

# FREE ROD RENTAL PROGRAM HELPS ANGLERS FISH INDEPENDENTLY



For Lake Accotink Park Manager Dan Grulke, it all began with a feeling that not enough kids were fishing. He felt strongly that increased access to fishing for all youngsters and their families, including those with disabilities was vital. He wanted more kids learning about this great outdoor activity and benefiting from the joys of fishing.



After supervising and supporting several free fishing events, Grulke wondered “How can I expand this opportunity to everyone?” He realized this was much bigger than him. He understood how important partners and collaboration would be and began to work with Fish and Explore, as well as Monica Klock, the Park Authority’s Americans with Disabilities (ADA) coordinator. Within months, they developed the first Fishing for Awareness fishing day for families and people with autism.

Grulke began to work with the Virginia Department of Wildlife (VDWR) which had received grant funding from the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation. Now there were great ideas and the money necessary to make things happen. As discussions about the possibilities went forward, the partnership expanded. Alex McCrickard, VDWR Aquatic Education Coordinator and others felt that the lack of fishing equipment was an impediment to participation. In response, the idea of free

fishing rod rentals at Fairfax County Park Authority Parks took root.

This turned out to be the perfect time to clarify the relationships between FCPA and VDWR. The Fairfax County Park Foundation developed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Lakefronts Supervisor Chris Goldbecker was instrumental in clarifying the process, keeping things from stalling, and getting final approvals. Once the MOU was complete, it became clear that many more people would have the ability to go fishing without having to worry about purchasing fishing gear. Individuals who might not be comfortable in a group setting, such as those with disabilities, could participate on their own and at their leisure.

The program is simple but effective. Burke Lake, Riverbend, Lake Fairfax, and Lake Accotink Parks have all agreed to support the free rod rental program. There are no dues or fees associated with this program. Organizers only ask that participants fill out a short survey about the program, so that in the future they can modify, expand, or change it to better serve our communities. The program is currently in operation at Burke Lake Park and Riverbend Park and will be up and running in March 2023 at Lake Fairfax Park and Lake Accotink Park.



To help facilitate a meaningful fishing experience for anglers, multiple staff from the Park Authority and approved vendors have written articles and fishing reports to help support beginning anglers. This content can be found online at [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/fishing](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/fishing). Readers will find articles, tips, and reports that help people learn at their own speed and become as self-sufficient as they choose to be. Jordan Jenkins, who has been essential for keeping the program operational, is developing a brochure for the program that links QR codes to the website, so that participants can use real time information to catch the fish they desire. For additional information on the free rod rental program please reach out to [Dan.Grulke@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Dan.Grulke@fairfaxcounty.gov).

