

# Friends of Huntley Meadows Park

December 2009

Email: [info@friendsofhuntleymeadows.org](mailto:info@friendsofhuntleymeadows.org)  
Website: [www.Friendsofhuntleymeadows.org](http://www.Friendsofhuntleymeadows.org)



## Park Manager's Message

This has been such an exciting and eventful year for wildlife happenings at Huntley Meadows and I've had a great time sharing it with you.

Writing about the abundance of biodiversity that lives in this sanctuary and the importance of preserving king rails, giant silk moths, unicorn beetles, and hognose snakes is a good way to spend my time in front of this computer. *Today, however, I'm very concerned about the future of Huntley Meadows Park and the other eight sites managed by the Fairfax*

*County Park Authority's*

*Resource Management Division:*

*Riverbend Park, Ellanor C. Lawrence Park, Hidden Pond Nature Center, Hidden Oaks Nature Center, Green Spring Gardens, Frying Pan Farm Park, Sully Historic Site, and Colvin Run Mill.* These sites all desperately need your help and I'm using my space in this newsletter to ask for it. The proposed budget cuts for the Resource Management Division (RMD) for fiscal year 2011 (FY11) are substantial and potentially crippling to these nine sites – nine of the most unique, valuable and significant pieces of land in Fairfax County. In addition, cultural and natural resource programs and projects outside of these sites could also be affected.

### Here are the facts:

- 1) The Park Authority and Libraries are the *only* county agencies being asked to cut their operating budgets by 15% in FY11. (RMD budgets were already cut by over 20% in FY 10, so that's a 35% cut in just two years).
- 2) For RMD, that works out to over \$700,000 in additional cuts for FY11.
- 3) If this cut goes through, it means the loss of 14 staff positions, potential site closures, decreases in programs

and services, and less management and protection of the county's natural and cultural resources.

It's our job (and my nature) to see each problem as a new challenge and to forge ahead with optimism. However, this is a serious situation that must be looked at honestly and as county residents whose taxes fund our park system, you need to know the situation your parks are in. RMD and its nine sites will hopefully survive this cut, but we will not be the same division. These parks will change. The programs, projects, maintenance, management and resource protection that these parks are known for will be reduced, and in some cases, lost. Some sites may have to close.

Our visitors tell us that environmental education, resource management and protection of natural lands are vital to the health, well-being, and quality of life in Fairfax County. RMD's nine parks spend 365 days a year engaged in those three endeavors. They're now on the edge and need your help to survive. This isn't about budgets and spreadsheets – it's about educating the public, preserving wildlife, plants, and cultural history, as well as keeping our air and water clean.

Please take advantage of living in a democracy and make your voice heard.

Talk to your representatives on the County Board of Supervisors and/or the Park Authority Board and share with them what makes this county home for you, what quality of life issues you consider important and what influences your vote. To find out what you can do to help, contact the Friends of Huntley Meadows Park, [www.friendsofhuntleymeadows.org](http://www.friendsofhuntleymeadows.org).

Thank you for your interest and many contributions of time and support that keep this park and division going!

**Kevin Munroe**




Huntley News


**Dragonfly Surveys** – With the help of many volunteers, we conducted four dragonfly surveys this year and explored little-known sections of the park. We found two species new to Huntley Meadows: Lancet Clubtail and Twin-spotted Spiketail. The spiketail was an especially good sign as it prefers clean streams. We actually watched a female laying eggs in East Barnyard Run! We also had probable sightings of two new additions to the park’s dragonfly list, the Clamp-tipped Emerald and Black-shouldered Spinyleg. We’ll be out again next year to track down these last two species and perhaps even more new species. Dragonfly diversity, just like bird diversity, can be used to measure an ecosystem’s health and serves as an important tool for natural resource managers.

**Historic Huntley Restoration** – We hope to move forward with restoration of the Historic Huntley Mansion, its surrounding buildings and the site itself. Look for work to start this spring. Contact park staff or Friends of Historic Huntley, [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/histhunt/hh11.htm](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/histhunt/hh11.htm) for more information.

**Barnyard Run Restoration** – Hundreds of native trees and shrubs have been planted along East Barnyard Run and its tributaries that flow into the central wetland. This should not only help stabilize eroding stream banks that dump silt into the wetland, but also provide important food and habitat for the park’s songbirds, caterpillars, flying

*Gifts of Huntley Meadows Park in your year-end giving. Donations to support educational programs, resource management needs and park restoration are important in preserving our beloved park.*

found a home in the berms that surround the stream. Many thanks to the Hunting Creek

Garden Club for their generous donation to fund this project. This spring we’ll be creating a Garden Keepers club of volunteers to help care for the outdoor classroom’s native plant gardens, bird and bees boxes, frog ponds and rain barrels. Keep your eyes and ears open for opportunities to be part of this exciting project.

**New Exhibit on Huntley’s Aviation History**—Harry and Anna Marie Lehman of the Friends of Beacon Field Airport have created a new display for the Huntley Meadows Visitor Center. *"Barnstormers and Mailmen: Local Airport History"* tells the stories of the former Beacon Field and Hybla Valley Airports. Discover the purpose of the beacon that Beacon Shopping Center is named for and learn the real story behind the dirigible landing site effort in the 1930s. For more information on the airfield’s history, visit [www.beaconfieldairport.com](http://www.beaconfieldairport.com).

**Not-So-Good News Department**—Mike Ready, who’s been a Monday Morning Birdwalk regular for many years and is almost never without his camera, captured these photos in the main wetland at Huntley on September 13, 2009. For those of you who may not recognize this fish, it’s the invasive snakehead. The only good news is that some herons, snapping turtles or some other animals are on the job. If you see this fish at Huntley, please let the staff know.





## President's Message



### *Please take immediate action!*

Anthony Griffin, the Fairfax County Executive, has asked the Fairfax County Park Authority to prepare a budget proposal for FY2011 with a 15% additional cut to the current budget. These proposed cuts will be submitted and reviewed by Mr. Griffin and the Board of Supervisors in November and December. If the full 15% cut is adopted, then the Resource Management Division will lose (abolish) 14 positions. Eight of these positions will be cut from the nine FCPA parks. These cuts will result in reduced hours at parks, staff working at more than one park and RMD projects abolished and/or reduced.

The Park Authority and the Public Libraries are the only two agencies in Fairfax County that are being asked for a proposed 15% cut. All other agencies are being asked for an average of 3%. Apparently, Mr. Griffin believes that Parks and Libraries are discretionary. The current budgets of these two agencies comprise less than 2% of the total county budget.

It is crucial that you contact Mr. Griffin, the County Board of Supervisors, and the Park Authority Board and let them know that these kinds of cuts are not what the County Taxpayers want. We need to impress upon them that they need to support ways to increase revenue. Suggestions such as increasing the property tax rate, reinstating the Fairfax County vehicle sticker fee, and allowing parks to charge parking fees should all be considered.

The Friends groups at the RMD sites are doing what they can to fill the gaps left from cuts. They are raising money to hire interns, to provide funds for seasonal salaries, and to support programs and resource management projects. An additional 15% cut will have a noticeable impact on services at the parks.

The Park Authority and RMD have worked hard over the past 2-3 years to increase their revenue. Currently about 60% of their budget is revenue supported and 40% tax supported. The Resource Management Division is tasked with a major part of the Park Authority Mission, which includes the conservation and management of open space and of cultural sites within Fairfax County for the use and educational benefit of its citizens. These natural and cultural sites are of great value to the education of our residents and require support from the taxpayers, just as schools do.

Please take the time to contact the Board of Supervisors, Park Authority Board members, and Anthony Griffin, the County Executive. Contact info is below. If you have any media contacts and/or would like to write a letter to local newspapers, do it. We need to get the word out as quickly as possible. If you know any young people who want to get involved and write letters and emails, please encourage them. I think this would be a great community service. This is our chance to make a difference - Take it! Thank you.

*Kathi McNeil*

***If you don't have time to write your own letter, please sign the letter included in this newsletter. Fold in three, seal and stamp. To be of further help, please make copies of it, sign, and send to the following addresses:***

**Call the Budget Hotline to register your comments, Calls accepted until mid-December. 703-324-9400**

**Email your budget comments and find out about public budget hearings that will be held on December 2nd at [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/budget](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/budget).**

Anthony Griffin, County Executive  
12000 Government Center Parkway  
Suite 552  
Fairfax, VA 22035  
[www.fairfaxcounty.gov/cex](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/cex)  
703-324-2531

Jeff McKay, Lee District Supervisor  
Franconia Governmental Center  
6121 Franconia Road  
Alexandria, VA 22310  
[www.fairfaxcounty.gov/lee](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/lee)  
703-971-6262

Sharon Bulova, Chairman  
Fairfax County Board of Supervisors  
12000 Government Center Parkway  
Suite 530  
Fairfax, VA 22035  
[Chairman@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Chairman@fairfaxcounty.gov)

Ed Batten, Lee District Representative  
Fairfax County Park Authority Board  
12055 Government Center Parkway Suite 927  
Fairfax, VA 22035  
[parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)

William G. Bouie, Chairman  
Fairfax County Park Authority Board  
12055 Government Center Pkwy, Suite 927  
Fairfax, VA 22035  
[Bbouie@aol.com](mailto:Bbouie@aol.com)

Contact FCPA Board through Judy Pederson at  
703-324-8662



# Winter Happenings



## Huntley's Holiday Happening

**Sunday, December 13<sup>th</sup>, 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.**

Join us for our third annual winter holiday event! Enjoy refreshments while you do your holiday shopping in our Visitor Center. At 2:00 p.m., attend the opening reception of the FOHMP Photography Show with photos taken exclusively at the park. Later, make a holiday craft. After that, do some more shopping! A wide array of nature-oriented gifts are available for purchase including Gwen Frostic notecards, calendars, nature books for all ages, animal ornaments, locally handcrafted jewelry and new Huntley Meadows t-shirts and ball caps. When your shopping is done, take a walk in the park. A perfectly enjoyable way to spend a December afternoon. Please come!

## Special Winter Programs

*Evenings at the Huntley Meadows Park Visitor Center, 703-768-2525*

### Flying Dragons

*Gifts of Huntley Meadows Park in your year-end giving. Environmental programs, resource management needs and park management important in preserving our beloved park.*

ph through the air? What do they eat, who eats surprising answers from this colorful presentation. Create the perfect dragonfly pond on your own. \$6 (Ages 11 and up)

### Native Wildflower Meadows

Saturday January 30, 5-6:30 p.m.

Learn why the native grasses and wildflowers found in Virginia's meadows are so important and discover all the colorful wildlife that calls them home. We'll focus on what makes a Northern Virginia meadow and how to install, manage and enjoy your own "pocket" meadow in modern-day suburbia. Native meadow seed packets will be on sale. Children must be accompanied by an adult. \$6 (Ages 11 and up)

### All A-Buzz About Bees

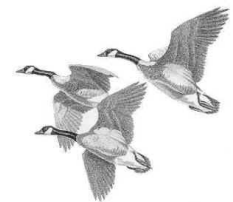
Saturday February 20, 5-6:30 p.m.

Learn all about the fascinating lives of our native bees, how they contribute to the human world and what you can do to attract them to your gardens. We'll discuss the best plans for bee boxes and how to build and care for them. Children must be accompanied by an adult. Reservations required. \$6 (Ages 11 and up)



## Huntley Meadows Park Meeting Room Rental

*Have your office or club retreat in the midst of a premier wetland sanctuary!*



The Huntley Meadows Visitor Center is a great place for a meeting, training or team building. The multi-purpose room can be set up with tables and chairs for up to 50 people – full AV equipment available. Participants can enjoy the center's informative exhibits on local natural and cultural history, as well as the gift store featuring nature-related books, jewelry, and stationery. A naturalist-led tour of the 50 acre wetland on the half-mile boardwalk trail can be arranged for an extra fee. Tables can be set up for a self-catered lunch. Please call the Visitor Center at 703-768-2525 for more details. The rental fee is \$50/hour (20% discount for non-profit).



## Winter Programs



### **The Friends of Huntley Meadows Park invite you to attend the opening reception of the 2009 Photography Contest on Sunday December 13, 2-4:00 p.m.**

*The FOHMP Photo Contest is a nature-themed photography contest and a Friends of Huntley Meadows Park fundraiser. The public is invited to attend our opening reception and awards presentation. All photographs were taken at the park and include entries in a youth division. The photographs can be seen in the multi-purpose room through February. All monies raised from entries and sale of photographs go to support Huntley Meadows Park. Please plan to come enjoy our opening reception featuring refreshments and an awards ceremony.*

### **Owl Outing**

Saturday December 5, 4:30-6:30 p.m.

Learn about the secret lives of the park's resident owls. Following the indoor presentation, take an off-trail walk in search of these nocturnal birds of prey.

Sponsored by FOHMP. Reservations required. Call HMP at 703-768-2525. Cancelled if rain. \$6 Adults

### **Birding for Beginners**

Saturday January 9, 8-10:30 a.m.

Winter is a great time to begin birding. Program starts with a discussion about field guides and optics then we'll walk to look for resident birds. Reservations required. \$6 Adults

### **Café Cattail**

Friday January 22, 7-9:30 p.m.

Welcome to Huntley Meadows' very own coffeehouse! Enjoy a relaxing evening applauding our community's talents. Musicians, dancers and poets are encouraged to share their arts with a nature theme. Sponsored by FOHMP. Free

### **Winter Hike- Marvelous Meadows**

Saturday February 6, 2-4:00 p.m.

Chase the winter blues away with a two mile hike to the meadows on the South King's Highway side of the park. Look for winter hawks and ducks, insect galls, and bluebirds and goldfinches. Children must be accompanied by an adult. \$6 (9 and up)

### **Drummers and Drillers**

Saturday February 6, 9:30-11:30 a.m.

As they drum and drill on trees, woodpeckers are ridding our yards and woodlands of ants, wasps, and grubs.

Watch a variety of woodpeckers on the park's suet feeders, learn how to attract them to your yard, and hopefully glimpse a flicker on its mission to eat a thousand insects in a day! Reservations required. \$6 Adults

### **Naturally Sweet!**

Saturday February 13, 1-3:00 p.m.

Celebrate Valentine's weekend in a natural way. Take a stroll with a naturalist through forest and meadow, then warm up with a pastry and hot beverage at popular café, Grounded Coffee. Meet at S. King's Highway entrance. Reservations required. \$10. Adults

### **Wonderful Wetland Waterfowl**

Saturday February 20, 2-4 p.m.

Hike the boardwalk to the observation tower. Look for green-winged teals, pintails, swamp sparrows, winter wrens, and hopefully spot a bald eagle. Children must be accompanied by an adult. \$6 (9 and up)

### *Just for kids*

#### **Winter Chills and Thrills**

Saturday January 30 and Sunday January 31

Monday February 1, 1-3:00 p.m.

Discover how wildlife copes with winter by playing games, making crafts and exploring self-guided activities. Children must be accompanied by an adult. Sponsored by FOHMP. \$4/child (5-10 yrs.)

#### **Young Explorers - Holiday Crafts**

Monday December 7, 3:15-4:30 p.m.

Join the fun of making holiday gifts, ornaments and cards with a nature theme. Reservations required. \$6 (6-8 yrs.)

#### **Nature Detectives - Holiday Crafts**

Wednesday December 9 or

Thursday December 10, 10-10:45 a.m.

Listen to a winter tale, and then make a holiday ornament. Reservations required. \$6 (3-5 yrs.)

#### **Bones!**

Sunday February 28, 1-3 p.m.

Every skeleton has a secret. Search clues left behind in animal skulls, teeth and bones. Reservations required. \$6 (9-12 yrs.) Call HMP at 703-768-2525.



Dear Friends of Huntley Meadows Park,

I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to you all for providing me with the opportunity to attend an Advanced Plant Identification course at Environmental Concern's Wetland Learning Center in St. Michaels, Maryland. I thoroughly enjoyed the class and learned a great deal. The instructor, William Sipple, worked for Maryland Dept. of Natural Resource's tidal wetland group from 1971-1979 and was an ecologist with the Environmental Protection Agency, wetlands division, from 1979-2003. Bill is an incredible field botanist and was a pleasure to learn from in the field and the classroom. We covered an incredible amount of material over the three-day course and I hope to retain as much of that as possible. Bill has done a little consulting work for Huntley Meadows Park in the past and has nothing but praise for our wonderful park. On several occasions he mentioned the amazing plant diversity and beautiful wetland at Huntley Meadows to the entire class and Environmental Concern staff.

Thank you all very much,

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***Friends of Huntley Meadows Park Board***

Kathi McNeil, President  
Sarah Stromayer, Vice-president  
Sally Cureton, Treasurer  
Glenn Curtis, Secretary  
Connie Carpender, Membership  
P.J. Dunn, Webmaster  
Marianne Mooney, Newsletter Editor

At-large board members:  
Harry Glasgow  
Andy Higgs  
Norma Hoffman  
Ben Jesup  
Suzanne Lepple  
Charles Studholme

Send newsletter submissions to: [m.mooney@comcast.net](mailto:m.mooney@comcast.net)

**Holiday Gifting**

**This Christmas, give the gift of nature to friends and loved ones through a membership to the Friends of Huntley Meadows Park. Your gift will support the park and will introduce someone new to Huntley Meadows. A life membership is \$150, family memberships are \$20, and individual memberships are \$15. For all new gift memberships, the recipient will receive an announcement of their membership, a current FOHMP newsletter and the Great blue heron park patch. An additional purchase of a HMP sweatshirt, hat or t-shirt would complete the gift!**



## Nuthatches Understand Chickadees' Language

Black-capped Chickadees' vocalizations are more sophisticated than a casual human listener might realize. The familiar *chick-a-dee* call repertoire, for example, conveys an amazing variety of information. In the 1980s, Jack P. Hailman and colleagues documented 362 different *chick-a-dee* call types, analyzed their structure and context, and concluded that the whole communication system of this species is similar in some respects to human language.

Warning of a predator's presence is one vital purpose of their calls. M. S. Ficken and Steve R. Witkin pointed out in 1977 that the *chick-a-dee* vocalizations instigate mobbing of a perched raptor (*Auk* 94:156–157). They found the calls to be quite effective, but they could scarcely have realized how precise the alarms are.

Recent research shows that by varying their calls, chickadees actually describe an avian predator's size and, thus, tell their companions how much danger the predator represents. A smaller, faster predator is a greater threat than is a larger, slower one. Reporting the chickadees' ability in 2005, Christopher N. Templeton, Erick Greene, and Kate Davis refer to the vocabulary—which also includes a high *seet* to warn of flying predators—as “one of the most subtle and sophisticated signaling systems yet discovered”. (*Science* 308:1934–1937). The authors experimentally confronted chickadees in an aviary with 13 species of perched raptors ranging in size from Northern Pygmy-Owl to Great Horned Owl. The chickadees reacted to relatively small, fast, and more maneuverable predators with more and longer calls, which also had characteristics reflecting greater agitation. Further, the calls aroused more intense and persistent mobbing of high-threat predators by other chickadees in the captive group.

As birders know, chickadees form the nucleus of multi-species flocks, and, conversely, other species seem to be attracted to flocks of chickadees. These other songbirds sometimes join chickadees in harassing predators.

At least ten other species participate in mobbing when they hear chickadees' alarm calls, according to experiments reported by Christine Hurd in 1996 (*Behavioral Ecology and Sociobiology* 38:287–292). Templeton and Greene document a remarkable example of this interspecific communication in 2007

(*Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 104:5479–5482). They demonstrate that Red-breasted Nuthatches not only can recognize the general import of Black-capped Chickadees' warnings but also can understand fine details of the chickadees' language. This time the authors experimented with a pair of nuthatches in the wild. Speakers hidden at the base of a tree played small-predator and large-predator call types in the nuthatches' presence. The test was whether the nuthatches could distinguish the two different *chick-a-dee* alarms denoting high-threat and low-threat predators. Indeed, the nuthatches responded in chickadee-like fashion. They showed much stronger mobbing behavior to playback of the small-predator warn-

ings. In particular, they were more likely to fly to the tree with the small-predator warning, they moved closer to the speaker, they spent much longer in mobbing behavior, and they more often showed wing-flicking activity indicating agitation.

Thus, nuthatches evidently understand the exact meaning of each call. Templeton and Greene doubt that the nuthatches' comprehension simply arises from any similarities with their own calls, because nuthatches' alarm calls differ fundamentally from those of chickadees. Rather, the authors speculate that Red-breasted Nuthatches translate the foreign language by “eavesdropping” on the chickadees and learning which call corresponds to which degree of danger.

*Article reprinted with the kind permission of the author, Paul Hess.*

*The article first appeared in the November/December 2007 issue of Birding, a publication of the American Birding Association, [www.aba.org](http://www.aba.org).*



***Friends of Huntley Meadows Park  
Membership and Renewal Form***

*Please support Huntley Meadows Park by joining our Friends group. By becoming a member, you will help to protect and preserve the park. Your dues will help fund new initiatives and programs and your support will help us to be advocates for the park. Fill out and mail the application to this address:*

**Friends of Huntley Meadows Park  
3701 Lockheed Blvd.  
Alexandria, VA 22306**

***Dues information:***

- \$15 Individual
- \$20 Family
- \$10 Student/Senior
- \$150 Lifetime membership

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

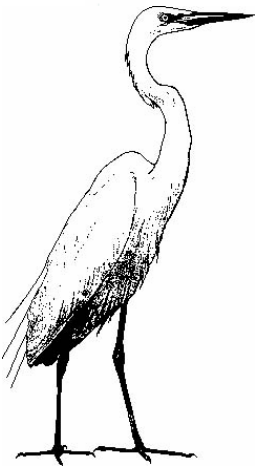
**Telephone:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email:** \_\_\_\_\_



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**Friends of Huntley Meadows Park  
3701 Lockheed Blvd  
Alexandria, VA 22306**



Please check your mailing label for accuracy and notify us of any changes.  
Your membership expirations date is in the upper left corner.



November 22, 2009

Sharon Bulova, Chairman  
Fairfax County Board of Supervisors  
12000 Government Center Parkway, Suite 530  
Fairfax, VA 22035

Dear Chairman Bulova,

I am a Friend of Huntley Meadows Park, a Fairfax County Park Authority site with over 1,400 acres of wetlands, forests and meadows. With an active school field trip, children and adult program schedule at the Visitor Center, it is also one of the best places in the county for educational outreach to the public. I am writing to object to the Fairfax County Executive's decision to reduce the budget of the Fairfax County Park Authority by 15% in fiscal year 2011. The Park Authority is still reeling from the impacts of the FY2010 18% budget cut. The inequity of this decision is appalling. All other county agencies, except Public Libraries, are being asked to make only a 3% cut in FY11. To demand a disproportionate cut from an agency that is only .08% of the County's total budget is unreasonable.

Because the Resource Management Division of the FCPA is 60% tax supported, there will be serious ramifications from the choices that the Park Authority will have to make in balancing its budget. This excessive budget cut will have negative effects on natural and cultural resource protection in the county. For example, the Invasives Management Program, which employs dozens of volunteers, will be abolished. Natural resource volunteer projects on County parkland will end, including important riparian buffer planting projects. The Board of Supervisors' stated environmental goals are in great part carried out by the Resource Management Division. The three primary goals include energy conservation, protection for the County's natural resources, and the major charge of "*Open space conservation, which seeks to preserve and protect stream valleys, woodlands and other ecologically valuable areas to protect plant and animal life*". Fully half of the FCPA's mission encompasses the goals set by the County Board. Besides creating opportunities for recreation, the Park Authority's mission is to "*set aside public spaces for and assist citizens in the protection and enhancement of environmental values, diversity of natural habitats and cultural heritage to guarantee that these resources will be available to both present and future generations*". Open space conservation will suffer and, with cuts resulting in reduced operating hours at nature centers and historic sites, the public's use and understanding of these resources will decline.

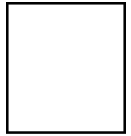
Fairfax County parks are important to the quality of life of residents. In a far-ranging 2006 FCPA survey, walking in parks was the number one preferred leisure activity by the majority of respondents. Losing access through the inability of the Park Authority to maintain and staff parks will deal a blow to many people in the county from school-children on field trips to families enjoying nature walks and programs. While the FCPA budget is less than one percent of the county's total budget, its mission is central to the health and well-being of the county's citizens and to the environment. Fairfax County officials have consistently touted and promoted the quality of life in the county, especially its wonderful park system and natural resources. I ask that you stand behind your commitment now. Please do not submit the Park Authority to such a damaging budget cut.

Sincerely yours,

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Sharon Bulova, Chairman  
Fairfax County Board of Supervisors  
12000 Government Center Parkway Suite 530  
Fairfax, VA 22035

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