



## **Regulation to Reduce Unnecessary Use of Pesticides in Montgomery County**

**Letter Sent on Dec 10, 2014 by Kit Gage  
President, Friends of Sligo Creek**

Dear Members of the Montgomery County Council,

I am writing on behalf of the board of directors of Friends of Sligo Creek with regard to possible regulation to reduce unnecessary use of pesticides in the County. Since such legislation would affect the work of Friends of Sligo Creek, our Board of Directors has carefully considered this proposal and we offer our perspective here.

As you may know, Friends of Sligo Creek (FOSC) is a nonprofit, all-volunteer, community organization dedicated to enhancing the natural beauty and ecological health of Sligo Creek Park and its surrounding watershed. In support of our goals, we work primarily on litter control, removal of non-native invasive plants, improving water quality and stormwater control, and educating residents about wildlife habitats and their enhancement. An important part of our work is engaging the community in appreciating and protecting the Park.

Most of the Sligo Creek watershed is in Montgomery County, so the pesticide bill you are considering that would affect how and whether pesticides are used and applied is of direct concern to us. We understand that pesticides applied in our watershed can find their way to the creek or its tributaries, with potentially damaging results. Even when these chemicals don't migrate from their target site, they can have detrimental effects on wildlife and natural habitat. For example, insecticides targeted at Japanese beetles or aphids also kill butterflies, pollinators, and other beneficial or benign insects. The loss of these insects, in turn, deprives birds and other animals of an essential food source. Herbicides that kill dandelions also damage native plants that contribute to biodiversity in open spaces such as yards. Because of these and other problems, the FOSC Board has always appreciated strict limits on use of pesticides.

In the County, pesticide use (including herbicides, fungicides, and insecticides) no doubt ranges from those who apply pesticides across wide areas of lawn and ornamental plantings to others who targeted their applications very carefully to manage only very specific pests that are impractical to control otherwise.

The Board of FOSC has much experience with the latter, highly targeted approach through our work with the Montgomery County Parks Department in controlling non-native invasive plants in Sligo Creek Park. Among these are kudzu, Japanese knotweed, mile-a-minute, honeysuckle, bittersweet, bamboo, and porcelainberry. Parks staff and contractors try to apply herbicides directly to individual plants after they are cut in order to limit the amount of herbicide needed. The chemicals are used only by trained and licensed applicators under the control of Montgomery County Parks. In all cases, the chemicals help restore or maintain a healthy habitat by getting rid of highly noxious alien weeds. (Never is the goal merely "cosmetic.") The FOSC Board believes these uses are legitimate and necessary. This targeted use by trained and licensed professionals, we believe, runs little risk of harm to humans or the natural environment in comparison with its benefit to limit non-native invasive plant monocultures. For these reasons, we support this kind of pesticide use. We understand that the pesticide bill as introduced would continue to allow this integrated pest management kind of use and we appreciate that exemption. .

In sum, we believe there is an important role for the responsible use of pesticides in public and private spaces, as exemplified by the herbicide practices used by Montgomery County in combating non-native invasive plants in Sligo Creek Park. However, because of the potential for environmental problems from some other non-essential uses of pesticides we endorse efforts to develop approaches to limit their

unwarranted use. Finally, we will continue to educate residents on the potential damage caused by the careless use of pesticides.