

Dear Montgomery County Council,

I am writing to you today to comment on the proposed M83 highway in the Master Plan of Highways and Transitways. I'm a resident of Montgomery Village - and I'm a birder.

100 million Americans are birders. Our hobby enriches our lives - and our communities. Birding generates \$279 billion in annual economic output, including \$90 billion in labor income related to 1.4 million jobs. Another \$7 billion is tax revenue for counties. All of this data comes from a report published last November by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (<https://www.fws.gov/media/2022-birding-united-states-demographic-and-economic-analysis>).

In 2011, the Maryland Ornithological Society published a report (<https://birdersguidemddc.org/about-us/birding-economics/>), based on the then-most-recent underlying data from the USFWS report, finding that birders spend \$261,500,000 each year on birding equipment in Maryland. That includes travelling birders who pick up a local field guide while visiting our state's Globally Important Bird Areas - but notably, it does not include what those birders spend at our hotels and restaurants. Nor does it include the economic value of the jobs that serve local and visiting birders.

If Montgomery County captures a proportional share of this spending, based on our population relative to the state, then we can estimate that birding contributes \$45 million a year to our local economy. Again, this is a conservative estimate that excludes wages and spending on travel - and it doesn't account for inflation since the report was published 14 years ago.

That's \$45 million that our community might not be receiving if birding opportunities are lost due to the destruction of habitat.

Aside from generating all that economic activity, birds also make us **feel** wealthier. That is a finding from a study published in 2021 in the journal *Ecological Economics*. In that study, researchers documented that a 10% increase in the number of bird species that people encounter lifts their life satisfaction comparably to a 10% increase in their net household income.

So, isn't it wonderful that the greenway in our community helps us encounter more birds? Just a few weeks ago, I hiked in that greenway - which also happens to be the M83 highway alignment - and I found 28 species of birds.

Notably, I **didn't** find a Wood Thrush, with its beautiful echoing song. According to the newest State of the Birds Report (stateofthebirds.org/2025), released this spring by the North American Bird Conservation Initiative, Wood Thrush is a yellow-alert species. These are birds that have experienced long-term population losses over the past several decades. Yellow-alert species are stable right now but need continued conservation efforts in order to sustain that recovery. Destroying remarkably pristine interior forest habitat to make room for a new road is not a conservation effort.

On that hike in early June, I also didn't find an Eastern Towhee, a large and colorful sparrow. Eastern Towhee is an orange-alert species. These are birds that have had long-term population losses and that are in even steeper decline over the past several years.

The State of the Birds Report includes the disappointing finding that, of the 27 bird species that are completely dependent on Eastern forests for breeding habitat, 18 of them are declining. The report notes that this decline has been "especially prominent along the Atlantic Coast." That's us. We are the ones who need to provide the conservation efforts that the future of these birds depends on.

Recall what the alternative is. Fewer kinds of birds in our daily lives. Decrease in our life satisfaction equivalent to losing 10% of our household income. Would you vote for an across-the-board 10% pay cut for residents of the Upcounty? No? Then please do not vote for a loss of bird diversity caused by the destruction of habitat.

Instead, please vote no on the project that would cause that destruction. Please follow the Planning Board's recommendation to **remove the proposed five-mile M83 northern section from the master plan**. In return, we'll continue to enjoy the tax revenue from birding activity in our greenway. Maybe we can spend it on improvements for public transit. Thank you for your work to make life better for people in the Upcounty and throughout our MoCo community.

Yours,
Janette Rosenbaum