



Dear Members of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors,

The Fairfax Invasive Removal Alliance (FIRA) was recently created by \_\_\_ homeowners' associations (HOAs), \_\_\_ citizen associations, and \_\_\_ condo associations, encompassing over \_\_\_ residents, who have come together to ask you to address the critical problem of invasive non-native plant species in Fairfax County. Community associations manage thousands of acres of land that include woods, ponds, and Resource Protection Areas. The problem is too big to be solved by individual communities operating alone, so we are looking to the County for assistance.

Invasive plants are devastating the natural areas of Fairfax County. Our native trees, which are the powerhouses of the ecosystem, are the most visible victims. At least a million are at risk just in our county from invasive vines that smother and strangle, such as English ivy and Asian wisteria. Still other native trees are being displaced by invasive trees such as the notorious Callery Pear that rapidly moves in after land disturbances. Meanwhile, invasive shrubs such as Multiflora Rose and Burning Bush are choking the lower levels, and the ground layer is being destroyed by invasive groundcovers and other low-growing species.

As a result of this epidemic, combined with over browsing by deer, most of our woods are not regenerating and are likely to fail altogether by the end of the century unless action is taken. Our grandchildren may be living in a scarred and ugly landscape that is unable to support birds and other wildlife, and that is an invitation to dumping and crime. Trees on individual residential yards are headed for premature death as well. If action is not taken, owners will have to pay for costly tree removals and increase their air conditioning use. Infestations of invasive plants can also be breeding grounds for mosquitoes and ticks.

The economic repercussions alone of such a scenario are enormous and by themselves justify investing now in preventative measures. Paying for those measures can be difficult for communities with tight budgets and may seem hopeless when uncontrolled invasives on surrounding land can reinfest cleared areas. It is therefore essential that our County come up with a plan to engage all types of landowners, whether public (government, parks, and rights of way) or private (residential, community common land, and commercial.)

We are writing to urge you to take steps to identify and implement creative solutions to the problem. These could include

- creating a vigorous public education campaign
- collaborating with other public entities such as VDOT, railroads, etc.
- developing the needed workforce
- leveraging volunteer labor to maximize effectiveness
- advocating for needed legislative changes at the state level
- offering incentive programs for the owners of private properties, such as matching grants for communities to treat their common open space
- encouraging nurseries to move away from the sale of invasive plants and boost native alternatives instead
- finding funding sources for County-owned spaces beyond taxpayers' money

Community associations are in a position to help the County with a campaign to reverse the plague of invasive plants. They are able to spread the word and help residents figure out what to do on their own properties. Community associations and the County can be partners in saving our trees and preserving the natural beauty of Fairfax County.

Thank you for taking the time to consider our request to take action immediately. We are eager to partner with you, since every month of delay only compounds the problem and adds to the expense.

