

**I am pleased to nominate EARTH SANGA for a 2009 Fairfax County Environmental Excellence Award based on its outstanding leadership in the restoration of Fairfax County's native forests and meadows and its exemplary support for Fairfax County's environmental protection efforts in our stream valleys and parks.**

Earth Sangha is a 501(c)3 volunteer-based non-profit environmental organization located in Fairfax, Virginia devoted to practical environmental action. Earth Sangha was founded in 1997. For more than a decade it has pursued an ambitious ecological restoration program to restore native forests and meadows, stabilize streams, and control invasive alien plants, principally in Fairfax County.

In 2008 more than 500 people volunteered more than 10,000 hours of their time to work on Earth Sangha's environmental initiatives located in Fairfax County. Several of these initiatives are being carried out in partnership with Fairfax County Government departments, i.e. the Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) and the DPWES Storm Water Planning branch and the Urban Forest Management Division, as well as with the Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District.

Key initiatives include: a **native plant nursery** at **Franconia Park** in Springfield; a **native arboretum** at the FCPA's **Marie Butler Leven Preserve** in McLean; **stream buffer restoration** along several Fairfax County streams; and two special parks – **Wilburdale Park** in Annandale and **Barcroft Park** in Arlington County.

Earth Sangha's **nursery** supplies native plants and trees for planting in Fairfax County parks and stream valleys. It has been operational since 2001. It includes about 2,000 square feet of raised beds, 12,500 square feet of shaded container space, and a very small (100-square-foot) greenhouse off-site for germinating hard-to-sprout species. Each Year Earth Sangha grows over 170 species of native trees, shrubs, vines, and herbaceous plants. These are all grown from seed collected from local forests and meadows. The use of local, wild seed helps to maintain genetic diversity and local adaptation in the species planted. The nursery was built by volunteers, and volunteers do most of the daily work—mulching, weeding, watering, filling pots with soil, maintaining nursery structures, and helping to collect, process, and sow seed. (The nursery has also benefited continuously from support from the FCPA. With FCPA assistance it is expanding the nursery's container yard by 8,000 square feet.)

The **Native Arboretum** project which began in 2004 will transform the Marie Butler Leven Preserve, a 20-acre park into an extensive collection of plants native to the greater Washington, DC, region. When complete, a broad range of native trees, shrubs, vines, and herbs will be available for viewing, accompanied by labels keyed to major field guides. The Native Arboretum will be a public resource for building ecological literacy, and for creating a stronger mandate for conservation.

Since 2007 Earth Sangha has worked with Fairfax County's **stream buffer** program to mobilize hundreds of volunteers to control invasive alien plants and plant a diverse spectrum of native species along Fairfax County Streams. The program is run by the Storm Water Planning Division of the Fairfax County Department of Public Works and Environmental Services. However, Earth Sangha does most of the planting design, logistics, volunteer outreach, event supervision, and maintenance of the plantings. To date, nearly all the plantings have occurred on land owned by the Fairfax County Park Authority. Stream buffer plantings have taken place at Carny Park (Popes Head Creek Watershed), Lake Fairfax Park (Difficult Run Watershed), Rutherford Park, Canturbury Woods Park and Noman Cole Pollution Control Plant (Pohick Creek Watershed), Flag Run Park, Luria Park, Roundtree Park, Mason District Park, and Wilburdale Park (Cameron Run Watershed), Flatlick Park and Rocky Run SVP (Cub Run

Watershed), Pleasant Hill Park (Little Rocky Run Watershed), Frying Pan Farm Park (Horsepen Creek Watershed), and Waverly Park, Wakefield Park and Eakin Park (Accotink Creek Watershed).

One of Earth Sangha's special attributes is its ability to partner with a wide variety of public and private organizations to accomplish its objectives. In addition to the FCPA and the Storm Water Planning Division, Earth Sangha has partnered with numerous Fairfax County community organizations, educational institutions, and businesses. These include the Canterbury Woods Community Association; Local chapters of the Church of Latter Day Saints; Fairfax Releaf; Lands and Waters; The National Wildlife Federation; The Northern Virginia Conservation Trust; The Northern Virginia Interfaith Alliance; The Vienna Moms Club; Annandale High School; Lake Braddock Secondary School; The New Century College at George Mason University; South County Secondary School; AOL; Fitness and Health; HSBC Finance Corporation; and Network Solutions.

In 2008 alone Earth Sangha mobilized 10,000 hours of volunteer efforts valued at almost \$200,000 that helped Fairfax County progress toward achievement of its environmental objectives. Earth Sangha's major accomplishments in 2008 include:

- Cultivation and distribution of 5,000 native trees, shrubs, and herbaceous plants from Earth Sangha's Wild Plant Nursery to local parks and schools to restore degraded stream banks and flood plains, and to revegetate areas cleared of invasive alien vegetation. Most plant material was planted through volunteer efforts organized and coordinated by Earth Sangha.
- Earth Sangha's efforts at the Native Arboretum through 2008 have included: planting of: a **Witch-Hazel Grove**; a **Native Pollinator Garden** a **Pollinator Garden Forest**; a **Rain Garden** constructed with the assistance of the FCPA, the Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District, and the McLean Citizens Foundation.
- During 2008 Earth Sangha mobilized 260 volunteers to **restore Fairfax County riparian Buffers**. These volunteers planted 1,200 trees and shrubs on six sites totaling just over 2.6 acres and buffering about 2,000 feet of stream channel. Planting sites in 2008 took place along Rocky Run, Accotink Creek, Holmes Run, Pohick Creek, Horsepen Creek, and Backlick Run. Previously, the buffer restoration program had planted 8,400 plants on 30 sites covering 18 acres along more than two miles of Fairfax County streams.

Earth Sangha is a small organization that is having a major positive impact on the natural environment in Fairfax County. For this reason it deserves to receive a 2009 Fairfax County Environmental Excellence Award.

#### ATTACHMENTS:

- 1) 2008-2009 Earth Sangha newsletters
- 2) Selected Earth Sangha Publications
- 3) Photos of 2008 Activities.