

# 2024 Highlights



Since 2010, Conservation Montgomery has been an all-volunteer 501c3 nonprofit. Our working board of directors accomplishes the Conservation Montgomery mission with support from donations and volunteers. Tax-deductible financial support from donors allows us to continue activities like those outlined below.

## Environmental education and awareness

We promoted awareness and environmental education by holding Home Tree Care 101 classes this year and participating in events. We also amended our bylaws and updated our branding with a refreshed logo. Our website was completely redesigned to improve navigation, and the site was translated into the Spanish language, which allows communication with more county residents.

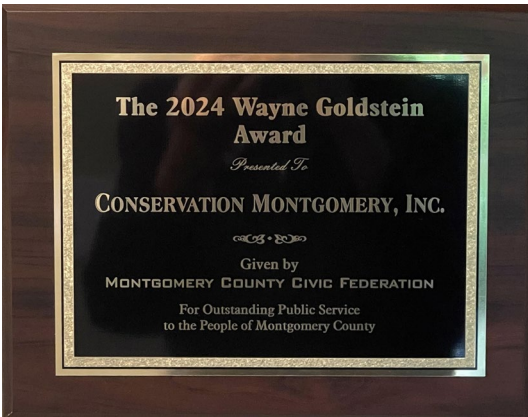


The goal of our **Home Tree Care 101** (HTC 101) classes has been to show homeowners and business owners how to care for and preserve mature trees on their private property. HTC 101 complements free County tree planting programs like *Tree Montgomery* and *Reforest Montgomery*. We held HTC 101 spring and fall classes, primarily in sections of the county where tree canopy percentage is low. Certified arborists teach these hands-on classes to help homeowners learn about caring for trees on their property. With proper care, trees can live longer and be less hazardous in severe weather. Classes are held outdoors in neighborhoods throughout the county. We thank the Montgomery County Government and the Chesapeake Bay Trust for supporting this program. This past year, we were able to have the ***Healthy Trees, Healthy Communities Guide to Tree Care in Montgomery County*** translated into Spanish. We will be increasing our reach with

distributions of the guide in locations around the county.

To stay directly connected with the public, Conservation Montgomery participated in *GreenFest 2024*, the *Takoma Park Folk Festival* and *Naturally Latinos*. We were also one of the sponsors of the *Naturally Latinos* and *Taking Nature Black* events organized by our colleagues at Nature Forward. *Pictured at right: CM Co-Chair Amanda Farber at GreenFest.*





## Advocacy, lending your voice to the environment

The beginning of 2024 started with a win for trees in the County. The Montgomery County Forest Coalition, including Conservation Montgomery, worked with the County Council to introduce and unanimously pass Bill 40-23 in January. The legislation, *Tree Canopy and Roadside Tree Requirements - Fee Revisions*, adjusted the fee structure for trees removed in the County's right of way to ensure the fees matched the cost of new tree replacement. It also adjusted the fee that sediment control permittees pay to the County's Tree Canopy Conservation Account to reflect planting and maintenance costs under the Tree Montgomery Program. The fees for these programs had not been updated in about 10

years, and now will be updated every two years going forward. The Council press release on the legislation acknowledged: *"Trees are one of the most important natural resources and one of the few truly renewable resources. Tree canopies play a pivotal role in enhancing quality of life and contributing to the well-being of residents. A thriving tree canopy reduces air, water and noise pollution, alleviates heat stress and reduces heat islands, and positively impacts human health, among other benefits. Protecting the tree canopy will help mitigate climate effects and help Montgomery County reach its ambitious climate goals."*

We worked with partners at the County Department of Transportation and Tree Friends United to raise awareness about the danger that invasive tree vines pose to some of our oldest and healthiest trees. Invasive vines can quickly overtake and eventually kill a tree. For this, we were awarded the Montgomery County Civic Federation *Wayne Goldstein Award* for public service.

We have participated in written testimony and in public forums about negative impacts on rural lands and water resources from data centers, campgrounds, increased housing density and industrial solar arrays in the Agricultural Reserve. Whenever possible, we partner with the Friends of Ten Mile Creek and Little Seneca Reservoir on these issues. Our advocacy team is calling attention to water conservation in and around the Agricultural Reserve. We urge planners and decision makers to consider how water quality and supply may be affected by new land use proposals. The 93,000-acre Ag Reserve protects the forested headwaters of streams feeding our drinking water reservoirs at Little Seneca and Triadelphia Lakes as well as protecting streams feeding the Monocacy, Patuxent and Potomac Rivers. When County residents turn on taps, some of that water likely flowed from the Reserve.

The Reserve also contains the Piedmont Aquifer providing the sole source of water to farmers and residents from wells. Our rural areas are under constant threat by non-agricultural uses that displace farmland, degrade water quality and deplete ground and surface water supplies. For example, data centers require huge amounts of land and water to operate. The County's first large data center would be built near Dickerson. Planned housing densification in Poolesville and around MARC train stations at Barnesville, Boyds and Dickerson will demand ground water and will require septic systems. The County Council passed a bill permitting campgrounds in rural zones including RV camping. This will lead to septic waste polluting the aquifer. Septic systems contribute nutrient pollution to septic waste polluting the aquifer. ground and surface waters. As droughts are expected to become more frequent and severe due to climate change, every drop of water matters. The cumulative impact of new land uses must be considered to ensure we have an adequate clean water supply for rural and urban residents long into the future. This summer's drought is yet another reminder that our water resources cannot be taken for granted.

As we do each year, CM supported the County Park budget requests to the County Council with particular emphasis on natural resource protection efforts and funding for additional park acquisitions. We are currently supporting the Montgomery County Council's *Bring Your Own Bag Bill (BYOB)*. The BYOB bans carryout single-use plastic bags, retains a small fee on paper bags, and makes it easier for retailers to remit more of what they collect.