

On My Mind  
1/19/01

A magazine published by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) recently carried an article on places, on the mainland, to which people might want to retire. The story set up five categories: green and clean, college towns, big cities, small towns and "quirky." Among the criteria for eligibility: that the towns were easy to get around in, that the streets were safe, the opportunities for life-long learning were plentiful; and that they had good hospitals and lots of civic activities, recreational options and cultural vitality.

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Another criterion was the town (or city)'s kitsch factor, which the story defined as "the number of klunky stores that sell T-shirts and useless souvenirs," with preference given to places with a low kitsch factor. Of fifty cities and towns listed in the final selection, only three - all in the "quirky" category - had a high kitsch factor: Seaside, Florida (has one of the world's oldest wooden roller coasters); Branson, Missouri (American's number-one bus destination); and Santa Cruz, California ("every house must have a white picket fence").

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The premise underlying the selection was that most retirees no longer actually retire, but continue active lives telecommuting, volunteering, going back to school, undertaking a new career or opening their own business. Thus, the article says, the standard criteria for retirement living - the presence of golf courses, sun and active senior citizen centers - were no longer primary considerations.

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In looking at the CNMI in light of the "new" criteria for retirement living - hasn't it been suggested more than once that the CNMI develop retirement communities as a new source of income? - it would appear that the CNMI can take top spot in terms of kitschiness, at least. CNMI abounds in klunky stores that sell T-shirts and useless souvenirs.

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But the CNMI does not offer opportunities for life-long learning (in one of the college towns, senior citizens were offered free audit of three classes per semester; in another, senior citizens could take any continuing education class at no cost provided there was room). The CNMI is not easy to get around in unless one has a car. Its streets are not all that safe (and with the gun-resort over-ride still pending, they might even get less safe).

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Nor would the CNMI rank all that high on neighborliness and good restaurants, two more of the criteria used by the AARP's *Modern Maturity*.

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Even if becoming a retirement destination is not high on the list of tourist priorities for the CNMI, many of AARP's criteria for judging good retirement destinations would appear equally useful for judging good vacation destinations. And to the same extent that the CNMI fails to meet the criteria for retirement destinations, it fails to meet the criteria for vacation destinations. Those concerned with the tourist industry might want to take note.....

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The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council held a hearing on Saipan this week on its draft environmental impact statement for something called the Coral Reef Ecosystem Fishery Management Plan of the Western Pacific Region. The meeting was held at 8:00 p.m. at the Diamond Hotel earlier this week.

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In theory, the Council (WPRFMC - an indigestible, impossible-to-remember combination of letters if there ever was one) wants and encourages public input on its plans for managing the fish in the waters surrounding U.S. islands in the western Pacific. And, in theory, it also wants and encourages public input on the plans the Council comes up with for protecting the corals that those ocean fish breed in, inhabit and feed upon.

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Unfortunately, no one at the Council seems to understand basic principles of effective communication or public relations. The meeting announcement states that "the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration announces the availability of its draft environmental impact statement for the draft Coral Reef Ecosystem Fishery Management Plan for the Western Pacific Region," and that a public hearing will be held on management alternatives of the plan.

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That statement doesn't give a clue as to what is at issue, who will be affected, or where, much less what the range of alternatives might include. There is nothing in the announcement that lets fishermen know that where they fish, and what equipment they use to do so is up for discussion, and might be changed, depending on what happens at the hearing.

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As a result, other than dedicated professionals, there was virtually no public participation at the public hearing.

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Should someone have been enterprising enough to call the local Fish and Wildlife office, been persistent enough to discover that there is a handout available, and gone so far as to go to Lower Base to pick it up, he or she would have discovered that it doesn't help. The material - a 20-page handout - is as user-unfriendly as is the abbreviation for the Council: dense, complicated, and full of jargon.

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Sample:" The coral reef ecosystems FMP has been proposed to provide for better understanding of impacts due to natural environmental changes, other FMP managed fisheries, and non-fishing related impacts such as dredging." Huh?

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Here's a description of a "preferred" permit requirement, listed under a "summary table of management measures and options considered in the DEIS:"..."Option to require for take of specific CHCRT in specific sub-areas of the EEZ as determined by the Council through framework processes. Unless specifically designated by Council, CHCRT will be managed by regional authorities in non-MPA areas of the EEZ. Required for transshipment of CRE MUS within EEZ of MHI, A.Samoa, Guam, CNMI."

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I'm sorry, but that's far too much jargon, gobbledy-gook and just plain bureaucratese for me to even begin to want to try and decipher, decode, translate.

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Nor is this problem unique to last week's hearing. It is standard conduct for the Western Pacific's Fishery Management Council. The problem is that the language is so dense that hardly anyone is aware that actions of the Council do affect them, and therefore, hardly anyone makes a fuss about not being able to <B>understand</B> what it is the Council is doing, and saying, much less making a fuss about <B>agreeing</B> with what the Council says and does.

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Which is a pity. The Council is setting limits on where commercial fishing is allowed, how many commercial fishers may operate in any given area, the size of their take, and what equipment they are allowed to use. All of which affects the over-all fish stock in the area. Concern has been expressed that the Council proposals do not adequately protect the stock, that they, in fact, do not prevent overfishing.

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While one section of the handout seems to imply that all of the CNMI is included, another mentions only Saipan, Tinian and Rota, but not the Northern Islands or Farallon de Medinilla. Among other things, the Council proposes banning the use of scuba and hookah equipment at night in the EEZ of the North Western Hawaiian Islands and in what it calls the Pacific Remote Island Areas, but not in American Samoa, Guam or the CNMI, and not during the daytime - where, it would appear, it might make far more sense.

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Additional information is available - copies of the Fisheries Management Plan, the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, and allied documents - in three volumes, totaling some 1,100 pages. That is not user-friendly, either; that's downright intimidating!

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Deadline for comments is February 26. Contact information can be found on page 19 of the 1/15/01 issue of the <I>Variety</I>, or by calling the CNMI Fish and Wildlife Division at 664-6000. Consistent with its user-unfriendly approach, comments may not be e-mailed. Only snail mail or fax comments will be accepted.

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And speaking of matters marine, isn't it odd that even after all these years, Northern Marianas College has yet to establish a marine sciences program?