any reputable leads on actual attacks, but assuming there have been some throughout recorded history, what are the actual statistics, and how can we possibly verify those statistics as a source of fact? Of these potential actual historical cases of unprovoked snapping turtle attacks on human beings, how do we associate and validate any contextual data which might help us better understand these interactions as a larger pattern, if at all?

To better understand the usefulness of these potential contextualizations as evidence for pattern evaluation in our decision-making process about whether or not we should kill more snapping turtles, let's consider elements of biology and ecology associated with snapping turtles. The common snapping turtle can live for nearly a century and grow to nearly two hundred pounds in weight. As of the mid-2010s, according to sources such as National Geographic and the scientific journal *Zootaxa*, in the southeastern United States, there are now two new species of snapping turtle identified as separate from the Alligator Snapper (which is loosely related to the Common Snapper): the Suwannee River snapper and the Apalachicola River snapper.

An omnivorous species, the diet of the common snapper is varied, ranging from fish and reptiles to mammals and aquatic vegetation. Another dietary option often chosen by snapping turtles is carrion. I remember we had several deer succumb to a disease within 2018, and these deer ended up dead near the edge of the lake. I wonder if any of our snapping turtle neighbors were able to partake of the venison feast delivered to their home? In any case, these snapping turtles are not aggressive predators.

While snapping turtles often display a combative disposition when encountered out of the water, when approached in water, they are highly likely to flee and hide—much like the kayak encounter I described above. Additionally, snapping turtles typically reach sexual maturity somewhere between twelve and fifteen years of age, and while they reproduce often, apparently there is a low amount of reproductive success per event.

Part of the reason they are considered to be so aggressive by so many humans is that when they're encountered on land, unlike other turtles, snapping turtles are unable to retreat into the protection of their shells, because the plastron, which is the underside plate of their shell, is not big enough to completely conceal them, so they must act in a manner that we humans might typically perceive as aggression as a defense mechanism when provoked. Other than finding food near the edge of the water, there are two likely reasons that a snapping turtle will leave the water: looking for a place to lay eggs or moving from one body of water to another. A third reason a snapping turtle would leave the water is if it were trapped by humans and pulled out of the water.

How might we use the Postropolis SRA to better understand the lives of snapping turtles, their actual relationships with their niche environments, and their actual relationships with us and other species in their webs of life?

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Back to reality? Or at least back to our second turtle. Upon releasing the turtle on August 14, I decided to drive home along a different path, taking Caudill Road off the Blue Ridge Parkway, into a part of Alleghany County called Shawtown—or at least on to Shawtown Road. At the intersection of Caudill and Shawtown roads is an old store called Williams Grocery. Based

solely on exterior appearance, it's difficult to say whether the store still functions as a store, or if its owners merely use it as a residence. However, there are lots of rusted-out tractors and trucks scattered around the property, parked in a manner that could be taken as "leave 'em where they died"—or a more pragmatic arrangement intended to provide cover from flying bullets when defending the homestead.

As my father and I joked about the potential for strategic defense, and what a good idea it is to have those trucks available, our conversation turned to a discussion of a recent county-wide garbage ordinance that was causing a stir amongst the citizens of Allegheny County. Many residents were concerned that the County would be empowering itself to overstep its bounds in limiting the freedom of private property owners to behave within reason on their own property. Originally called the Nuisance Ordinance, the second iteration changed the title to the Beautification Ordinance, with the following objectives:

- A. To enhance the scenic beauty of Allegheny County and to promote tourism.
- B. To prevent injury and illness to occupants of property and the public and to remove public nuisances.
- C. To provide countywide standards for the abatement of public nuisances and to ensure proper actions are taken to abate public nuisances.
- D. To establish responsibility of involved parties and assure that people are not unnecessarily exposed to dangers of public nuisances.”

The Beautification Ordinance provided many definitions relevant to its contents and intention, three of which seem rather relevant to the discussion I had with my father that day, and where it has led my thoughts since. Junk is defined as “litter, debris, waste materials of any kind, dead

animals, used or unserviceable automobile and machinery parts, used and non-functional furniture and appliances, and used and non-functional tools, equipment, and implements, but shall not include compost piles for normal, personal or non-commercial use, in their proper location.” Occupant is defined as “any person who occupies real property, whether with or without any right, title or interest in the property, and any person in possession or charge of such property, in the event the owner resides or is located elsewhere.” Public nuisance is defined as “any activity or failure to act that adversely affects the public and shall include, but is not limited to, any condition which poses an immediate and direct hazard to human health if left unremediated due to the existence of the condition itself or due to the immediate threat of transmission of disease through insects, animals, or other means of transmission of infections. Any violation of this Beautification Ordinance may be deemed a public nuisance.”

The ordinance was reworked, with the final iteration renamed to Garbage Ordinance with a few notable differences, including the primary objectives:

- “A. To protect the public from health nuisances, safety hazards, and sources of danger to citizens due to improper disposal of garbage.
- B. To preserve and enhance the scenic beauty in unincorporated areas of Allegheny County.
- C. To provide countywide standards for the proper disposal of garbage and to ensure proper actions are taken to enforce such standards.
- D. To establish responsibility of involved parties and assure that people are not unnecessarily exposed to dangers of the improper accumulation of garbage.”

Some definitions were removed altogether, including public nuisance, and junk was changed to garbage and redefined as “solid wastes, including post-consumer waste, household vegetable matter, animal offal, carcasses of animals, recognizable industrial byproducts, used and non-functional appliances, dilapidated furniture, construction waste, demolition waste, and roofing shingles. Garbage shall not include compost piles for normal, personal or non-commercial use.” Solid waste was added as a term and defined as “construction and demolition debris and land-clearing debris. This shall not include beneficial fill consisting only of inert debris limited to concrete, brick, concrete block, used pavement asphalt, or uncontaminated soil, rock, and gravel.”

Furthermore, it is interesting that they seemed to have removed all references to tourism from the ordinance altogether.

If you’ve got insomnia, there’s a YouTube video of the Alleghany County Commissioners discussing the Garbage Ordinance at the August 13th meeting.

In any case, the ordinance was eventually voted down: two in favor, three opposed.

Back to Williams Grocery. My father and I, as is typical when we’re in a vehicle together somewhere on a backroad, made a quick decision to veer onto another road and drive up a hill to check out something else we’ve been meaning to check out for some time. In this case, we’re headed up to visit a farmhouse owned by one of his patients. It’s for sale, as well as a substantial portion of the land around it. It’s a nice piece of property, and it used to have an unfettered view of our beloved Bullhead Mountain. But for quite some time, there has been a cell phone tower in the way—really close to the edge of the property. It’s practically adjacent. And it’s empty.

Zero cells on the tower. A nonfunctional cell tower. It's been there for quite some time, and there's no telling when it will finally have cells installed, if ever.

This isn't the only empty cell tower in the region. There are at least two others along US Highway 21 coming up the mountain from Elkin.

How are these empty cell towers not considered garbage? Aren't they, from a certain perspective, a nuisance in a similar manner to that growing pile of junk (that appears to serve no purpose) in your neighbor's yard?

Remember: the Garbage Ordinance was concerned with "any activity or failure to act that adversely affects the public"—and an intentionally empty cell tower certainly seems like a failure to act on the part of the wireless company that has built the tower in the first place!

Corporations are people too, right? Let's say Alleghany County fined the corporation \$500 per day until the corporation either installed cells or took down the tower and restored an unfettered view of "our" landscape (which is, by the way, a common selling point of realtors and tourism promoters in the area). \$500 per day x 365 days = \$182,500 per year (per tower). Let's say there are three empty towers. That's a total of \$547,500. Over half a million bucks per year from three pieces of empty, yet quite tall, garbage. I can think of lots of ways Alleghany County could use half a million dollars per year to provide services to its citizens. Divide that sum evenly amongst 11,500 residents, and it comes to \$47.61 per person. That doesn't sound like a lot, but used collectively, it could be quite powerful.

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Flash forward to September 2018.

Two hurricanes, basically back to back. Irma and Michael.

Up here on the escarpment, we experience egregious heavy rainfall. Serious flash flooding.

The dam at Hidden Lake probably could have survived the first flooding.

As the second set of rains soaked the county, I walked down to the dam once again after sunset to check its status, and it was flooded higher than I'd ever seen it. At least half the top of the usually dry dam had a steady flow of water at least ankle deep. I walked to the far end of the dam where the overflow pipes were located. On the backside of the dam, there was a hole from a previous blowout that had been fixed with a bit of "Appalachian engineering" (...a bandage made from a piece of plywood and some dirt. "It'll be aight!").

I stood on the patched section of the pipe and felt the resonant vibrations increasing. I left quickly.

I recorded some time-stamped narrated video with my phone as I splashed back across the dam to head back up the hill to the house. I figured we'd see a big mess in the morning.

There was a big mess in the morning, and it got worse throughout the day. At least half of the dam was gone.

To this day, we're still finding strange debris downstream. A testament to the power of water. Honestly, it's probably better the dam did breach.

Once the rain stopped, our community had a big decision to make.

Do we rebuild the dam?

The affirmative answer was basically unanimous. At the time I figured it was most prudent to leave my questions about whether we still "needed" and "deserved" a lake unvoiced. I figured nobody would want to hear my thoughts. Nobody would want to even consider such an idea, much less attempt any sort of rational discussion of the matter.

Nobody could remember the community without the man-made lake since it had been there longer than any current homeowner had been old enough to have memories.

To conclude 2018, there was much discussion, planning, fretting, and political control seeking to be had within our little mountain community tucked beneath Bullhead. Some folks wanted as little as possible to do with the project other than writing several checks. One family sold their deteriorating bungalow to another family to avoid the situation altogether. (Side note: that bungalow is now a party pad where kids can watch obnoxiously loud outdoor movies while getting ridiculously high on sugar.)

Demolition and construction began in March 2019. The new dam, drain, and dock were completed, and the lake was refilled, by the end of May 2019. Regarding the political maneuvering, the rather anal-retentive engineer in our community decided to throw a thank-you party for himself to celebrate the completion of the dam, and it was not well attended.

In the end, though, this was a truly impressive undertaking. I'm glad I was around to watch it unfold and document as much as possible along the way.

With the new facility, it is nice to have the ability to drain the lake every year to allow for maintenance and ecological stewardship projects (such as sediment management and dealing with invasive species issues—especially vegetation). However, I'd still like to run the numbers on lake usage for each household to calculate how much time, manpower, and money each family has invested and what kind of “per hour of lake time” cost-benefit they're experiencing over the next ten years, based on how little time any of these families actually spend engaging with the water—looking at it, sitting next to it, swimming, or boating—during the few weeks of the year that they're actually up in the community in the first place.

Furthermore, how does this cost calculation compare to the environmental costs of keeping up such a manmade lake that, it can be argued, isn't supposed to exist?

The lake is here because a human (or group of humans) decided to build it in the first place.

That doesn't mean it was ever a good decision, nor does it give any sort of permanent validity for its continued existence.

Here's something positive. As far as I know, I was the first person to physically break the surface of the water on the newly refilled lake. I took our canoe out to explore the perimeter.

What was one of the first things I saw as I made the lap?

You guessed it! A snapping turtle.

The turtle appeared to be minding its own business (again, I'm making the huge anthropomorphic assumption that a turtle can "mind" anything), basking in the sun near the surface of the water in a relatively hidden cove of the lake. As I approached in a canoe, it quickly dove and swam away, presumably to avoid me. The same would have happened if I were swimming, I'm sure, even though many in our community (despite the fact that they never actually swim in the lake) would consider this to be a more "vulnerable" state with increased risk for an attack from such a "vicious predator."

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Fast forward to the end of January 2020. Another weekend, looking for an excuse to shake off some cabin fever. My father and I decide to take a trip back up to see the owners of the house on the hill next to the cell tower, hoping to see the progress the owners have made on the renovation work, inside and out. As we drive over, I mention to my dad that I had noticed a utility truck parked at the base of the cell tower earlier in the week, as well as a crane offloading some

containers from a flatbed. We arrive at the property. As it turns out, the tower is indeed now having cells attached. As we tour the house and grounds with the owner, chewing the fat about old things and new, we watch two men work in the frigid winds, tethered to the top of the tower, and we take turns contemplating what kind of hazard pay they must be pulling in. Soon we drift to stories of historical reenactments and wayward cannon fire, as well as a discussion of the future of the land in our community. Were it not for a few thousand trees between us, we would be able to see each other's houses with a good set of binoculars.

These discussions of the future of "our" land make me think of my own history and the history of those before us, and thus I consider the two turtles in "our" lake as a metaphor for other temporary entities, such as two municipalities with which I am most familiar: Elkin and Sparta, North Carolina. These two towns are fairly close together, fewer than twenty miles apart, yet they are in separate watersheds on different sides of the escarpment of the Blue Ridge Parkway. Sparta sits at around three thousand feet elevation, in the Upper New River Basin, and Elkin sits at around one thousand feet elevation in the Upper Yadkin-Pee Dee Basin. They are both small rural post-industrial towns, less than five thousand inhabitants. Each of these municipalities was created at some point in recent history for any number of reasons, and, like all other previous and current municipalities, neither will last forever and thus both are temporary.

What should happen to each of these struggling towns? Are they still relevant? Are they a nuisance? Are they piles of junk that should be considered hazardous? How are we defining the concept(s) of "struggling"? What justifies our efforts to continue to attempt resuscitation of these entities? Shall we compare their fates to those of our snapping turtle neighbors? Should Elkin and Sparta be trapped and killed? Relocated?

Perhaps we should think a bit more deeply about how to justify the existence of these two municipalities. Consider our man-made lake as an analogy for these man-made municipalities: Why were these towns initially created and incorporated where they are? What purposes, if any, do they still serve as municipalities? What, then, justifies their continued existence as municipalities?

If we can't answer these questions about these two municipalities, all other efforts we make (regarding economy, industry, commerce, etc.) in service of the population of the municipality and the surrounding area are, unfortunately, completely off base. I'd argue that this perspective can be generalized to any post-industrial town or small city in the United States (or really anywhere, for that matter, at least in North America).

What sorts of tools do we need in order to build evidence-based claims to make an argument in support of justifying the continued existence of these municipalities? How might we use the Postropolis SRA framework and process to help validate the purpose and justify the continued existence of any municipality in any watershed on any continent? This is something to consider in more detail in one or more follow-up essays.

For now, though, let's get back to our little "hidden" lake community and our interspecific interactions with our snapping turtle neighbors. In defense of our non-human neighbors, I ponder the perspective of some of our human neighbors.

I wonder how many other humans in proximity to other such man-made lakes containing snapping turtles might also need to hear my closing thoughts, so here they are: You think snapping turtles are icky, and you don't like the idea of them swimming in "our" lake? You hardly ever swim in the lake anyway, if ever.

You want the turtle dead? You kill it.

And all those children and grandchildren you're trying to protect from the evil monster turtle?

You better make them watch the killing, then stick their fingers into the neck of the severed head of the turtle to paint their own faces with its blood. And then you better cook up some turtle soup and make them all drink at least a cup, no matter how horrible anyone thinks it tastes. It's only fair, I think.

Me? I don't even want to trap the turtles anymore. Unfortunately, that decision is not just up to me. We live in a community populated with convenience-driven pleasure seekers, most of whom fall into the all-too-typical human mindset that nature must be "controlled" for our comfort and convenience.

So, I'll probably keep getting asked to kill the turtles, because many of the non-resident folks in our community think they're yucky, uncomfortable, and inconvenient for vacation happiness.

And, since I live up here full time, everyone else always seems to assume that we're "on-call" to take care of things like this.

What a shame.

I hope to see the dam breached again in my lifetime, restoring the headwaters area of Little Glade Creek to its natural state; the way it was prior to this major human disturbance for the rather selfish purpose of recreational pleasure, not to mention the silly game of property value manipulation.

I imagine the turtles might still populate the deeper pools of the creek. Who knows?

WE are the invasive species.