

Save Our County Parks

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. As a Fairfax County citizen and parks volunteer, I respectfully suggest the County Board of Supervisors *consider sustaining funding to county parks at the current level approved for FY2010* for two reasons: 1) The Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) budget cannot manage another cut after nine years of level funding (no increase) from the County and one (FY2010) a reduction of 14%; 2) We should support the outstanding programs and services in environmentally responsible homescape and landscape management made annually by park staff and hundreds of volunteers; their work is an important contribution to the health and well-being of Fairfax County citizens in their homes and businesses.

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 alone, Green Spring Gardens Park (GSGP) volunteers gave 14,367 volunteer hours and made 9,223 citizen contacts in the gardens, horticulture center, historic manor house and children’s programs (both in public schools and GSGP). This volunteer action to educate and serve the citizens of Fairfax County in 2009 was the county equivalent of \$188, 638 in compensation from Green Springs Garden Park—a generous return on the county’s investment.

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 produced by our parks staff and volunteers. 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 Invasive Management Area, riparian buffer, and Green Springs environmental education programs. Budget hearings are scheduled for April 6-8, 2010. For more information, www.fairfaxcounty.gov/government/budget/.

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