

Dear Montgomery County Council

This past year, during the lockdown, we were allowed to go out to walk in parks nearby. I had been doing a bit of 'weed warring' the previous 3 years, but got into it in a big way during the shutdown.

About four years ago, I took a workshop at Glen Echo from a resource manager for the GWMP to learn about non-native invasive (NNI) vine removal on the parkway. I obtained a permit for removing the NNIs for the entire parkway. A year later, I obtained permits to weed warrior in bits of Rock Creek Park and all of Montgomery Parks.

With the circumference of my life limited by the pandemic as everyone else's was, I realized a Montgomery County park was only a few miles away. I found biking to these woods near my home to be really good for my mental and spiritual well-being. Over the past year, I spent over 122 days, more than 325 hours, and liberated at least 452 trees, annoying the invasive vines that threaten the lives of these noble trees. I could sense that the trees were happier; the vines not so much. I was happier too, being outside, breathing the fresh air, and feeling I was doing something positive in a world spun out of control.

I heard Richard Louv speak at a conference about 15 years ago, and read his book "Last Child in the Woods" on the need for nature in folks' lives, especially children. I knew

this to be true as I had observed it many times in the little forest by the Minnehaha Creek at Glen Echo during my 30+ year's tenure as a park ranger there. I see it when I am weed warrioring in the Montgomery Park forests, as parents and their children seek safe outdoor spaces to roam and explore. I also know the power of forest bathing from the many hours I spent in the woods removing vines off the many trees in our county parks. I come home from this work feeling energized and refreshed. Some doctors even prescribe for their patients to spend time in the woods as it increases their T-cell counts and boosts their immune system.

I am currently sorting through my year of Covid in the woods: 5,828 photos, my notes, and Log entries as a weed warrior for Montgomery Parks to see if I have a story to tell. There is a link at the end to the photos/story in progress.

After more than 30 years in the dance world, I see that trees are really fine dancers, though they dance to a different beat.

I urge you to continue to fund Montgomery Parks as they are more needed now than ever as spaces where we can breathe freely, social distance, and benefit in all kinds of ways from dancing with the trees.

Stan Fowler,

Takoma Park

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