



FCWC

Federated Conservationists
of Westchester County

Position Statement on Defunding Nature Centers For hearing before the County Board of Legislators November 22, 2011

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The Federated Conservationists of Westchester County (FCWC) has just been made aware that the Westchester County Executive's proposed 2012 budget calls for the defunding of all six county nature centers and the abolishment of the wildlife biology monitoring program. FCWC and its member organizations and individuals are strongly opposed to such actions and have many concerns regarding the future effects these decisions will precipitate. The nature centers and related staff slated for elimination include:

- Marshlands Conservancy in Rye, NY;
- Edith Read Wildlife Sanctuary in Rye, NY;
- Cranberry Lake Preserve in West Harrison, NY;
- Croton Point Nature Center in Croton-on-Hudson, NY;
- Trailside Nature Museum (Pound Ridge) in Cross River, NY;
- Lenoir Preserve in Yonkers, NY.

Westchester County's nature centers and their staff have played a pivotal role in the environmental education and conservation efforts within the County, and continue to provide affordable programming and passive recreational opportunities for tens of thousands of Westchester's citizens. This important link between public and nature has helped foster and create environmental stewardship by nurturing an appreciation for the essential natural resources around us. Additionally, nature center staff has consistently been at the heart of conservation efforts within the County, helping to protect the fragile ecosystems and rare species which abound in Westchester's impressive parkland. This includes efforts to manage deer populations after years of research and coordination to develop the Deer Task Force Report in which FCWC was involved. The resulting program, necessary to save our parks from deforestation by excessive deer browse, will thus end as soon as it began, negating an important conservation effort of the County. Although our colleagues at not-for-profit facilities such as Rye Nature Center, Teatown Lake Reservation and Greenburgh Nature Center provide wonderful environmental and conservation programs, these organizations would agree that they do not offer duplicate services provided by the county facilities and they would be unable to fill the void.

As we are in troubling economic times, FCWC understands the need for government to become more efficient. However, the proposed cuts are penny wise and pound foolish. Without staff at these preserves, invasive species will proliferate, trails will deteriorate, and vandalism will occur to buildings and grounds, all of which will have to be cleaned up at a later date. It is also in these times that individuals and families look to the parks for an outlet. Residents, schools, and social groups seek out individuals who share, and with whom they can share, their knowledge and love of nature. Furthermore, it is detrimental to the overall quality of life of Westchester's residents to cut programs that contribute so heavily to environmental quality and the protection of our valuable natural resources.

We urge you to protect these oases of conservation and education, as they play an integral part in the future of Westchester County's environmental security.