

Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy

People and Wildlife Living in Harmony

Our Children Need More Than Ball Fields

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From remarks made by LWC member Maria Ruth at the hearing on Banshee Reeks in May 1998

On behalf of the mothers in Loudoun County, I urge the Department of Parks and Recreation to keep Banshee Reeks a natural park for children growing up here. Like many mothers - and fathers too - I am a devoted user of Parks & Rec facilities throughout the county. We enjoy the playgrounds, preschool, and classes at the community centers; we take walks and nature classes at Claude Moore Park; we play baseball and soccer on fields throughout the county; we have eagerly awaited the opening of the pool at Franklin Park. Parks & Rec places are happy, lively places for children.

But children need places where they can be silent. They need places where they can sit and listen to the sounds of nature, see the stars in a dark and unpolluted sky, watch a hawk or a caterpillar. They need wild places beyond the lines of ball fields, past the playground equipment, and beyond the reach of paved sidewalks and bike trails. Banshee Reeks can be such a place, especially for our young children.

My husband and I took our four- and six-year-old sons on the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's "Beavers at Banshee" in March. For three hours we walked along a small tributary of Goose Creek marveling at the beavers' work -- more than 15 dams and small ponds in a secluded woodland. My children (and most of the adults) had never seen anything like it. They are still talking about the dams, the ponds, the felled trees, the teeth-marks. At the end of the walk we all sat in stillness and silence, hoping to see one of the beavers emerge. But our mere presence, and the occasional whispered comment or footstep, were enough to keep the shy beavers in their lodge. Imagine what impact ball fields and parking lots will have on the beavers and the other wildlife.

We have returned to Banshee Reeks with our children and their young friends. The children never fail to discover some treasure here - a clutch of Canada goose eggs in a downy nest, swarms of tadpoles at a pond's edge, salamanders, toads, fresh piles of chewed tree trunks. And they are transformed by their discoveries in this natural place. They become quiet, keen observers and respectful listeners.

I urge the Department of Parks and Recreation to show restraint as they plan the future of Banshee Reeks. Yes, it is important to learn the rules of soccer, how to take turns on the swings, what sportsmanship means — but not at Banshee Reeks. This should be the place to learn how the natural world works.

The existing home on the property could become a nature center to interpret Banshee Reeks for young children. In Leesburg, we have the wonderful Smithsonian Naturalist Center for scientific discovery — but it is not open to children under ten years old. Ten years old is too

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late. You must captivate children when they are much younger. You must show your infant the full moon. You must take your toddlers outside when it's dark — away from the lights of the towns and ball fields --- and turn their heads to the stars. You must take your preschoolers by the hand and lead them into the forest.

The children of Loudoun County need Banshee Reeks to learn these lessons and to feel that vital connection to all living things.