



www.fairfaxfederation.org P.O. Box 3913, Merrifield, VA 22116-3913

RESOLUTION OPPOSING FALL CANKERWORM SPRAYING

The following is a resolution passed by the membership of the Fairfax County Federation of Citizens Associations on November 20, 2014, for sending to the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors.

Resolution

WHEREAS, Fairfax County maintains an insecticide spraying program to reduce populations of a native insect, the Fall Cankerworm *Alsophila pometaria* (commonly referred to as “inchworm”);

WHEREAS, in 2014 and 2013, Fairfax County sprayed approximately 2,200 acres and 1,965 acres, respectively, in the County with a commercial application of the bacterial insecticide *Bacillus thuringiensis* var. *kurstaki* (Btk);

WHEREAS, the County conducts spraying for the Fall Cankerworm in the early spring to minimize impacts on other species of moth and butterfly larvae,

WHEREAS, climate change is causing the emergence of moth and butterfly larvae to emerge earlier each year;

WHEREAS, the Fall Cankerworm (inchworm) is a native moth caterpillar that has irruptions (population increases) every few years as part of its natural population dynamics; there are natural forces that keep these irruptions in check, including predatory insects and birds;

WHEREAS, the Fall Cankerworm (inchworm) is an important food source for wildlife including migrating and breeding birds in Fairfax County; spraying occurs in spring, an especially critical period when many birds are migrating through Fairfax County or raising their young;

WHEREAS, this spraying program is lethal to all species of butterflies and moths present in their caterpillar stage in the sprayed areas (not just the Fall Cankerworm) and thus could be an important contributing factor to the declines in local butterfly and moth populations, along with the songbirds and other wildlife that depend on this caterpillar as an important food source;

WHEREAS, according to the American Bird Conservancy, National Audubon Society, North American Butterfly Association, and conservationists nationwide it is widely published that many migrating and resident songbirds, and many butterfly and moth species along the Eastern Seaboard are declining;

WHEREAS, Fairfax County does not monitor the impact of the Fall Cankerworm on tree health or mortality, thus failing to show any harm directly attributable to this native insect to the trees; the County also does not monitor the impact of the spraying on other native butterfly and moth species that are just as vulnerable to the Btk spraying as the Fall Cankerworm, nor does it monitor the indirect impacts on birds and other wildlife;

WHEREAS, continuous and repeated spraying typically results in an unnatural pesticide dependence (known as the “pesticide treadmill”) and negatively impacts the overall biodiversity needed to support tree health;

WHEREAS, trees in Fairfax County are under much greater threat from non-native invasive plants such as English Ivy, Kudzu, Honeysuckle, Wisteria, and others than from the Fall Cankerworm; **WHEREAS**, the Fall Cankerworm does not bite or sting, and poses no threat to human health or safety;

WHEREAS, Ashley Kennedy, a trained entomologist, testified at the May 22, 2014 Board of Supervisors budget hearing against the continuation of this program, having consulted with more than one dozen similarly trained entomologists from institutions around the country, all of whom agree that the significantly negative impact of this program on songbirds, butterflies (including our state butterfly, the Eastern Tiger Swallowtail), and moths does not justify the focus of this program on the killing of one native species of caterpillar, just because the inchworms may be “bothersome” to a relatively few County residents;

WHEREAS, any “nuisance” caused by the appearance of the Fall Cankerworm does not justify the costs, damage to wildlife and risks of insecticide spraying program;

WHEREAS, alternative, less destructive approaches are available to manage nuisance-related concerns, including education and community outreach on the importance of the Fall Cankerworm to our urban ecosystem and the value of a diverse mix of native tree species in resisting damage from Fall Cankerworm outbreaks, along with increased promotion of tree banding as an option for citizens who wish to control the Fall Cankerworm; only a fraction of the annual spraying cost would be needed to develop and distribute these materials to County residents;

WHEREAS, at least six community groups have committed to assisting Fairfax County in developing more balanced communications materials, including alternatives to insecticide spraying that are available for controlling the Fall Cankerworm;

WHEREAS, the county staff says this program can be opted out of through their mailed postcard program, this process does not fully inform the citizens of the program and its impact. Furthermore, while the county staff may feel it is meeting its notification goal it is not. Citizens are inundated with bulk “trash” advertisements and it is most likely that these post cards are simply not recognized as an important notification from the County.

WHEREAS, the funds appropriated in the Fairfax County Budget for the Forest Pest Program are \$1,105,927 for FY 2015 and \$1,105,316 for FY 2014 (Revised);¹

Therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, the Fairfax County Federation of Citizens Association recommends the immediate termination of the Fairfax County Fall Cankerworm insecticide spraying program;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Federation recommends that a portion of the funds approved by the Board of Supervisors for the Fall Cankerworm insecticide spraying program be reallocated to citizen education and community outreach as described above, along with increased funding for the County’s Tree Action Plan to increase native species diversity and otherwise improve forest health in Fairfax County.

¹ The Forest Pest Program represents a portion of the Integrated Pest Management Program, Fund 40080, which has appropriated \$3,128,092 under the FY 2015 Adopted Budget Plan and \$3,115,655 under the FY 2015 Advertised Budget Plan.