

What: Call to action!
When: February, 2010
Why: Avert Cuts to the FCPA FY2011 Budget

If the County Board of Supervisors approves the potential 15% budget cut for FY2011, the Park Authority will have lost \$7.9 million, or 31% of its general fund operating budget since fiscal 2008. While everyone needs to bear their share of cuts in these hard economic times, our parks are down to the bone right now. Below is a letter I submitted to several Fairfax County supervisors. Join me in writing county officials, civic and homeowner associations to ask that Fairfax County sustain the current level (FY2010) of funding for fiscal 2011. The County Board of Supervisors' contact information can be found at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/government/board/; they have scheduled public hearings on the budget April 6-8, 2010. To register to speak at a public budget hearing, go to: <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/government/budget/>.

"As a Fairfax County citizen and parks volunteer, I am writing to ask that you and your colleagues on the County Board of Supervisors *consider sustaining funding to county parks at the current level approved for FY2010*. The basis for this suggestion is twofold: 1) The modest operating budget for the Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) cannot manage another cut after nine years of level funding (no increase) from the County and one (in FY2010) a reduction of 14%; 2) Recognition of the extraordinary contributions our park programs and services make to the health and well-being of Fairfax County citizens and businesses through public outreach, education and service in environmentally responsible homescape and landscape management offered up annually by dozens of staff and volunteers. Let me be more specific.

In 2009, the Park Authority welcomed 18.6 million visitors to 417 parks. We groomed fields for 225,000 competitors, improved our 300 mile trail system and worked to control non-native invasive plants, promote native species and preserve woodlands and green open spaces.

It is a well-documented fact that parks help to attract business to Fairfax County.

- ✓ Parks are important to suburban workers. A recent nationwide survey commissioned by EDA showed suburban workers identified "more nearby parks and open spaces" as the amenity they most wanted more of in their work communities.
- ✓ EDA touts Fairfax County as a premier business location based on the "Fairfax Advantage" which includes a pro-business climate, well-educated workforce and enviable quality of life. When illustrating the County's outstanding quality of life, EDA features parkland and recreational opportunity.

In 2009, Green Spring Gardens Park volunteers gave 14,367 volunteer hours and made 9,223 citizen contacts in the gardens, horticulture center, children's programs, historic manor house and through public education by staff and Master Gardener volunteers. Of these contacts 2,092 represented outreach to school children in 90 classrooms in 30 Fairfax County Schools. Volunteers provided eco-savvy information displays at 12 County libraries and 24 Farmers Market sites and provided programs on sustainable gardening practices to 17 area garden clubs and civic organizations. All of this volunteer support to educate and serve the citizens of Fairfax County in 2009 is equal to \$188, 638 in compensation from Green Springs Garden Park—a generous return on the county's investment.

Fairfax County's Invasive Management Area (IMA) program functions on a volunteer-based workforce that removes highly aggressive, non-native bushes, vines and grasses from the parklands. After eliminating invasive plants from a site, IMA volunteers replant the area with suitable, diverse native species if existing native vegetation is low. In 2009 alone, 1,284 IMA volunteers worked 4,388 hours, providing at least \$74,596 in services. The program realizes a higher gain in volunteer time than the \$70,000 annual operating budget which seeds this effort.

With recent EPA mandates for Chesapeake Bay restoration, it makes no economic sense to take money from habitat restoration and bay-friendly landscaping education programs like those carried out by IMA and Green Springs Gardens. Proposed cuts to the Park Authority budget threaten quality of life and economic vitality in Fairfax County. At risk is the public outreach,

education and preservation service our parks provide on a very modest budget—assisted by a corps of dedicated volunteers.

The win-win solution for the environment, the budget, and tax-paying constituents is for Fairfax County to invest money to maintain, if not expand support of the IMA, riparian buffer, and Green Springs environmental education programs.”