

Friends of Huntley Meadows Park

March 2009

Email: info@friendsofhuntleymeadows.org
Website: www.Friendsofhuntleymeadows.org



Speak Up for Parks

In FY 2010, Fairfax County is projecting a budget deficit of more than \$600 million. As part of overall budget reduction, the Fairfax County Park Authority has been asked to reduce their tax-supported budget by 15% or \$4 million. One million dollars of this amount will come from proposed reductions at Huntley and the eight other sites in the FCPA Resource Management Division. Eleven crucial positions will be abolished, including the loss of Huntley's administrative assistant and part-time teacher, our own Nancy Pryor. Seven Naturalist positions in the division will be changed to 50% revenue-supported, and can basically be considered next on the chopping block. In addition, all sites are tasked with making \$200,000 more in revenue per year.

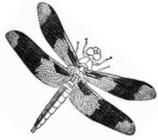
Conservation of parks and open space in the County is threatened by the choices that the Park Authority has made in their budget-cutting decisions. These cuts will have a devastating effect on natural and cultural resource protection in the county, as well as on the education of the next generation of environmental stewards. The staff directly responsible for maintaining treasured parks and for educating the public is already feeling the strain of these proposed cuts. Both the public's experience in the parks and their understanding of the importance of the environment will definitely suffer.

The Board of Supervisors' stated environmental goals are in great part carried out by the Resource Management Division. The three primary goals include energy conservation, protection for the County's natural resources, and the major charge of "*Open space conservation, which seeks to preserve and protect stream valleys, woodlands and other ecologically valuable areas to protect plant and animal life*". Fully half of the FCPA's mission encompasses the goals set by the County Board. Besides creating opportunities for recreation, the Park Authority's mission is to "*set aside public spaces for and assist citizens in the protection and enhancement of environmental values, diversity of natural habitats and cultural heritage to guarantee that these resources will be available to both present and future generations.*"

The Park Authority seems to find it difficult to balance self-supporting operations like golf courses with the need to preserve and protect the environment through parks and nature centers. They are distinct, and at times, opposing missions. In short, parks cannot be run like businesses.

Parks are important to the quality of life of people and to the environment. In the FCPA's own 2006 household survey, walking in parks was the number one preferred leisure activity by a large majority of respondents. Losing access through the inability of the Park Authority to maintain and staff parks will deal a blow to a majority of people in the county who prefer nature to golf courses or rec centers. While the FCPA budget is only one percent of the county's total budget, its mission is central to the health and well-being of the county's citizens and its environment. Fairfax County officials have consistently touted and promoted the quality of life in the county, especially its wonderful park system and natural resources. They need to be reminded of this now.

If you feel strongly about these cuts, you can help! How? It's as simple as making a phone call, writing a letter or attending one of the FY2010 County Budget Hearings next month. The county considers public input to be a key factor in making budget decisions and welcomes public opinion. You can easily make a call to the county's budget hotline, which will record your opinion. You can also write to your local supervisor and to the Park Authority Board stating your support for parks. Finally, you can attend the public budget hearings scheduled for late March and tell the County Board what you think. **Full contact information is on page 7.** Please help Huntley by taking action. The Friends of Huntley Meadows Park are grateful for your support.



Park Manager's Message
A Walk on Huntley's Wild Side



There are so many reasons why Huntley Meadows is a unique and valuable place, especially when you're talking wildlife. I have a special affinity for the lesser-known members of the animal kingdom that live here, in particular insects and herps (reptiles and amphibians). These were the animal groups that my father first introduced me to as a young boy. I can remember being amazed when an iridescent green darkling beetle was placed in my three-year-old hands. On special nights, I was brought up to our roof to see and hear breeding gray tree frogs. These experiences hooked me for life. Like many of Huntley's visitors, I love bird watching but have been known to disappear in the middle of a bird walk to pursue a dragonfly, tiger beetle or rat snake. Insects and herps seem to capture my imagination in ways that other creatures can't quite match. For folks like me, there are few places in Northern Virginia more exciting to be than at Huntley. Following are just a few of the reasons why.

Last May and June, I saw more giant silk moths here in two months than in my previous thirty-eight years. We had Cecropia, Polyphemus, Promethea, Luna, Royal Walnut, Imperial and Io moths all around the Visitor Center. Their names alone are impressive but the moths themselves are some of the largest, most striking insects in the world. We also had Hercules beetles (largest scarab beetle in the US), Eastern Eyed Click beetles (largest click beetle in the US), the large-mandibled Reddish-brown Stag beetle and several Giant Root Borers and Pine Sawyers who are big-eyed, night-flying members of the Long-horned Beetle family. The native violets, flowering shrubs and milkweeds in the park supported an amazing number of swallowtail, fritillary and monarch butterflies in summer and early fall. My favorite wasp, the ancient and bizarre Pigeon Horntail, was seen flying up and down the Heron Trail. The combined biomass and species diversity of insects in this park is stunning. For an insect geek like myself, this past summer was a three-ringed, entomological circus of six-legged biodiversity.

To keep Huntley a vibrant refuge for insect populations, our staff will protect, care for, and manage the park with the same vision and dedication that guided former staff and park supporters. This means keeping in mind the life cycles and ecology of insects in every management decision, whether it's meadow burns, wetland restoration, invasive exotic plant control or trail maintenance. However, many, if not most of Huntley's insects will at some point venture outside of the park's boundaries. To insure the survival of Giant Silk moths, Hercules and Tiger beetles, Fritillaries and Monarchs, we need the help of our neighbors and friends like you to care for these evolutionary marvels. Anything you and your community can do to help conserve our region's native insect diversity would be wonderful. Native lady beetles are in decline, monarch populations are down, Promethea and Cecropia moths are becoming scarce and several species of tiger and burrowing beetles are now on the federal endangered species list. To learn more about hands-on, proactive and fun actions you can take in *your own back yard* to become an insect conservationist, please join us at our **Eco-savvy Expo** on April 19 and at **Bug-lovers Paradise** this summer. We'll have how-to handouts on managing your landscapes for silk moths, tiger beetles, swallowtails and more, as well as presentations and guided nature walks.

The park's herps are just as amazing as our insects, with one state endangered species, one state species of concern and several snakes and frogs found here that I'd rarely seen before. Enough excitement for one article! I'll write about Huntley's reptiles and amphibians in the next issue ☺ Hope to see you all in the park this spring.

Kevin Munroe

Park Manager Walks

Join the Park Manager for a walk in the park. Learn what's happening at Huntley and see some wildlife along the way.

March 21, 4 p.m. to 6 p.m.

April 11, 4 p.m. to 6 p.m.

May 23, 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Meet at Visitors Center - FREE - no reservations required



Hercules Beetle

The Meadows are Burning with Excitement

In late December 2008 Rod Simmons, plant ecologist with the City of Alexandria and Charles Smith, Fairfax County Park Authority Natural Resource Specialist, came to Huntley Meadows to identify an unusual grass in one of our meadows. Rod determined that the grass was *Saccharum giganteum*, sugarcane plume grass. *S. giganteum* is quite common in the Coastal Plain of Virginia and portions of the eastern Piedmont but is not very common in Fairfax County and other northern Virginia piedmont counties. *S. giganteum* is 5 to 9 feet tall at maturity and prefers wet or seasonally flooded meadows.

The coverage of *S. giganteum* in our big meadow has expanded three or fourfold since the controlled burn we did in February 2007. In late summer, *S. giganteum* creates a beautiful sea of inflorescences blooming over almost an acre in the big meadow. According to Gary Fleming, vegetation ecologist with the Natural Heritage Program of the VA Department of Conservation and Recreation, *S. giganteum* responds very favorably when burned and can become dominant or invasive in meadows burned excessively. Consequently, HMP staff will be burning the big meadow every four to five years rather than every two to three years as previously planned. We will be monitoring the amount of *S. giganteum* that grows after the burns in the big meadow. This winter, we are proposing to burn about 10 acres of park land including two more meadows and a stand of degraded forest that is full of invasives.

As a note of interest for grass enthusiasts, Rod also identified a large, beautiful grass that came up in the wetland this year as American barnyard grass, *Echinochloa muricata*. The drawdowns in the wetland of the past several years resulted in the right conditions for the germination of this species, which is new to Huntley.

Dave Lawlor

Resource Manager



Sugarcane plume grass

Natural Resource Management Internship

Applications are now being accepted for the 2009 Natural Resource Management Internship at Huntley Meadows Park. This internship is designed to give interested college students or recent graduates the opportunity to work with professional park staff to preserve and enhance wildlife habitats in a 1,428 acre wetland preserve. It provides practical experience in the skills and abilities needed for a career in wildlife management and environmental sciences. Work includes assisting with habitat management, taking part in water quality assessments, vegetation classification and invasive species monitoring. There will also be an opportunity to coordinate a natural resource project for the summer.

The internship runs for 11 weeks from June 1 to August 14 and pays a stipend of \$2,700 that is raised from the Huntley Birdathon. Email a resume to Dave Lawlor, Natural Resource Manager at dave.lawlor@fairfaxcounty.gov. Call 703-765-8285 for more information.

Naturalist Internship

Applications are also being accepted for the 2009 Naturalist Internship at Huntley Meadows. This internship offers interested college students the chance to develop skills needed for a career in environmental education, wildlife conservation and nature center operation. Interns have the opportunity to work with professional naturalists on a variety of programs as well as creating and implementing their own nature program and an exhibit or brochure. The internship runs from June 1st to August 14th and pays a stipend of \$2,700.

To apply, email a resume to Carolyn Gamble, Site Manager, at Carolyn.gamble@fairfaxcounty.gov. Call 703-768-2525 for more information. This internship is supported through a generous donation from the Friends of Huntley Meadows Park.

Spring Art News

Karen Brown Arnold Nature Photography

Opening Reception

Sunday, March 1, 2 to 4 p.m.

This March the auditorium will be filled with photographs featuring the beautiful Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. Karen Brown Arnold is a photographer who has lived in the Valley with her family since 2002. She finds the Valley a photographer's paradise, with different colors, moods and images to capture in every season. The public is invited to meet Karen at the opening reception.



“A Do About Nature”, Jorja and Bob Feldman

Opening Reception

Sunday, April 5, 2 to 4:00 p.m.

This photographic duo has captured nature from places as far-flung as Iceland and Costa Rica but Huntley Meadows remains their favorite location for their craft. Take a photographic journey around the world and meet Bob and Jorja at the opening reception. Open to the public.

Friends of Huntley Meadows Park 2008 Photography Contest

The Friends of Huntley Meadows Park held their fourth annual photography contest in December. The show, for amateur photographers, features photographs taken at the park. Fred Siskind, a skilled photographer who has been photographing Huntley's dragonflies and other wildlife for over 15 years, juried the show. He remarked on the wonderful skill and subject diversity displayed by the photographers and chatted with many of them at the opening reception. The photography show is a fundraiser for FOHMP as well as an excellent opportunity for amateur photographers to share their work with the public.

We wish to thank all those who together submitted an amazing total of 120 photographs for the show. It was a hard decision to pick the best but the following photos received special recognition:

Adult Category

First Place: Jerry McHale

Second Place: Amol Limaye

Third Place: Al Giraldi

Honorable Mentions: Jorja Feldman, Mary Jane Cathers,
Richard Tyner and Amol Limaye.

Youth Category

First Place: Alexander Sweeney

Second Place: Maddie McMullen

Third Place: Akhir Stewart

Honorable Mentions: Maddie McMullen

We congratulate the winners and thank you all for participating. Start taking your photos now for our next show in Fall 2009.

Sarah Stromayer, Art Show Coordinator



Wetlands Awareness Day
Sunday, May 3rd, Noon to 3 p.m.

The biggest event on the HMP calendar is Wetlands Awareness Day. Hundreds of people come to the park to learn about the importance of and to experience the beauty of wetlands. Interpreters are stationed along the boardwalk where they unlock the mysteries of wetland soils, give close-up looks at wildlife through telescopes and impart visitors with a sense of what an amazing place Huntley Meadows is. There's also a Fun Fair for kids with games, prizes and an old-fashioned cake walk. Sponsored by FOHMP.



Eco-Savvy Expo
Bringing Nature Home
Sunday, April 19th
12 p.m. to 4 p.m.

Bring nature home from Huntley Meadows Park! Our Eco-Savvy Expo will offer all you need to make your yard an environmentally friendly place. There will be programs, walks and a native plant sale featuring Virginia natives from Nature By Design. Rain barrels, native seed mixes, bee boxes and books on wildlife will be available for purchase. Our sponsoring organizations will be there to talk to you and to offer advice on how to create space for nature in your garden. A special event will be a book signing by author Marfe Ferguson Delano. Her book, which will be available for purchase, is an educational and inspirational work for children as well as a showcase for the National Geographic Society's environmental mission.

Please join us.

Schedule of Events:

- * **Butterfly Gardening Tips** – 12:45 p.m. (\$6)
- * **Nature Walk** – 1:45 p.m. (Free)
- * **Earth in the Hot Seat** book signing – 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. (Free)
- * **How to Build and Use Your Rain Barrel** – 3:15 p.m. (Free)

Our sponsors include the Friends of Huntley Meadows Park, Pollinator Partnership, Fairfax ReLeaf, Trout Unlimited and the Audubon Society of Northern Virginia.



Historic Huntley Open House
Sunday, May 17, 2 to 4 p.m.

Enjoy this unique opportunity to visit Historic Huntley, a Federal-style villa built in 1825 for Thomson F. Mason, grandson of George Mason. The house is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and has a long and fascinating history. Learn about its connection to Huntley Meadows Park and about the uses the house has had over its history. Sponsored by Friends of Historic Huntley. FREE



Birds and Bagels

Saturday March 14

8 to 10:30 a.m. Enjoy beginning of spring during this morning search for waterfowl and other birds. Following the walk, you'll warm up with hot drinks and fresh bagels. Sponsored by FOHMP. Reservations required. Adults \$8

Spring Birds and Bagels

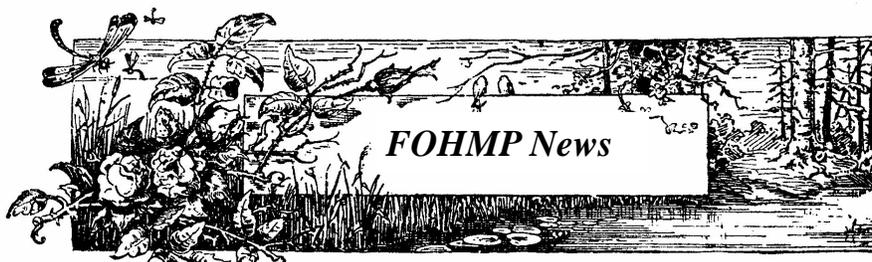
Sunday April 19

8 to 11:00 a.m. Search for warblers, thrushes, and a host of other birds as we approach the peak of spring migration. Following the hike, recap the sightings during a continental breakfast at the center. Binoculars and field guides recommended. Sponsored by FOHMP. Reservations required. \$8

Wonderful Web of Life

Saturday May 16

8 to 10 a.m. Start the morning with relaxation exercises, a walk to the Observation Tower, and basic yoga positions while hearing, seeing, and feeling the world around us. Reservations required. Canceled if rain. \$6



President's Message

FOHMP and the Fairfax County Park Authority are going to need your help to make this a good year for our parks. I'm sure you've heard the bad news about the County Budget deficits. The proposed cuts are going to have a severe effect on the stewardship and preservation of our parkland. Here is what you can do to help: Please contact members of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors and the Park Authority Board Representatives.

On Saturday, Feb 7, I attended a gathering of the Federation of Friends Groups, where we agreed that this is a cause that we need to join forces on. All of the sites in the Resource Management Division will be affected by these cuts and it is in our best interests to pull in as many supporters as we can. The Federation agreed that the Parks will suffer losses in three major areas: Environmental Stewardship, Safety, and Environmental Education.

Please read the additional information in this newsletter that will give you some talking points. The proposal to abolish the Administrative Assistant positions will drastically change visitor services at the RMD sites. Nancy Pryor is an invaluable member of the HMP staff and losing her will certainly have a negative effect on visitor services and on our environmental education program.

The proposed budget will be given to the Board of Supervisors on February 23, 2009. After that date, we will need to become the squeaky wheel, the Lorax (who speaks for the trees), the voice of reason. The Resource Management Department acts as a balance to the environmental impact of golf courses and Rec Centers. **Environmental Stewardship should be an integral part of County Government. It should not be tied directly to revenue.** Send an email, make a phone call, write a letter, register to speak at the budget hearings. Your efforts will be a crucial part of protecting our natural and cultural resources and quality of life today and in the future. Thank you.

Kathi McNeil, FOHMP President

Call in your support for parks

County's Budget Hotline: 703-324-9400

You will have two minutes to record your opinions.

Write letters and address them to:

Sharon Bulova, Chairman

Fairfax County Board of Supervisors

12000 Government Center Parkway, Suite 530

Fairfax, VA 22035

Or email the BOS clerk: clerktothebos@fairfaxcounty.gov

William G. Bouie, Chairman

Fairfax County Park Authority Board

12055 Government Center Pkwy. Suite 927

Fairfax, VA 22035

Bbouie@aol.com

John Dargle, Director

Fairfax County Park Authority

12055 Government Center Pkwy. Suite 927

Fairfax, VA 22035

john.darglejr@fairfaxcounty.gov

Attend the public Budget Hearings

The Budget Hearings are scheduled for March 30, 31 and April 1 and are held at the Fairfax County Government Center. To testify at the hearings, register in advance with the Clerk to the Board by calling 703-324-3151. You will have three minutes to speak. The hearings begin at approximately 3 p.m.

For more information on the budget, visit:
www.fairfaxcounty.gov/budget.

The Friends of Huntley Meadows Park would like to thank the following new Lifetime members:

Daria Bielecki

Lenore Bloch

Eric Mokole

We appreciate the support from our members that allows FOHMP to achieve our goal of helping to preserve and protect the park. If you would like to give a "lifetime" of support to Huntley Meadows by becoming a life member, please send a donation of \$150 to:

Treasurer, FOHMP
3701 Lockheed Blvd,
Alexandria, VA 22306

Thank you,
Connie Carpenter
Membership Chair



Huntley Meadows Park 13th Annual Birdathon

After a chilly winter, we welcome the change when weather warms, life awakens and spring migration begins once more. Cardinals, chickadees, and house finches are already singing in anticipation. Waterfowl numbers are rising, and it won't be long before green herons and bitterns appear in the wetland. Before you know it, there will be reports of warblers, thrushes, orioles and tanagers and that means it will be time for the 13th Annual Huntley Meadows Park Birdathon.

Every year, park staff and volunteers set out very early in the morning to count bird species in the park. Over the years, this event has grown from an annual survey to something more important. It now provides an opportunity to remember and honor Ed Weigel and Ken Howard, two volunteers who for years inspired a love of nature within the park visitors they met. They shared their time, wisdom, wit, and enthusiasm with everyone, acting as true ambassadors for Huntley Meadows. Their good work continues to this day through the park's Natural Resource Internship that is funded by the Birdathon. This internship provides a young person with an opportunity to begin a career in conservation and to get hands on experience in a great park.

As always, our goal is to record 100 species for the day. We've done it five times with 108 species in 2004 being our top record. To make a donation, you can do it per species or just by a dollar amount. If you were to donate only a quarter per species seen, 100 species would produce a donation of \$25. That would go a long way towards helping us reach our annual goal of \$2,700. This is our only big fundraising event of the year when we ask our members to donate to a good cause. We have always appreciated the generosity of park supporters in helping us to meet our goal.

I believe this is an outstanding cause. Like many of you, I knew Ken and Ed well, and count myself fortunate to have learned so much about the natural world from them. I want to see their good work continue, and I hope you feel the same way.

Thank you very much.

Andy Higgs



2009 Huntley Meadows Park Birdathon

Name: _____

Address: _____

Donation Amount: _____

Please make checks payable to FOHMP and write donations-birdathon on the memo line.

Mail this form and check to:
Huntley Meadows Park Birdathon
3701 Lockheed Blvd., Alexandria, VA 22306

Results will be posted by June 5 on the FOHMP website: www.friendsofhuntleymeadows.org

If you would like a hardcopy of the results, please check the []

***Friends of Huntley Meadows Park
Membership and Renewal Form***

*Please support Huntley Meadows Park by joining the Friends group.
Become a member today and help to protect and preserve the park. Your annual dues will keep you
informed and help to fund the Visitor Center's programs. Fill out and mail the application to this
address:*

**Friends of Huntley Meadows Park
3701 Lockheed Blvd.
Alexandria, VA 22306**

Dues information:

- \$10 Individual
- \$15 Family
- \$5 Student/Senior
- \$150 Lifetime membership

Name: _____

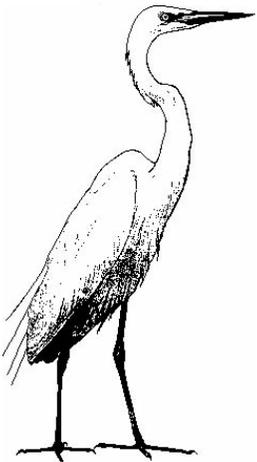
Address: _____

Telephone: _____

Email: _____



Friends of Huntley Meadows Park
3701 Lockheed Blvd
Alexandria, VA 22306



Please check your mailing label for accuracy and notify us of any changes.
Your membership expirations date is in the upper left corner.