

Cathy Ledec – Tree Warrior and Force of Nature

It is with sadness that I announce the departure of Cathy Ledec from the County Tree Commission (among many other duties and services to our community) due to her impending move out of the area. Cathy is a Tree Warrior and force of nature – by being a force FOR nature, with an intensity and focus that is truly remarkable and has served our natural world extremely well. She is a strong community activist, with a focus on environmentalism. Her achievements are not just volunteering, but also organizing, motivating others, demonstrating leadership, and serving as a role model and mentor.

Cathy has served on the Fairfax County Tree Commission since 2016, and as Chair since January 2019, until she recently stepped down as she plans to move out of the area. As Chair, Cathy led the creation of the 2019 Fairfax County Tree Action Plan, which was subsequently approved by the Board of Supervisors, and led to the institution of the Community of Practice in 2020. The Tree Commission and Urban Forestry brought together agencies and stakeholder organizations to work together to find ways to manage, improve and grow our urban forest in the Community of Practice. During Cathy's tenure, she led discussions and compiled research for the Commission to comment on a variety of County Board priorities, including solar projects and trees, the Joint County/Schools Environmental Task Force (JET) recommendations, land use decisions affecting trees, actions affecting trees in the Community Energy and Climate Action Plan's (CECAP), among others. The Commission also began producing annual reports to the Board of Supervisors under her leadership that include many tree recommendations and specific actions. As noted by the current Chair of the Tree Commission, Cindy Speas, "Cathy's work made the Tree Commission more relevant in a changing environmental world through the adoption of the Tree Action Plan and the Community of Practice."

Cathy has served on the Friends of Huntley Meadows Park since 2010 and as its elected President since 2012, where her leadership has contributed significantly to the long-term preservation of natural resources at Huntley Meadows and throughout Fairfax County. She volunteers with the Resource Management Division (RMD) of the County Park Authority (FCPA) assigned to Huntley Meadows, educating the public on the importance of being good environmental stewards and contributing to data collection supporting scientific research. Cathy has led countless cleanups, invasive species removals, bird counts, nature walks and organized volunteers for many other park activities. In 2020, Cathy received the Sally Ormsby Environmental Stewardship Award for 17 years of volunteer service at Huntley Meadows Park and for the Fairfax County Park Authority.

The FCPA recently recognized Cathy for her service. Her advocacy on behalf of the FCPA has successfully educated many about the importance of a healthy environment in maintaining Fairfax County's high quality of life for residents, businesses and visitors. Cathy frequents public hearings and provides testimony in support of FCPA's annual budget, defends parkland from the impact of development projects, performs "hands-on" ecosystem restoration as a Site Leader for the FCPA's Invasive Management Area Program and actively participates in citizen science activities. From the Park Authority Board's special resolution: "Ms. Ledec will be moving from Fairfax County, and we are left to hang on to the legacy she leaves behind; a legacy embodied in countless young people who have learned the ethos of environmental stewardship, the preservation and restoration of the wetlands at Huntley Meadows Park, and the example of what just one person can accomplish when they care about something as important as the environment."

In 2015, she received the Virginia Recreation and Parks Society's Distinguished Volunteer Service Award. She is active with the Mount Vernon Citizens' Associations, Delegate Krizek's Environmental Roundtable, Mount Vernon District Environmental Advisory Committee, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and Pavilions at Huntington Metro Community Association, and served on the County's CECAP. In 2018, Cathy was honored as Lady Fairfax for her service to our community and specifically for leading the effort to plan, design, fund and install a Natural Landscaping project at the Mount Vernon Governmental Center. Cathy's passion as a champion for the environment is contagious and she has an unmatched ability to transform a bland terrain into a beautiful landscape. In 2019, she received the County's Environmental Excellence Award for her work on many local initiatives regarding natural resource protection, restoration and land use. That year she was also named the Fairfax County Federation's Citizen of the Year for her extensive service.

Cathy is truly a protector of our natural world, from every bee to every tree. Her knowledge of trees, natural landscaping, climate and environmental issues, living shorelines and so much more is unmatched, as is her passion and enthusiasm. She has a strong conviction that we must preserve what we have, improve what we can, lead by example and love Mother Earth. Cathy is an inspiration to us all and we wish her all the best in her future endeavors and new community!