



May 28, 2024

To: Gloria.Medina@Fairfaxcounty.gov

Dear Gloria,

Congratulations on your fulltime appointment as head of the IMA office, and we send you our best wishes in making the program a success. This wet spring is making jungles out of our wooded areas, and FCPA volunteers are hard at work fighting our plant invaders.

We'd like to bring to your attention the backlog of volunteers waiting to be approved as site leaders—a problem we know you are aware of—and offer a possible solution, since staffing and resources in IMA are always going to be a problem.

We understand that it is time-consuming and difficult in an understaffed office to visit potential sites, assess them for suitability, check for utility easements, do all the paperwork to create new sites, and provide a new set of tools and toolbox. So, we propose a compromise to approve some folks that won't involve as much of your time.

We suggest that you place a hold on approving new IMA sites, but that you go forward with approving new IMA site leaders/co-leaders at already-approved sites. Existing sites badly need more than one site leader. Having only one site leader per site is wasting opportunities. When a site leader cannot be there, the event has to be canceled. Ideally, an IMA site would have 3 or even 4 site leaders. This would allow a great deal more habitat restoration to be done and on a more consistent basis, even on multiple days a week.

Further, we believe that an experienced IMA site leader (many are master naturalists, some of them from the inception of the program) could fully train a candidate, advise them of the county requirements on background checks, ensure they understand FCPA regulations, ensure they volunteer at least the required number of workdays at IMA sites, teach them how to recognize all the common native and invasive plants on the site, show them how to download and use plant ID apps like iNaturalist, and show them how to log in their hours. The experienced IMA site leader could then officially sign that their candidate is ready to be an IMA site leader subject to your approval.

The compromise would be that these new site leaders wouldn't have their own local sites, but would be co-site leaders at existing sites. This is unfortunate given the small numbers of acres having any invasive management efforts, but perhaps if this becomes successful then experienced IMA site leader volunteers could fill in as a resource in other ways upon expansion.

With every single FCPA park impacted by invasive plants, we need as many people as possible leading restoration efforts.

We thank you for the hard work you do already, but we still need to find a way to expedite the approval of new site leaders. Let's unblock the volunteer pipeline!

Sincerely,

Philip Latasa  
Steward@accotink.org

Friends of Accotink Creek Board of Conservators  
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Primary Conservator

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Secondary Conservator

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