



Testimony and e-mails to Council & Executive voicing support for Parks in the 2011 operating budget

Sent on April 5, 2010 by the Board of *Friends of Sligo Creek*

Speaking on behalf of the Board of the Friends of Sligo Creek I want to express our support for our exceptional park system in general, and in particular, say a few words in support of key programs that are working to protect the natural benefits of our public lands and waterways.

Over the last decade, our County government through the Parks Department and the Department of Environmental Protection has been making important strides in developing programs that protect streams and water quality and improve natural habitat. These efforts not only improve the health of Park woodlands and streams, but also help clean-up the Potomac and Anacostia rivers, and ultimately the Chesapeake Bay.

Many of these programs, such as the "Weed Warriors", conservation and planting of trees, stormwater management, and litter control make very effective use of volunteers. For example, our group, the Friends of Sligo Creek, has contributed literally thousands of hours each year in removing non-native invasive plants, building raingardens, and picking up litter. Having County staff to design, coordinate and support these programs has been an extremely effective way to leverage much useful action at low cost.

We fully appreciate that these are tough times for government budgets, but strongly feel that the small portion of County resources that goes to protect our streams and parks is already being very efficiently and wisely used.. Significantly cutting these efforts would not only destroy the forward momentum they've created in preserving our environment, but in some cases, like controlling invasive plants and deer, actually remove the potential of certain parklands to ever recover a healthy biodiversity of plants and animals. Let me very briefly mention three programs that we've heard have been unwisely targetted for large cuts:

First are cuts to the County's Tree Aftercare Program run by the Horticultural Services. Areas currently planted with trees would not be maintained leading to potential failure due to threats from deer, invasive vines, and lack of watering and mulching. This wastes money already spent. Other lost services include programs that recycle plant waste at the facility for use on public lands. These programs save taxpayer money by reducing dumpster costs, use of chemical fertilizers, and buying of mulch.

Second are cuts to the Park program that combats invasive vines and other non-native plants. This program makes very effective use of volunteers to save park trees from being overwhelmed by vines. Again, this is a program that actually saves resources in the long run.

Last is the County's very effective deer management program. This fifteen year-old effort is one of the most effective programs in the country. Managing the population of deer saves agricultural and ornamental plantings, prevents automobile accidents, saves wildlife habitat, and reduces likelihood of lyme disease.

All three of these programs directly improve our Parks and other public spaces. As you well know, one of the key traits that great companies and institutions look for in locating in our County, are the quality of it's parks.

Thank you for your past efforts to ensure our County has one of the best park systems in the United States and that our waterways are adequately protected. I know from personal experience that you all are working very hard to do the right thing. I invite you to look over our website, www.fosc.org, for more information about our group.

