

Starlink and “Pollution”

I saw someone complaining about how their long-exposure photograph of comet “Neowise” was ruined by the passage of Starlink satellites.

If you are unfamiliar with comet “Neowise”, well, it’s a comet. And if you are unfamiliar with Starlink, it’s Elon Musk’s swarm of internet-providing satellites.

The various voices chiming in about the horrors of the ruined photograph sympathized with the harm done to the photographer, and the evils of polluting the world for profit. I’m more upset that Elon takes government subsidies and launches government payloads, but whatever.

But “pollution”? I *HATE* pollution, including litter.

Pollution damages property; without the damage, there is no pollution. I can’t think of a way these satellites damage anyone’s property. One of the dissenters told me that “damages property” was a strange way to define pollution, so I asked for his definition. He said he’d include harming people. I asked him who is being harmed. Silence. Strangely, I find most of my questions to those on the other side keep going unanswered— some of them seem to have blocked me.

Sure, people are “forced” to see something they don’t want to see, in specific circumstances. Or, perhaps they are forced to accidentally photograph something they didn’t intend to photograph. A photobomb of sorts (but one you can avoid with a little prior planning— at least for the time being). The newer Starlink satellites are getting harder and harder to see, even right after launch. Musk has been trying to make them less reflective to keep ground-based astronomers happy, so perhaps it is working.

Someone said the pollution is the damage done by ruining a little of the beauty of nature for everyone. That’s too subjective.

I want to go outside and look at the horizon without seeing any man-made structures or invasive/exotic trees blocking the natural view. Am I being harmed that this isn’t possible where I live?

I hate to hear dogs bark. I don’t like seeing boys hobbling around with their pants below their butts. Is this pollution?

If I see my neighbor walk to the end of their driveway and they aren’t attractive enough for me to want to see them, am I being harmed? I don’t think so. A better case for pollution could be made if they were smoking and I caught a whiff of their smoke. Yet I’m not petty

enough to make an issue about that. They can smoke cigars as they walk out to the street naked and I can't think of a way this actually harms me.

Yes, "astronomy" pictures taken with a long exposure can be "ruined" by the multiple streaks from Starlink satellites. How many satellite tracks does it take to ruin a photo? One? Three? A dozen? Do planes also ruin photos? Do meteors?

It takes a long exposure- specialty photography- to really have a problem with Starlink streaks. I could complain if I use infrared photography to take photos of my neighbor's house and I see them inside doing things I don't want to see, but who has the problem here?

Starlink is intended to fund Musk's Mars missions and Martian colony. I am in favor of getting humans to Mars and to seeing if they can live there sustainably. It takes a lot of money- profit- to fund these kinds of things. Either direct profit spent willingly by those who earned it, or profit confiscated from the rightful owner by government through "taxation"- guess which one I like better.

One of the detractors said satellites are too expensive and it would be cheaper to run wires out to all the remote areas to provide high-speed internet. I think this shows a lack of understanding of how remote some remote areas actually are, and the economics of running wires out there *and* the people in remote areas being able to actually afford to use such a service. Plus, this only shifts the property damage to actual *property*. Would these people like to have a path bulldozed for this line- either underground or hanging on poles- through their property so they don't have to see (if they look hard) something they don't want to see in the dusky sky?

I have gone out at night and watched Starlink satellites pass overhead. Most of the time they were too dim for me to see. A few times I was able to see the "train"- a string of satellites following one another across the sky- with some success. It's rather interesting to see and even beautiful in a way. But, even though I really like antique stuff made of brass, bone, wood, leather, and glass, I'm not a Luddite.

I get it, though. If I had my choice I'd turn the clock back to the Pleistocene or something and wear animal skins and live in a cave. I don't care to see plastic everywhere I look- I'd rather see mammoths. But I can't pretend someone is harming me just because the world isn't the same as it used to be or as I might wish it still were. There are more important things to fix.