

From: sgagne@erols.com  
To: county.council@montgomerycountymd.gov  
Subject: Crucial Need for Deer Management  
Date: Sun, 7 Mar 2010

Dear Council Members,

Our group, the *Coalition for Deer Management*, was recently formed to avoid the quickly-unfolding natural disaster in the county, the exponentially growing deer population. Deer are eating native plants to the point where whole plant communities - trees, shrubs, and flowering herbs - are destroyed. We are knowledgeable outdoors people by virtue of our employment and avocation, who are alarmed about the decrease of plant diversity on county wild lands and what it means for plant and animal life in the woods.

We understand that there is presently no money allocated in the county budget to expand the existing deer management program. From our conversations with the Deer Management Group in Montgomery County Parks, we understand also that the group is overextended presently, and control of deer on more acreage is not possible with current staffing. Currently 15,000 acres of the department's 35,000 acres are being managed - which means that 20,000 acres are going unprotected.

It is our intention to impress upon you the immediacy of the problem and urge you to ADDRESS THE DEER PROBLEM before it is too late. The present large populations have already made an indelible mark on county wild lands, to wit:

Much of our woods on unmanaged land contain browse line areas where available leaves and twigs between the ground and five feet above have been eaten. In these places the regeneration of forest trees has been suspended, leaving one to wonder how there can be future woods.

Cris Fleming, an instructor of Spring Wildflower Identification for thirty years, will be teaching her last class this spring, as she says that "there are hardly any native wildflowers left in the local woods or fields".

The person who started the Removing Invasive Plants program, part of Friends of Sligo Creek, has left because too few native plants remain to save in larger portions of Sligo Creek Park.

Deer generally prefer native plants to many invasive plants. This allows devastating invasive vines to grow unfettered and more easily replace native plants. Although the ground cover may appear green in high-deer areas, it often consists of undesirable and aggressive alien plants.

At least two ground nesting birds, ovenbirds and Kentucky warblers, have disappeared from one park, Sligo Creek. Of 56 breeding birds there, nearly half feed mostly on the ground, and a quarter of them nest low or on the ground. They understandably lose out when ground plants for nesting and food disappear. As the "Ground-foraging Birds of Sligo" page on the Friends of Sligo Creek website puts it, the birds "depend for cover on the very undergrowth that our overpopulation of deer is destroying."

As Park wild lands lose the capacity to feed deer, deer are relying more on plants in adjacent neighborhoods, forcing homeowners to fence in as well as they can valued ornamental plants and vegetable gardens. This affects severely the quality of life, especially in down-county areas where no parks have deer management.

The longer we wait to effect control of all natural Park land, the more permanent the damage. Rare and uncommon plants tend to go first. Where will we bring our grandchildren to appreciate nature, where will classes go for botanical forays, what will the forest look like with trees wrapped in screening, a costly measure in itself, surrounded by alien vines and weeds?

Deer control of the 20,000 acres of unmanaged wild lands must begin forthwith. We note that when gypsy moth populations threaten neighborhood trees, helicopters are hired to spray and when a major snowstorm occurs trucks are sent out to plow and apply salt and sand. We realize in these tough economic times that additional money for this program is unlikely. However, we see this as a matter of prioritizing existing funds. We plead with you to work with the M-NCPPC Directorate to redistribute funds in the Parks budget so that an additional staff position can be applied to the Deer Management Program. We believe a largely unwitting public will feel greatly cheated when it understands the problem and sees that “ghost woods” could have been prevented.

Members of our committee will be contacting you to discuss the urgency of addressing the deer herds which are causing so much damage to native diversity in our public land.

Sincerely,

James Anderson  
Lynnwood Andrews  
Stuart Armstrong  
Doug Barker  
Cris Fleming

Raymond Gagne  
Sally Gagne  
David Hauck  
Marc Imlay  
Liz Jones

Noah Kahn  
George Middendorf  
Beth Mullin  
Suzanne Richman  
Aimee Weldon

The signers are writing independently of organizations with which they are associated. However, to give you an idea of who we are, the organizations with which we are affiliated include the local Maryland Native Plant Society, the Audubon Naturalist Society, the Anacostia Watershed Society, Friends of Sligo Creek, the Little Falls Watershed Alliance, Friends of the Rock Creek Environment, Howard University, the Agricultural Research Service (retired scientists), the Montgomery County Sierra Club and the Fish and Wildlife Service.

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### SAVING DAY LILIES AND IMPATIENS FROM DEER

Certain garden plants are favored by deer despite their usual preference for native plants.

### COMPARISON OF WOODS WITH FEW AND MANY DEER



Healthy woods where relatively few deer live.  
Sept. 4, 2004, West Virginia



Woods near the Kemp Mill Shopping Center, where deer damage has been noticeable since at least 2002.  
July 31, 2008