

FIRST HIKE FAIRFAX



For the past five years, the Fairfax County Park Authority has held First Day Hikes with a twist. Not only do we encourage residents to get out on the trails on New Year's Day, we inspire them to document the moment with photos they can submit for a photo contest. It's a sweet start to the new year that draws hundreds to our parks and highlights talented amateur photographers. If fitness and health are part of your New Year's resolutions, this is a perfect way to start the new year.

FCPA's First Hike program is part of something much bigger -- a nationwide initiative led by America's State Parks to encourage people to get outdoors. Activities are held across the country.

With more than 330 miles of trails to appreciate in Fairfax County, First Hike is a great way to familiarize yourself with iconic parks such as Burke Lake Park, Lake Accotink and the Sully Woodlands area, or discover a hidden gem in one of the more than 400 parks in the park system.

"The program brings out the best in people, setting the bar for a new year of fitness, spending time with family and friends outside and enjoying the tranquility of abundant open space and parkland," said John Berlin, Program Branch Manager. That's an easy feat in a community which boasts more than 23,600 acres of FCPA-protected parkland, of which 78% remains in its natural state.

The 2021 First Hike program, sponsored in part by the Fairfax County Park Foundation, also served as part of our larger 70th anniversary celebration. Deputy Public Information Officer Cristin Bratt helped coordinate the program and noted, "We were proud to use the Park Authority's 70th anniversary as an opportunity to celebrate our parks and the people who use them. Our open spaces have offered a much-needed breath of fresh air during the pandemic; it was great to see the parks and trails through the lenses of the many visitors who use them for their own health and wellness."

This year's photo contest included special prize amounts of \$70 to further commemorate the Park Authority's 70th anniversary. Nearly 200 hikers submitted photos. More than 1,000 people voted on the People's Choice Winner. With 167 votes, the photo above, submitted by Mike Crosby and featuring the Huntley Meadows boardwalk, received 16 percent of the vote. That made it the most popular of the 30 finalists selected by the judges.

First Hike 2022 this January will serve as a clarion call to go back outside – a place that remains a safe haven during the continuing pandemic. Watch for specific details of this year's program on the Park Authority website and via our social media platforms.

