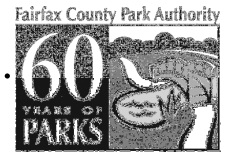




# FAIRFAX COUNTY PARK AUTHORITY



12055 Government Center Parkway, Suite 927 • Fairfax, VA 22035-1118  
703-324-8700 • Fax: 703-324-3974 • [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks)

March 17, 2010

Dear Park Advocate:

Fairfax County's national award-winning park system is a force for economic strength and community betterment, but budget cuts threaten to blunt the positive power of parks. Before that happens, we're asking the Board of Supervisors to assess the return on the county's investment in its parks. Our park system faces an 11.3% reduction in General Fund support in FY 2011, a proposed reduction of more than \$2.6 million plus concurrent reductions in our Revenue Fund and maintenance funding. While we recognize the need for each agency to help weather this financial storm, the Park Authority will have suffered recurring reductions of more than \$7 million, nearly 28%, since FY 2007 and 61 positions total.

The impacts are dramatic. Park users will see changes resulting from a decrease of 41 positions in FY 2011 on top of the 20 positions reduced in FY 2010, and significantly reduced funding of \$541,365 for athletic field and park maintenance. Park mowing, trail grooming and trash pick-up will be greatly reduced. More than one dozen park bathrooms will be closed. Court lighting will be eliminated. These new reductions will exacerbate the impact of previous reductions that are just being realized. Less than one penny from each tax dollar supports the Park Authority

Parks play a crucial part in advancement of the county's environmental agenda. They are sanctuaries for wildlife. Their green space and trees reduce air pollution and water pollution. Based on U.S. Forest Service calculations, over a 50-year lifetime just a single tree generates \$31,250 worth of oxygen, provides \$62,000 worth of air pollution control, recycles \$37,500 worth of water, and controls \$31,250 worth of soil erosion

The social benefits of parks may be harder to quantify but that value is clearly recognized by Fairfax County's residents. Parks are popular with every Fairfax County demographic - young and old, rich and poor. Eight of 10 households say a quality park system is extremely or very important to their quality of life here, and those who use parks rate the quality of life in the county much higher than those who don't use parks.

On the economic side, parks are a vital component of the "Fairfax Advantage" that's cited by the Economic Development Authority in bids to attract new business. In promotional materials, EDA features parkland and recreational opportunities to illustrate the county's outstanding quality of life, and its recent survey found that nearly half (47 percent) of suburban workers would change jobs to be in a location that offered the amenities they want, with more parks and open spaces at the top of the most wanted list.

Good parks are good medicine. The Centers for Disease Control has called for the creation of more parks and playgrounds, citing studies showing that access to parks for physical activity results in a 25% increase in the percentage of people exercising on three or more days per week. Regular physical activity reduces the risk of heart disease, hypertension, cancers, diabetes, and



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depression. It's the prescription for combating the nation's obesity epidemic. About one-third of America's children and teenagers are now classified as overweight or obese, according to CDC data. To reverse the trend, we have to make it easier for families to choose healthy options.

That's where parks come in.

Surveys show that 79% of County households use parks; that's higher than any other Northern Virginia jurisdiction, and it equates to over 300,000 households. The numbers demonstrate that we have a receptive audience for our on-going campaign to get kids and grown-ups moving towards better health. In fact, Fairfax County residents love their parks as evidenced by their continuing support for park bonds. Most recently, despite a dismal economic outlook, 68% of voters approved a \$65 million referendum to finance capital projects. Over the past 60 years, voters have said yes to parks time and time again, approving \$400 million in bond financing.

If we're going to persuade people to take a trail instead of a car to neighborhood shops and to play ball instead of a computer game, we need a maintenance program that keeps parks inviting and safe for these no-fee options for active recreation. We need creative, knowledgeable naturalists at our nature centers that can educate as they inspire kids to play outdoors. We need management of natural and cultural resources to ensure that those treasures are waiting to be discovered by a new generation.

We've reached a tipping point. The ability of parks to make a difference in the quality of life in Fairfax County and to continue contributing to both the health of our community and its economic vitality will be compromised by the proposed budget cuts for fiscal year 2011.

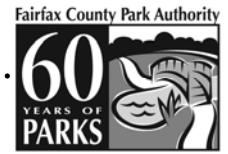
Help your elected officials connect the dots that show the link between investments in parks and the benefits we each receive from our parks. For FY 2011 budget reduction information go online to <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dmb/>. Share your feedback at [http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/survey/fy11\\_budget\\_comment.htm](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/survey/fy11_budget_comment.htm), or by phone at 703-324-9400. Voice your opinion by speaking at budget hearings. Sign up online at [https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/bosclerk/speaker\\_bos.htm](https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/bosclerk/speaker_bos.htm). You can also reach out directly to your supervisor by going online for listings at <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/government/board/>. Together, we can make a difference and help protect these precious resources.

Sincerely,

William G. Bouie  
Chairman



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March 17, 2010

Dear Sports Enthusiasts and Park Supporters:

Over the past 60 years, the Fairfax County Park Authority has grown in order to meet the expanding demand for services in this community. In 1977, the county park system included 190 parks on about 11,000 acres, with 60 athletic fields, 60 miles of trails, more than 80 tennis courts and 60 playgrounds. A staff of 140 maintained the grounds and facilities.

Today, the Park Authority features 417 parks on 22,600 acres, with 290 athletic fields, 310 miles of trails, 224 tennis courts and 201 playgrounds. Residents of this community have witnessed explosive system wide growth in all areas; except in the number of full time staff and in operational dollars for these resources and facilities. In fact, the number of maintenance personnel – those folks charged with maintaining our fields, courts, playgrounds, trails and open space now number 131, down from a high of 140 staff members. It may be just a 6% decrease but acreage to care for is up by more than 200% and if proposed cuts are implemented, the Park Authority will be forced to lay-off more workers, making the staffing reduction a 20% cutback.

County Executive Anthony Griffin has proposed a 7.5% cut to the Park Authority's Maintenance Fund (Fund 303). With another 18 grounds maintenance positions threatened by budget cuts, we have reached a tipping point. This potential loss means parks will be less inviting. Trash pick-up, mowing, athletic field grooming, trail inspections and tree hazard removal will all be reduced.

Additionally, the County Executive has recommended an 11.3% cut to the Park Authority's General Fund. These reductions, if approved by the Board of Supervisors, will significantly impair the Park Authority's ability to provide appropriate levels of field and park maintenance.

Thanks to reorganization, improved efficiencies, additional training and more specialized operating equipment the Park Authority Park Operations Division continues to do more with less. A motivated and dedicated workforce helps make that a reality. However, there comes a time when regardless of staff determination, reductions have an impact.

These reductions come at a time of renewed popularity for parks which offer an affordable and convenient place to recreate. A recent survey by the Trust for Public Land shows people are making greater use of parks and playgrounds during the recession, especially young families with children. More than 18 million visitors came to Fairfax County's nationally-acclaimed parks last year. Will they still want to visit parks that are ill-maintained?

What does this mean to you? How will the 225,000 players who come to our athletic fields each year be impacted? How will all park visitors feel the sting of these reductions?



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- Athletic field conditions are likely to decline and field closures after rain events will increase.
- Deteriorating athletic fields will have to be removed from use to ensure player safety.
- Seeding and aeration of all athletic fields will stop and two turf management positions will be eliminated in the Park Authority.
- Player benches and bleachers will not be maintained at school athletic fields.
- Playing conditions will degrade as the mowing schedule is reduced.
- High school athletic fields will no longer enjoy warning track maintenance and vegetation control on infield skin areas will be stopped.
- Twelve ground maintenance staff members will be eliminated.
- Trash collection will be less frequent, restrooms closed at 14 community parks and grooming of athletic fields will be reduced.
- Two park recreation specialists, responsible for maintenance management of 85 parks and 40 athletic fields will be eliminated.

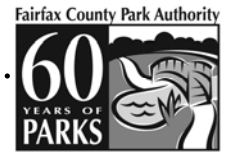
Please join me in spreading the word about the impact of budget cuts on local parks. Please take a moment to let your Board of Supervisors representative know that parks want to do their fair share in these difficult times but another 11.3% reduction, on top of four years of cuts is too much and inequitable. For FY 2011 budget reduction information go online at <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dmb/>. Share your feedback at [http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/survey/fy11\\_budget\\_comment.htm](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/survey/fy11_budget_comment.htm), or by phone at 703-324-9400. Voice your opinion by speaking at budget hearings. Sign up online at [https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/bosclerk/speaker\\_bos.htm](https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/bosclerk/speaker_bos.htm). You can also reach out directly to your supervisor by going online for listings at <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/government/board/>. We need your voice and we need it now. Please become a friend of the parks. Let's protect the parks and the recreational activities that we all treasure.

Sincerely,

George E. Lovelace  
Chairman  
Park Operations Committee



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March 15, 2010

Dear Trail Enthusiast:

A walk in the park can be just what the doctor ordered. Recognizing the power of this simple, no-cost activity to enhance wellness, the Park Authority has been actively encouraging Fairfax County residents to take steps towards improved health on its 300 plus miles of nationally recognized trails.

People have responded, judging by the traffic in hikers, bikers, strollers, and joggers on the Cross County Trail, the 42-mile centerpiece of the park trail system, and the speed at which our free sectional maps of trail routes, access points and highlights fly off the racks. Also, surveys show that trails, along with lakefront parks and RECenters, are the most popular components of our park system, used by 61% of Fairfax County households.

Now, proposed budget cuts put the quality and safety of the trail network at risk, and that diminishes its attraction and the potential for making Fairfax County a healthier community. Before the Board of Supervisors votes on the budget for Fiscal Year 2011 – July 2010 through June 2011 – we are asking the Board to assess the return on the county's investment in its parks.

Our park system faces an 11.3 % reduction in General Fund support in FY 2011, a proposed reduction of more than \$2.6 million. While we recognize the need for each department to help weather this financial storm, the Park Authority will have suffered recurring reductions of more than \$7 million, nearly 28 percent since FY 2007, and 61 positions total.

The impacts are dramatic and you will see the changes. In 1977, we had 60 miles of trails. Today, we have 310 miles, a five-fold increase. But, the workforce charged with maintaining the trails is six percent smaller than it was 32 years ago, and the proposed reductions in the Park Authority's general fund support for FY 2011 will bring the loss to 20 percent. Eliminated will be 12 maintenance positions with responsibilities that include trail inspections, improvements and repairs.

When it comes to safe and clean trail environments, parks are at the tipping point. We managed to sustain the quality balance as our trail inventory grew over time with no corresponding increase in caretakers, but there will be no escaping the detrimental impact of the proposed cuts. With fewer inspections, slower identification of trouble spots, longer waits for repairs and removal of hazards, trails will become less inviting.



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Trail Enthusiast  
March 15, 2010  
Page 2

Walking is the best exercise. It's free, it takes no special knowledge or equipment besides a good pair of shoes, and it can be done safely and effectively by almost everyone. From the perspective of good public policy, walking is a behavior that should be encouraged, not discouraged. In this time of economic turmoil, it's one form of healthful exercise that everyone can afford. The disproportionate budget cuts directed at parks – 11 percent in FY 2011 when most other agencies and departments are looking at two or three percent losses – endanger an asset that should be protected.

This budget review period provides you with the opportunity to share views on the importance of investments in parks. We hope you will take advantage of it. For additional FY 2011 budget reduction information go online to <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dmb/>. Share your feedback online at [http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/survey/fy11\\_budget\\_comment.htm](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/survey/fy11_budget_comment.htm), or by phone at 703-324-9400. You can voice your opinion by signing up to speak at approaching budget hearings. Sign up online at [https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/bosclerk/speaker\\_bos.htm](https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/bosclerk/speaker_bos.htm). You can also reach out directly to your district supervisor by going online for listings at <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/government/board/>. Together, we can make a difference and help protect these precious resources.

Sincerely,

Marie Reinsdorf  
Trail Liaison  
Park Authority Board  
[Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov)

