

## Comments of the Friends of Accotink Creek:

To: EQAC

January 10, 2024

Why are we replacing carbon sink trees with heat sink asphalt?

Improved opportunities for safer bicycle and pedestrian travel are always welcome, but such opportunities should not target intact forests and floodplains as the path of least resistance for paving new trails. Fairfax County has thousands of miles of streets that need to be made people-friendly first. Citizens already pay taxes to have our streets paved and lighted and plowed of snow; let's use them!

In this case of a choice between two worthy goals we appeal against sacrificing any more of our finite and dwindling wooded natural habitats.

In areas of natural habitat where no trails now exist, in areas within floodplains, the Friends of Accotink Creek question the need for any new paved trails and the wisdom of applying resources to their construction that could better be used to enhance the health of our streams and watersheds.

The cumulative effect of projects must be considered. Our stream valleys are already fragmented, already crisscrossed by power lines and sewer lines and gas lines, are already asked to sacrifice for every new road widening proposal and parking lot expansion. The limits of sacrifice have been reached.

Some demands for ever more sacrifice of natural habitats and stream buffers are difficult to deny. Recreational trails, on the other hand, are entirely optional. We can make different choices.

Other County plans need to be fulfilled, too, such as the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance, the Accotink Creek Watershed Plan, the Fairfax County Tree Plan, or the [Community-wide Energy and Climate Action Plan](#). All these plans assure the preservation of tree canopy while other County, Commonwealth, and private interests continue to clear it away. Why should the environmental preservation mandates of these other plans not take priority?

We must resist the temptation to regard forests and floodplains as blank spaces awaiting improvement by human infrastructure. We must resist the view of woods and wetlands as an obstacle in the way of pavement, not a treasured natural resource. The Cinder Bed Road Bikeway may be the worst current example, where even globally rare wetlands are unprotected from the demands for pavement.

Even more troubling than paving of the woods is when these routes are to be lighted. The [negative impact on wildlife of artificial lighting](#) is well known and should be ruled out in natural habitat areas.

The Active Fairfax website illustrates the compelling alternative to new paved trails in forests and floodplains – make our streets safe for people, rather than make our woods safe for pavement. With the current Active Fairfax planning under way, now is the time to prevent another Cinder Bed Road Bikeway by ensuring environmental representation in transportation and land use stakeholder groups.

There is no limit to demands for active recreational use of parks. Finite Nature cannot expand to meet our demands. We must preserve what we have or lose anything worth preserving. Let's make the "Complete Streets" of the Active Fairfax plan and leave our remaining forests and floodplains intact.