

March 28, 2023

Hello,

I am an active Certified Weed Warrior as well as a steward and advocate for conservation of natural areas in Montgomery County, and as such, I understand how much work is needed to remove the non-native, invasive vines that are killing our magnificent native trees. We need to prioritize saving the native trees in our parks as well as educating the public about the destructive force of non-native invasive vines on the trees in our parks and yards. We need even more volunteer Weed Warriors, but for that to happen, they need to be trained and supervised. The county parks' Weed Warrior supervisory staff do a wonderful job but they are stretched thin, and if we are to manage the invasive non-natives plants throughout our extensive park system, we need more county staff in the Parks Department.

While the Parks Department's annual operating budget includes significant increases in resources towards vegetation management in the parks' natural areas (including increased support of down county Weed Warrior efforts and environmental equity focus areas), the proposed increase is not in line with the increases for other budgeting areas, nor is it sufficient. In addition, the County Executive has recommended cuts which could potentially eliminate three proposed career positions for Vegetation Management. These proposed cuts should not be made as the Vegetation Management currently has four staff for approximately 26,000 acres of Parks' natural areas and is not able to meet the expectations of park users, volunteers, and advocates. These positions are necessary to greatly improve our ability to enhance conservation efforts in the parks.

I implore you to increase the parks' operating budget and staffing so that we can better control non-native invasive vines that are strangling our native trees.

Sincerely,

Ms. Kristine Knutson

A black rectangular redaction box covering the signature area, likely containing a name and contact information.