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# Resolutions

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## ENVIRONMENT & RECREATION

### E&R-2014-03: OPPOSING FALL CANKERWORM SPRAYING

**1. WHEREAS**, Fairfax County maintains an insecticide spraying program to reduce populations of a native insect, the Fall Cankerworm *Alsophila pometaria* (commonly referred to as "inchworm");

**2. WHEREAS**, in 2014 and 2013, Fairfax County sprayed approximately 2,200 acres and 1,965 acres, respectively, in the County with a commercial application of the bacterial insecticide *Bacillus thuringiensis* var. *kurstaki* (Btk);

**3. WHEREAS**, more than 70% of the 2014 insecticide treatment areas are located in the Mount Vernon District of Fairfax County;

**4. WHEREAS**, the stated purpose of the cankerworm suppression program is "to minimize tree mortality", but the County does not monitor tree mortality, and so has no direct measure of either the need for or the effectiveness of its spraying program, and no evidence of tree mortality specifically caused by Fall Cankerworm;

**5. WHEREAS**, the Fall Cankerworm (inchworm) is a native moth caterpillar that has irruptions (population increases) every few years as part of its natural population dynamics; there are natural forces that keep these irruptions in check, including predatory insects and birds;

**6. WHEREAS**, Fairfax County's trees face multiple threats, including clearing for development and expansion of roads, non-native forest pests, invasive plant species, unmanaged deer populations, air and water pollution, and the warming and extreme weather of changing climate patterns;

**7. WHEREAS**, the native Fall Cankerworm is part of the larger local web of life and has co-evolved and is mutually dependent with the trees and plants, birds, insects, and other organisms native to the eastern deciduous forest ecosystem;

**8. WHEREAS**, the Fall Cankerworm (inchworm) is an important food source for wildlife including migrating and breeding birds in Fairfax County; spraying occurs in spring, an especially critical period when many birds are migrating through Fairfax County or raising their young;

**9. WHEREAS**, this spraying program is lethal to all species of butterflies and moths present in their caterpillar stage in the sprayed areas (not just the Fall Cankerworm) and thus could be an important contributing factor to the declines in local butterfly and moth populations, along with the songbirds and other wildlife that depend on this caterpillar as an important food source;

**10. WHEREAS**, according to the American Bird Conservancy, National Audubon Society, North American Butterfly Association,

and conservationists nationwide it is widely published that many migrating and resident native birds, and many butterfly and moth species along the Eastern Seaboard are declining;

**11. WHEREAS**, the County does not monitor impacts of the spraying on native butterfly and moth species or on birds, and so cannot say whether spraying contributes to declines in beneficial butterfly species and to observed steep declines in migratory and resident native birds in our area;

**12. WHEREAS**, other wildlife that rely on caterpillars as a food source (such as bats, beetles, and frogs) are also in trouble, and some, such as the Eastern Red Bat, are moth specialists;

**13. WHEREAS**, Ashley Kennedy, a trained entomologist, testified at the May 22, 2014 Board of Supervisors budget hearing against the continuation of this program, having consulted with more than one dozen similarly trained entomologists from institutions around the country, all of whom agree that the significantly negative impact of this program on native birds, butterflies (including our state butterfly, the Eastern Tiger Swallowtail), and moths does not justify the focus of this program on the killing of one native species of caterpillar, just because the inchworms may be "bothersome" to a relatively few County residents;

**14. WHEREAS**, continuous and repeated spraying typically results in an unnatural pesticide dependence (known as the "pesticide treadmill") and negatively impacts the overall biodiversity needed to support tree health;

**15. WHEREAS**, the Fall Cankerworm does not bite or sting, and poses no threat to human health or safety;

**16. WHEREAS**, any "nuisance" caused by the appearance of the Fall Cankerworm does not justify the costs, damage to wildlife and risks of insecticide spraying program;

**17. WHEREAS**, alternative, less destructive approaches are available to manage nuisance-related concerns, including education and community outreach on the importance of the Fall Cankerworm to our urban ecosystem and the value of a diverse mix of native tree species in resisting damage from Fall Cankerworm outbreaks, along with increased promotion of tree banding as an option for citizens who wish to control the Fall Cankerworm; only a fraction of the annual spraying cost would be needed to develop and distribute these materials to County residents;

**18. WHEREAS**, concerns about its impacts on wildlife have led the Audubon Society of Northern Virginia, Friends of Dyke Marsh, Friends of Huntley Meadows Park, Friends of Mason Neck State Park, Friends of Little Hunting Creek, Friends of Meadowood, Center for Biological Diversity, North American Butterfly Association, and Northern Virginia Bird Club to oppose the spraying program and to offer to assist Fairfax County in developing more

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balanced communications materials, including alternatives to insecticide spraying.

**BE IT RESOLVED that the Mount Vernon Council of Citizens Associations (MVCCA) recommends that:**

- (a) The Fairfax County immediately discontinue the Fall Cankerworm insecticide spraying program;
- (b) The County should undertake a program to monitor tree mortality, to better understand sources and magnitudes of threats to urban trees;
- (c) The County should convene a group of experts including foresters, ornithologists, and entomologists to assess and prioritize the major threats to the forests of Fairfax County, and to devise comprehensive approaches to address them and to protect and restore biodiversity;
- (d) The County should acknowledge that forests and woodlands are more than trees, and should redefine and broaden the mission of the Forest Pest Branch to cover *forest health*, focused on the health of the forest ecosystem, not just the trees, and should direct the agency to address the full range of threats to the forests and woodlands of Fairfax County, including non-native invasive plants;
- (e) The County should promote more benign methods for residents to control Fall Cankerworms that do not require insecticide spraying;
- (f) The County should use the direct budgetary savings from ending the Fall Cankerworm spraying program for the control of non native, invasive forest pests and plants.

**END: RESOLUTION E&R-2014-03**