

OPINION

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EDITORIAL

Goshen should pass on Scouts

Have you driven to Goshen Pass? Try it sometime on a lovely Sunday afternoon when you've got plenty of time and plenty of fuel. No matter how you get to the village of Goshen — population 395 — the way is beautiful, remote, difficult.

And here the Boy Scouts of America want to insert 240,000 Scouts, volunteers, vendors and visitors for its massive Jamboree every four years.

Since 1981, the event has been held at Fort A.P. Hill in Caroline County, but BSA officials have been looking to relocate.

They announced in February that its Scout camp near Goshen in Rockbridge County was their top choice. Some 80 sites in 28 states had been considered.

We're pleased that a Virginia site bested the 79 others in contention.

And we understand that the influx of visitors would bring revenue to the county, as would the initial construction necessary to bring the existing camp up to new standards.

The enhanced camp also would become a year-round center, creating about 80 full-time jobs. Total capital investment is pegged at around \$100 million.

Yes, indeed, being chosen is an honor for Rockbridge and for Virginia.

But we can't understand how any of the small, two-lane roads to Goshen could adequately handle the traffic that an event such as the Jamboree would generate. It would be a nightmare for residents and probably no picnic, either, visitors.

A slow, serene Sunday drive is one thing. Thousands of vehicles pushing to get to their destination is another.

And there's more.

Environmentalists are worried about what the event would do especially to the Maury River. A state expert has estimated that the Jamboree would generate up to 3 million gallons of sewage a day, which would have to be very carefully treated in order not to harm the Maury downstream. And of course there are other environmental concerns, ranging from solid waste to vehicle air pollution.

But even that isn't the greatest concern.

The greatest concern ought to be the Lake Merriweather dam, located on the campgrounds. The dam is considered a "high hazard" due to a deficiency in the spillway and has been operating on a conditional permit for years.

If the dam failed and there were a flood? Could people be evacuated safely along those narrow roads?

Details of the BSA plan are yet to come, but county officials say it likely would require a special-use permit.

If that's the case and Rockbridge has final call over what the BSA can do, then the county has a tough call to make: Accommodate a prestigious, money-making event or take a more cautious route aimed at long-term protection of personal property, human safety and environmental integrity.

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