



**SIERRA  
CLUB**

# PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY

EXPLORE – ENJOY - PROTECT

## Newsletter Fall 2021

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### JOIN THE MOVEMENT FOR CLIMATE ACTION IN PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY

Perhaps the most important thing we can advocate for right now is our Prince George's County Climate Action Plan. It sets out guidelines for systemic change in how county decisions should be made to take climate change into account. Better land-use decisions are essential for decreasing greenhouse gas emissions by decreasing vehicle miles traveled as well as for conserving our natural places for the vital ecosystem services they provide. The Climate Action Plan recommends new "No Net Tree Loss" policies that will put greater value on our natural places. The Plan also calls for closer adherence to Plan 2035 and using a "climate score" to evaluate development proposals. Adopting these policies would tip the scales in favor of denser development in our transit zones and infill development in already-developed areas and help to prevent the ongoing sacrifice of our forests and agricultural land for new development.

**Advocate for adopting the Climate Action Plan during the public comment period, Nov 1 through Dec 1. Visit [mypgc.us/climateactionplan](http://mypgc.us/climateactionplan) to view the plan, complete the survey, and find out about public meetings. Tell your friends!**

## Advocacy in Action

*By Janet Gingold*

This Advocacy-in-Action edition of the Prince George's County Newsletter spotlights efforts by activists speaking against the development practices that sacrifice our mature forests for new development even as it becomes increasingly clear that we need our forests to mitigate the impacts of climate change. In College Park, Forest Heights, and Fort Washington, residents organized and spoke out, through letters and hearings, petitions and protests. A coalition of the University of Maryland community, residents from University Park and College Park, and environmental organizations succeeded in getting the University administration to rethink its sacrifice of Guilford Woods. However, efforts by residents of Forest Heights and Fort Washington to sway the County Council and the County Executive to protect their forested areas from development were not successful.

Land use decisions are complicated. Decision makers have to take into account many

competing interests. In Forest Heights, developers described plans for a walkable, bikeable community with green roofs and community gardens that honored local history, provided much-needed senior housing, retail space, and a new police station. What's not to like? This would involve leveling 20 acres of mature forest to construct a huge wedge of concrete between a low-density suburban neighborhood and national parkland. The County's planning experts recommended against the change to MXT zoning. Many Forest Heights residents spoke against the zoning change. But our County Council wasn't swayed by descriptions of the historic viewshed or arguments for conserving a forest in a flood-prone area to increase community resilience in the face of a changing climate. They voted to approve the rezoning that paves the way forward for this "gateway" project, as if we need another behemoth to balance the National Harbor development across the beltway.



*Small person, large tree at Guilford Woods*

In College Park, a few local residents learned of the University of Maryland's plans to sell a plot of "unused" public land to a private developer who would build some new housing, including units for graduate students, within walking distance of the Purple Line. The problem? This land was occupied by one of the few remaining mature forests in the area. From a small group of interested people, a movement grew. A website was developed to inform people about the value of Guilford Woods and its importance in protecting the headwaters of Guilford Run as well as its usefulness for humans in need of a dose of Nature. Volunteers met each Saturday for stewardship activities in the woods. Elected officials were invited to tour the woods. Faculty circulated a petition. The Sierra Club distributed a state-wide Action Alert. As word spread, the movement grew to include students, faculty, and alumni as well as residents of surrounding neighborhoods. Surely our flagship University, committed as it is to sustainability, should be expected to lead by example in its own land-use decisions. By identifying key decision makers and mobilizing key stakeholders, this effort culminated in a change of course. The University has now "paused" the Western Gateway project and will now seek an alternate location for graduate student housing near the Purple line. Support for preserving and maintaining Guilford Woods continues to increase. Friends of Guilford

Woods continue their efforts to remove invasive species and look for new ways to ensure that the forest be preserved in perpetuity for the enjoyment and wellbeing of the university community and local residents, as well as wild things who live there.

*Demonstration at University of Maryland, College Park, October 15, 2021*



## **Unnecessary Destruction of the Swan Creek Forest in Fort Washington, MD** *By Valencia Campbell, Ph.D.*

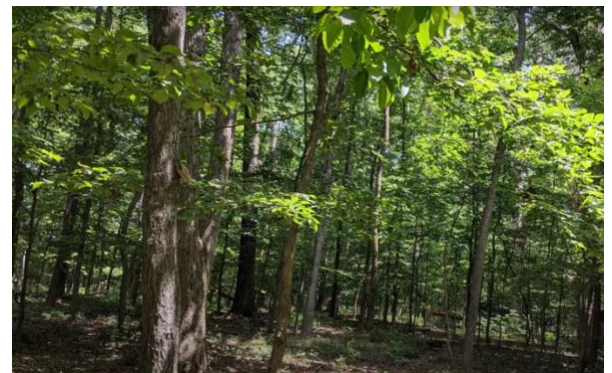
“If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never has and it never will.” Frederick Douglass coined the familiar admonition more than 150 years ago. Now in 2021, our struggles still continue for racial equality, economic equality and environmental justice.



Problems with environmental justice persist because our community is often confronted with false narratives that allow some to approve unnecessary developments regardless of the negative effects to our environment. For example, those who opposed the destruction of the Swan Creek Forest to build a K-8 school were dishonestly painted as being against

education. This dishonest smear was used to reframe the debate and attack citizens who are concerned about both the environment and education. The community can and should have both – a great, although smaller school on an existing site **and** the preservation of the Swan Creek Forest.

In the case of the destruction of the Swan Creek Forest, neighbor after neighbor spoke on various television stations and social media platforms protesting the removal of the trees and the 30 year \$1.25 billion-dollar Public Private Partnership (P3) agreement with the Prince Georges County Education and Community Partners and the Prince George’s County Public School System. Gilbane is the developer for this project and is shamefully attempting to deforest the land known as Guilford Woods in College Park, Maryland as well. Fort Washington residents have spoken at the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning



*In this video, listen to Shaniya Campbell describe the natural area that is lost.*

Commission hearings, Prince George’s County Council meetings, and with elected officials about the unnecessary negative problems created by deforestation in their Fort Washington neighborhood due to the approval of this P3 agreement. Such problems included: flooding, air pollution, increased traffic, and the destruction of wildlife habitats. Pretending to listen to these concerns while going forward with deforestation, is not how the Prince George’s County Government should work.

Keeping the Fort Washington Forest intact while improving a school on an existing site, could have been used as a natural laboratory for the students' studies of tree and plant species, animal



*After deforestation, after a day of rain.  
Photo by Paul Campbell, Sr.*

habitats, green house and heat island effects likely to be brought on by the massive removal of trees. The County missed an opportunity to act on one of the most crucial environmental issues of our time-- climate change. Researchers (Joan Flocks and Dr. Robert Bullard) have long documented the many negative effects of deforestation on climate change and its impact on public health in minority communities. Even nationally, the President and Congressional representatives have included funding in proposed budgets to combat the deleterious

effects of human behavior on the environment.

Since an election season is approaching us next year, I urge each of you to vote. It is your responsibility to seriously examine candidates' environmental records. If a candidate supported developers who contributed to destruction, vote him or her out. Support pro-environment candidates who are working for a better tomorrow. No one group or individual is entitled to an elected seat without listening and acting upon the concerns of their constituents. Obtaining power through an elected position requires the ability to listen to their constituents and taking actions that are beneficial to the community **and** our environment. We do not need to destroy our environment to do this.

## Interviews at Swan Creek Forest

*By James Lawson*

James Lawson, member of the Prince George's Sierra Club Executive Committee, went to listen to the community members who were protesting the cutting of the trees. Here's what the people told him.

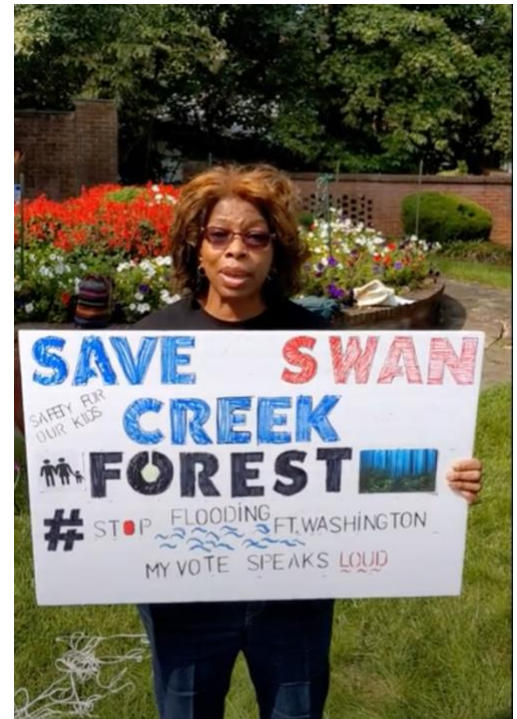
Earl O'Neal, former PTA president at Potomac Landing, has continued to be active in supporting is the local school even after his kids have grown up and moved on.

"We're not against the school, we're against the location of the school," O'Neal said. "They didn't consider the



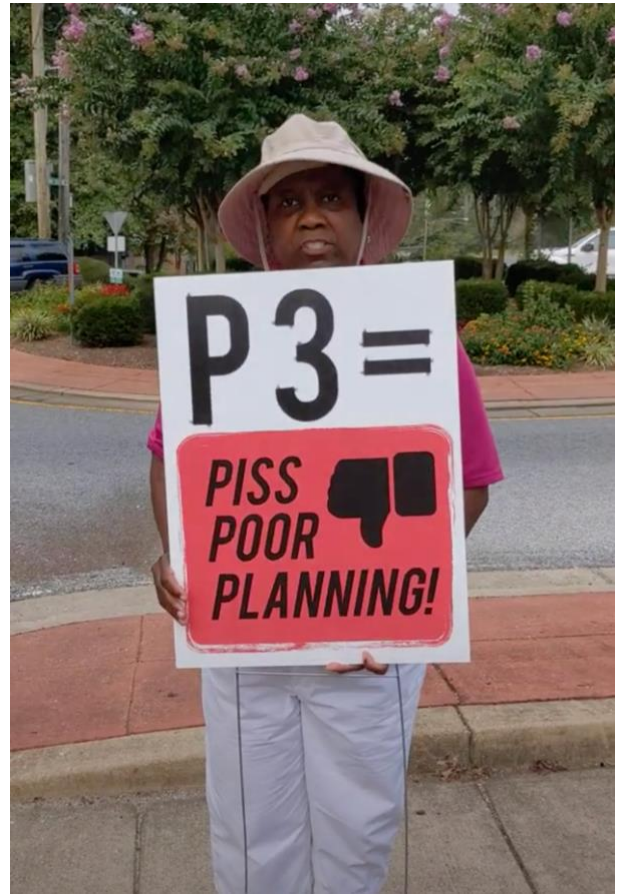
community in planning. And when we asked for discussions about changing (the location), they just ran over it, you know what I mean? And once the flooding starts in this area they'll want to have meetings and say they didn't know anything about it. They don't want citizen involvement unless you are for whatever they do and don't ask questions."

Tolores Holmes, is a registered nurse and a long-term resident of Fort Washington who raised her six children here. "The removal of this green space is very important," Holmes said. "This will directly impact our environment, particularly for people of color. This is just a travesty. In a time when global warming should be the major thing that we are addressing to save not only our communities, our world we are removing trees for a school that could be relocated in multiple other areas? This is my rainforest. I may not ever get to the Amazon. But this my environment. This is what supports our air quality here. This is directly impacting me and my community and when you impact the community, you impact the world."



Angela Malone Williams has lived in this community for eight years. She said, "Part of the reason I came was the serenity, the beauty, the trees. It's just heart-breaking to see how ruthlessly this can be destroyed so quickly. And what's really heart breaking is that there were other alternatives, just a mile away. This is a statement about power. And the lack of interest in creating a community with real dialog between leadership and community members. We hear leadership say they've done all that they can do. Sometimes just being present sends a message. Instead of tearing down an asset, why not put a beautiful nature trail through it? And then you could have the kids come over and learn about the importance of natural areas, the flora, the fauna. And this is what we do in our county, and we're supposed to say thank you?"

Marcilyn Patterson, retired Lt. Colonel, US Army, lives in the neighborhood. She says the community wants to see plans to fix infrastructure issues in the neighborhood that already cause flooded basements. But she's most concerned about education. "It's great to have a brand-new building, but this land is also precious for what it offers us. The government is going to spend billions of dollars on just six schools. What about the other 200 schools? We should take that money and build a couple of floors onto the existing school and use the rest of the money to help the children, help the teachers. and improve education. They did this under cover. (County Executive Alsobrooks) didn't listen to the community. They let us know late in the game. She met with us and she said she heard us but they started chopping the very next day. We're going to spend billions for buildings. Where is the breakdown for increase in



(teachers') pay, good books, computers, everything we need for a great education, not just a great building?"

Dr. Nancy Bhargava, who also lives on Swan Creek Road, has been helping to organize opposition to deforestation for building the new school since Spring 2021. "All the other new schools are being built on existing school sites," she said. "This is the only one being built on forested land, and wetlands, where wildlife abounds. We feel this in not in the best interest of our children, who will have more climate change. We need trees. We need the forest. All over the world, people are experiencing drought and wildfires. Countries are urging citizens to plant trees. We need to stop this destruction now."

## Voices from the Community and Related Readings:

Preserving the Trees Video - <https://youtu.be/XOupxblT-IE>

Saving the Wetlands video - <https://youtu.be/9F573bz44Go>

James Lawson's Interviews:

Earl O'Neal Swan Creek Forest

[https://youtu.be/g\\_Q-sIBdWq0](https://youtu.be/g_Q-sIBdWq0)

Tolores Holmes Swan Creek Forest

<https://youtu.be/m3LFs1HFNYQ>

Angela interview Swan Creek Forest

<https://youtu.be/yvwVdy-3nyU>

Marcilyn Patterson Swan Creek Forest

<https://youtu.be/Ha4lqLWURAU>

Nancy Bharbava Swan Creek Forest

<https://youtu.be/3-bzp8cRRVo>

WUSA report by Nicole DiAntonio June 16, 2021 <https://www.wusa9.com/article/news/local/fort-washington/neighbors-share-concerns-about-increase-in-flooding-reach-new-pgcps/65-2d37c29c-63ed-4dd4-8616-97df63d2abeb>

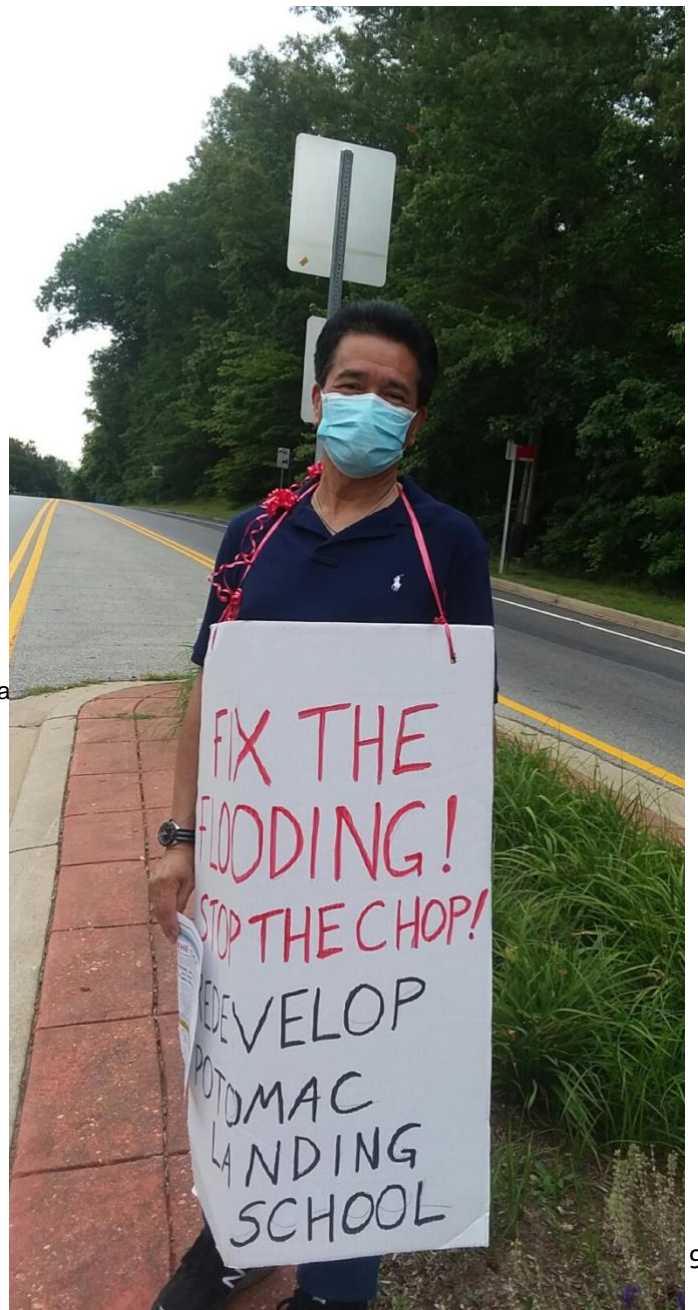
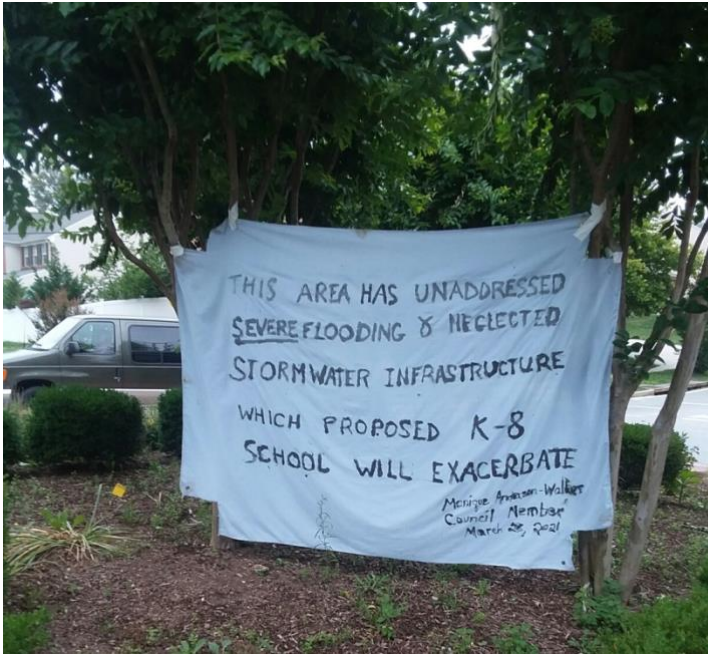
Bullard, D. D., Gardezi, M., Chennault, C., & Dankbar, H. (2016). "Climate Change and Environmental Justice: A Conversation with Dr. Robert Bullard." *Journal of Critical Thought and Praxis*, 5 (2).

Joan Flocks et al., (2011) "Environmental Justice Implications of Urban Tree Cover in Miami Dade County Florida." *Environmental Justice*, 4(2)

Bennett, Lauren. (2017) "Deforestation and Climate Change." Climate Institute. Washington, D.C.







# November PGSC Zero Waste Team Meeting on Climate and Waste Reduction

By Martha Ainsworth



Join activists at the next Prince George's Sierra Club Zero Waste Team meeting on the second Saturday of each month.

On Saturday, November 13<sup>th</sup> at 10 AM, we'll be discussing the recommendations of the County's draft [Climate Action Plan](#) with respect to waste reduction, follow-up actions on [local plastic legislation](#) from last month's event on "Plastic Pollution and Solutions in PGC," and final plans for the "[Round Table on Municipal Composting Options in Prince George's](#)

[County](#)," on Thursday, December 2nd. All are welcome! RSVP for the Zero Waste Team meeting here: <https://act.sierraclub.org/events/details?formcampaignid=7013q000002FYYmAAO>

## Plastic Pollution and Solutions in PGC video is now available!

The video of the October 20<sup>th</sup> Panel Discussion on Plastic Pollution is now available on the Maryland Sierra Club's YouTube Channel, featuring: Andrea Crooms, Director of the Prince George's Department of the Environment; Yinka Bode-George of the National Caucus of Environmental Legislators; Chris Williams, President of the Anacostia Watershed Society; and County Councilwoman Monique Anderson-Walker. You can access the video [HERE](#).



## Artificial Turf

By Janet Gingold

Artificial turf is a health issue, a water issue, and a land-use issue, as well as a waste issue. While a grass playing field does require more maintenance and current mowers burn fossil fuels, at least grass takes up carbon as it grows and the soil helps to absorb storm water. Artificial turf, on the other hand, absorbs neither carbon nor water. Instead of cooling by evapotranspiration like grass,



Land being cleared near Commerce Drive and Prince George's Boulevard in Bowie for sports fields.

artificial turf holds onto heat resulting in high surface temperatures. In addition to advocating for expanded composting programs and curbs on single use plastic, the Zero Waste team has been collecting data on artificial turf sports fields in Prince George's County. Such data can be used to support advocacy for regulating the use and disposal of these huge installations of plastic. Just after the University announced its decision to spare Guilford Woods, Dave Brosch, a resident of University Park found out that a nearby school was about to install an artificial turf field just near the woods where the bits of plastic and rubber will wash into Guilford Run and the Anacostia beyond. Alas, it was too late to change the outcome – the field has been installed.

Meanwhile, in Bowie, six new artificial turf fields are being built at the Liberty Sports Park which is expected to open next spring. While county leadership is quite proud of getting this new facility up and running, no one knows what will happen to those mountains of plastic waste when the fields need replacement after 10-15 years. What will happen to water quality in the nearby Collington Branch, and downstream at Watkins Park? And how many athletes will suffer from effects of the increased surface temperatures as our summers get hotter and longer?

## **Climate Parents and 100% Clean Energy Schools**

*By Joseph Jakuta*

One of the national campaigns that Sierra Club has run in recent years is Climate Parents. It calls for school systems to commit to 100% clean energy goals. It is like Ready for 100, but for school systems..

We have undertaken that in Prince George's. One volunteer from of our group worked with other community advocates, including Chispa Maryland, who have been spending years organizing the Latinx community to phase out fossil fuel buses, and students at several schools, in particular a Sunrise Hub at Eleanor Roosevelt High School and environmental clubs at Eleanor Roosevelt and at Kenmore Middle School, to make that happen

All of that work paid off. On March 1, 2021 the Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) Board of Education adopted a resolution committing to develop an action plan to make PGCPS meet the goals of 100% electricity from clean energy by 2030, zero food waste, also by 2030, and to phase out fossil fuel use in buildings and buses by 2040 and that a diverse workgroup meet over the next several months to develop that plan.

That workgroup has been meeting, listening to numerous communities that would be impacted by a school climate action plan and technical experts to make sure realistic approaches are taken. The draft action plan is expected in early 2022. To follow progress and learn about climate action in PGCPS visit <http://pgcps.org/climate>

# CHOOSE YOUR SIERRA CLUB LEADERS VOTE TODAY!

HAVE YOU VOTED? If you're a Maryland Sierra Club member, you have till December 11 to choose your state and local leaders. Here's how:

- (1) Be sure you have your member ID number. (Don't know it? Email [anne.s.odonnell@gmail.com](mailto:anne.s.odonnell@gmail.com).)
- (2) Go to [www.sierraclub.org/maryland/club-elections](http://www.sierraclub.org/maryland/club-elections) to "meet" the candidates and cast your ballot. Remember, no matter how you vote, your choice is green!





## Nature Corner

### INSECTS ARE CRITICAL! WHO KNEW?

By E. Anne Riley

Pictures by Janet Gingold

Remember how annoying it was when every time you got gasoline you had to clean off your windshield with a soapy water/scraper in the warm months? Now I am sad because I no longer have to do that. It is only in the past couple of years that I even noticed that change. When did that change really begin? Of course, it had to be gradual.

It was a deep-ocean marine biologist, Diva Amon, who said “Think about our world without insects. It would collapse.” Until about a dozen years ago I never gave insects a second thought, except for Monarch butterflies. Then I heard Professor Douglas Tallamy, entomologist of University of DE, speak about native plants. I had never understood what was the big deal about native plants. He emphasizes how native plants sustain wildlife. As many Tallamy admirers know, our North American insects cannot eat foreign plants. Habitat destruction has resulted in significant species loss. I now think of insects as “keystone species”.





Many gardeners on the east coast have taken a lot of interest in native plants because we have been replacing desirable native plants with alien species at an alarming rate. In his first of three books in 2007 he argues that “our own continued existence would be in jeopardy without our six-legged friends.”



Animals depend directly or indirectly on plants for their food. Most plants also depend on insects. E. O. Wilson called insects “the little things that run the world.” Birds must have insects to feed their babies protein. The significant decrease in insects (75% decline in Germany) is thought to be the cause of critical 40% world-wide bird depletion!

What we can do is to make sure that on our balconies, patios and garden plots that we plant, violets, golden rod, asters, coneflowers, phlox, buttonbush, black-eyed Susans, milkweed, and Joe Pye weed. We can also urge our children to plant natives, especially oak trees “support more forms of life” than any other tree genus in the U.S. Some oak trees support as many as 500+ lepidoptera species (butterflies and moths), not to mention numerous animals. Tallamy says “If insects were to disappear, our own extinction would not be far behind.”



### *Upcoming Events*

Think you might need a good walk after all that Thanksgiving feasting? Come along with the Prince George’s County Sierra Club’s Outings team to **walk along the Indian Head Rail Trail and visit Mattawoman Creek**. All are welcome! Bring a friend! To get the details, register at <https://act.sierraclub.org/events/details?formcampaignid=7013q000002G2a2AAC>

Don’t miss the **Roundtable on Municipal Composting!** This event, targeted to leaders and staff in Prince George’s County’s 27 municipalities, will provide information on options for municipally-sponsored food scrap collection and composting, and the experience of Prince George’s County municipalities that have adopted them. Register at <https://act.sierraclub.org/events/details?formcampaignid=7013q000002FykuAAC>