



Spring Sprang, And So Did We!

I don't imagine we're the only ones happy to have that Winter behind us! The near-record low temps and continued drought (despite all the snow and ice!) weren't just annoying, but exacted a price at our Wild Plant Nursery. Unfortunately, we saw much higher than normal winter loss, especially on some high-value species like oaks, hickories, and wild comfrey.

On the greenhouse front, the extreme cold signaled the death of the last heater standing and irreparably broke the irrigation system. Working with the Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA), we were able to still use the greenhouse, but with significant setbacks to the scope and timing of propagation and a lot more work for Lisa, Daly, and Georgina!

We are, unfortunately, also anticipating a dip in plant sales this year. The causes shouldn't be surprising to anyone with even a passing interest in the news: the mass layoffs of our hard-working federal public servants, the economic toll of tariffs, and back-to-office mandates limiting people's time to garden as they are stuck back in traffic.

We are feeling the squeeze from all of the above too, including increased prices for tools, pot tags, pots, soil, and other essential propagation materials. Despite this, our plan is to hold pricing at our nursery steady for the foreseeable future. We are doing this for several reasons: First, we believe strongly that native plants ought to be accessible to all people regardless of economic status. As big-box garden centers' and online retailers' prices go up, we want to ensure our community has access to locally-grown local-ecotype native plants. Second, we believe that keeping pricing affordable

directly and positively affects our mission to restore native plant communities on public and private lands. If more people can access our plants, we are helping to create more habitat. And third, we are also aggressively pursuing other funding streams such as grants from local, state, and private foundations to support our efforts.

But on to some good news! With the support of Fairfax County's Tree Preservation and Planting Fund, we increased our tree/shrub donations to FCPA's Invasive Management Area program this Spring! As a part of this grant, we've distributed over 1,000 trees and shrubs and the caging to protect them from hungry deer to dozens of sites across Fairfax County.

We were also excited for another round of Earth Sangha Plant Grants this Spring! In April, we awarded 13 Plant Grants to local parks, schools, and places of worship. (The Earth Sangha Plant Grant program supports grassroots restoration projects that have no or limited funds and focuses on sites that have the greatest ecological, social, and environmental justice benefits.) We'll have another Plant Grant cycle this Fall!

A rough Winter doesn't dampen our enthusiasm for our nursery expansion and relocation, either. While we don't have much more to share yet, we believe we will very soon, and I hope you'll find it as exciting as we do.

We also did a lot (and I mean a lot!) of planting this Spring. See inside for updates on our Spring restoration projects!

Above: Conservation Interns collecting *Claytonia virginica* (spring beauty). From left to right: Mikaela, Shogofa, and Justin. Seed collection is an excellent opportunity to go over plant ID, native plant communities, seed collection techniques, and more. Photo by Michaelanne Makuch.

Spring Restoration Plantings:

At Green Spring Gardens (pictured below) we continued our work with FCPA ecologist Darko Veljkovic to create a native meadow and ecotone in a back section of the park that was a previous home site and lawn. (We dug out part of a toilet while planting!) This is our second time planting at this site, and while we noticed lots of sprouts from our first round of planting last year, they definitely suffered from the late-season drought. Serious weather anomalies like that can introduce “year effects” on restored sites – long-lasting alterations to a plant community from one-off events that kills establishing plants.

In this case, that might mean the plants in the normally moist-to-wet woodland edge area may have died. Long-term that would leave gaps in the biodiversity on-site that could leave it permanently less diverse and also less resilient (especially to weather anomalies in the other direction, i.e. very wet years). By replanting over a few years, you can insulate a site from these year effects by getting a wider sample of weather across the site.

If this planting goes well, FCPA may choose to expand the restoration site, so fingers crossed that we’ll be able to support more meadow restoration at Green Spring Gardens!



At Mason District Park (pictured below), in addition to lots of invasive species removal, we worked with FCPA ecologist Bryan Coppede to restore *Quercus montana* (chestnut oak), *Quercus falcata* (Southern red oak), and *Quercus rubra* (Northern red oak) to portions of an Oak Heath Forest plant community. Mason District Park is home to a number of nice stands of upland forest typified by oaks and diverse understory stands of blueberries and huckleberries. We will return this Fall to plant more *Quercus rubra* (Northern red oak) and to add some *Quercus alba* (white oak) to this planting site. If you’ve noticed that most of our oaks have been marked as “Reserved for Conservation” on our website ...this is why!



At Ellanor C. Lawrence Park (pictured below), we assisted Fairfax County ecologists with a meadow planting adjacent to the Woodlands Stewardship Education Center. This meadow planting was part of FCPA’s Spring Break Green Action Day in which groups tabled to promote local environmental issues, volunteers removed invasive species in the park, and the Earth Sangha supplied plants and led a native meadow planting. FCPA hosts events like these to foster public education and get the community involved in green action and we are always happy to join!



At Lake Fairfax Park (pictured below) we supplied and planted almost 2,500 native meadow plants! This is another meadow being restored by FCPA ecologist Darko Veljkovic and is the second time we’ve teamed up to plant at this site. The first planting was about a year and a half ago, on Halloween, when we worked to restore the ecotone between meadow and forest by planting shrubs along the forest edge. The previous planting is doing well so we hope the same will be the case for all of the new plants that our staff, along with our fabulous group of about 40 volunteers and FCPA colleagues, installed this April. This year, we added a few more shrubs to the forest edge, but our main focus was on the meadow. FCPA prepped the site with a controlled burn to help suppress invasive species, like *Elaeagnus umbellata* (autumn olive), and there’s a plan to follow up with an herbicide treatment to suppress *Artemisia vulgaris* (mugwort). The meadow is quite dry so the planting focused on dry, sun-loving forbs such as *Asclepias amplexicaulis* (clasping milkweed), *Symphytotrichum pilosum* (frost aster), *Solidago juncea* (early goldenrod), and *Packera anonyma* (Small’s ragwort) and graminoids such as *Eragrostis spectabilis* (purple lovegrass), *Coleataenia anceps* (beaked panic grass), and *Sorghastrum nutans* (Indian grass).



Marie Butler Leven Preserve: Spring Wildflower Updates

In April 2024 we held a Big Day with volunteers at the Marie Butler Leven Preserve to plant and protect Spring-blooming woodland wildflowers as part of our “Habitat Refuge” program. This program uses applied nucleation techniques by targeting specific areas to plant dense and diverse pockets surrounded by deer caging. Research shows that these pockets encourage visitation by wildlife carrying outside native seeds, further driving succession across the site. We don’t typically fence off herbaceous plantings, but the Marie Butler Leven Preserve has a lot of deer pressure so it’s a great site to see how deer exclosures affect both the herbaceous and woody layers.

We started by removing invasive *Vinca minor* (periwinkle) to take pressure off stands of *Phlox divaricata* (woodland phlox) planted a few years back. We then added Spring-blooming forbs like *Polygonatum biflorum* (Solomon’s seal), *Aquilegia canadensis* (wild columbine), *Allium tricoccum* (wild leeks), *Geranium maculatum* (wild geranium), *Thalictrum thalictroides* (rue-anemone), *Sanguinaria canadensis* (bloodroot), *Andersonglossum virginianum* (wild comfrey), and *Thaspium barbinode* (hairy-jointed meadow parsnip).

Last Summer’s drought had a small effect on the survivability of this planting, but overall it’s looking fantastic! Approximately one year out from the planting, there’s very little invasive pressure within the exclosure and we’re even seeing some species we didn’t plant pop up including *Erythronium americanum* (yellow trout lily)! Many herbaceous plantings at this park have struggled due to deer browse, invasive plant pressure, and/or drought. But so far so good here! We’ll keep monitoring this planting and others on-site.



Thalictrum thalictroides
(rue-anemone)



Phlox divaricata
(woodland phlox)



Aquilegia canadensis
(wild columbine)



Thaspium barbinode
(hairy-jointed meadow parsnip)

Kayla’s Plant Picks:

One of our Summer favorites, *Oenothera fruticosa* (**narrow-leaf sundrops**), truly is like a drop of pure sunshine. Found in dry to mesic meadows, disturbed areas, and woodland edges, *Oenothera fruticosa* attracts pollinators like butterflies, specialized bees, and even hummingbirds. Songbirds eat the seeds and play a large role in dispersing them!



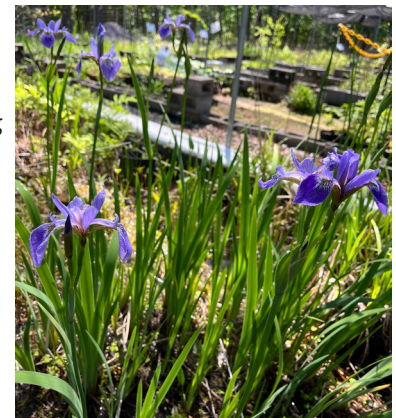
The flower of *Trichostema dichotomum* (**forked blue curls**) looks like something out of a sci-fi movie with a bottom petal shaped like a tongue and a forked, curved stigma on the top! It’s an annual that readily reseeds. Each flower only lasts a day, but each plant produces hundreds of flowers throughout the season. Found in full to part sun, *Trichostema dichotomum* prefers medium to dry soils.



Mountain mints are common constituents of most meadows and woodland edges in our region. *Pycnanthemum tenuifolium* (**narrow-leaved mountain-mint**) is far and away the most common and can inhabit a wide range of wet to dry meadows and forest edges. Every Summer, they are covered in a cloud of skippers and small bees at the Wild Plant Nursery!



If you have a pond or consistently wet area in your garden, you may be lucky enough to support *Iris versicolor* (**blue flag iris**). Its large purple-blue flowers bloom early in the summer. This species also grows from thick, creeping rhizomes, which prefer to be submerged in fresh water or very wet soil. You can find some growing in the Wild Plant Nursery’s Pond row, as pictured.



Conservation Intern Training:

We have quite the flock of Conservation Interns this year thanks to support from the Virginia Department of Forestry and a private donor! (Our internship program offers two pathways: a full-year experience for college graduates, career-switchers, or part-time students; and seasonal positions designed for full-time students.) Our objective is to prepare Conservation Interns for a career in on-the-ground native flora conservation and restoration. Interns assist with the full range of propagation activities at our Wild Plant Nursery and with restoration programs conducted in collaboration with local agencies and jurisdictions.

In addition to experiential learning, we run seasonal training sessions where staff share research papers, books, hands-on techniques, or lead nature walks. About once every week, interns are taken to various sites to explore and learn more about the native flora and fauna. During early Spring, we excitedly scout for spring ephemerals. While we may not be collecting seed early in the season, we are working on plant ID, reading native plant communities, and monitoring sites for future collection. An added bonus is frequent critter sightings! We often see birds, turtles, and, one day in March, we spotted an American mink along Cub Run! Returning to the same sites at different times helps interns identify plants at different life stages and to visualize how landscapes change throughout the seasons.

No matter where our interns' futures take them, we hope the hands-on experience they gain at the Earth Sangha helps prepare them for careers in conservation and a lifetime of appreciation for our natural areas!



Meet The Interns:



Full-Season Conservation Intern Shogofa happily planting an oak at Mason District Park.



Full-Season Conservation Intern Mikaela triumphant after pulling out *Rosa multiflora* and other invasives from Mason District Park.



Full-Season Conservation Intern Astra collecting *Claytonia virginica* (spring beauty) seeds.



Spring Conservation Intern Justin repotting *Hypericum prolificum* (shrubby St. John's wort) at the Wild Plant Nursery.



Summer Conservation Intern Olivia during a seed collection day along South Run.



Summer Conservation Intern Jessalyn carrying a tray of plants at our greenhouse.

Right: Summer Conservation Intern Aria, who is starting with us mid-June.

Left: Executive Director Maddie Bright and Full-Season Conservation Interns Shogofa and Astra at Cub Run in March. Maddie went over plant ID and identifying plant communities. This was the day they saw the mink! Photo taken by Michaelanne Makuch.



Spring Seed Collection:

Despite a hotter than usual Spring and continued drought conditions, Spring seed collection got off to a promising start. Generally, warmer weather accelerates the development of early-emerging plants, so we have to be careful to not miss these species as they go to seed more rapidly. Drought also adds stress to plants, which impacts seed set timing and seed viability. But, we're trying our best to collect more seeds from spring bloomers! Seed collection is always a balancing act. Collect enough to propagate enough to restore degraded habitats, but don't collect too much that we hurt the healthy wild populations.

All that said, we had another good year of *Claytonia virginica* (spring beauty) and *Mertensia virginica* (Virginia bluebells) collection. By the time this will have gone to print, we will have collected *Thalictrum thalictroides* (rue-anemone) and *Sanguinaria canadensis* (bloodroot), too – both are important spring ephemerals in upland dry-mesic forests. Like most spring ephemerals, these seeds take a few years to germinate and develop to a size that can withstand repotting, so our seed collection efforts might not be immediately reflected in our inventory.

We've had less luck with *Ulmus americana* (American elm) and *Ulmus rubra* (slippery elm), but managed to get some seed of both. These trees were once major constituents of floodplain and other moist-mesic forests, but Dutch Elm Disease has made them more scarce. Like other pathogen- and pest-threatened species, we continue to grow these to shore up threatened local populations with the hope that some of the remaining trees may be resistant to these threats and could help perpetuate future genetic diversity.

Top Right: Interns spotting *Symplocarpus foetidus* (skunk cabbage), while on the prowl for more *Claytonia virginica* (spring beauty)! Some of the other species our interns helped collect this Spring include *Mertensia virginica* (Virginia bluebells), *Jeffersonia diphylla* (twinleaf), *Sanguinaria canadensis* (bloodroot), *Cardamine concatenata* (cutleaf toothwort), and *Thalictrum thalictroides* (rue-anemone)!

Bottom Right: Full-Season Conservation Interns Mikaela, Shogofa, and Astra with Executive Director Maddie taking a short break after practicing plant ID along Cub Run. Both photos by Michaelanne Makuch.



Spring Ephemerals

Below are some spring ephemerals that we found this April while seed collecting.



Claytonia virginica (spring beauty)
Photo taken by Michaelanne Makuch



Cardamine concatenata (cutleaf toothwort)
Photo taken by Maddie Bright



Erythronium americanum (yellow trout lily)
Photo taken by Maddie Bright

National Invasive Species Awareness Week:

National Invasive Species Awareness Week (NISAW) took place from February 22nd to March 2nd and to “celebrate” we hosted two invasive species removal events. One was a joint effort with our colleagues at the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust at one of their conservation easements. The site is slated to be a combination of native plants and an Arlington Friends of Urban Agriculture Plot Against Hunger site. Produce grown at this site will be donated to local food pantries and the native plants that will be installed will attract and support the pollinators needed to help the food grow.

The other event was held at the Marie Butler Leven Preserve (pictured right) where volunteers removed invasive *Pachysandra terminalis* (Japanese pachysandra) and *Vinca minor* (periwinkle), two plants that are common in household gardens and traditional horticulture. These invasive plants and others like them have escaped from cultivation and are now wreaking havoc in our natural areas. We challenged our volunteers to share their experience removing invasives with their networks as a part of NISAW to help educate the public about the harmful effects of invasive species and the benefits of using native plants in their gardens.



Tree Bank News

Hispaniola



Above: Two members of our Tree Bank Hispaniola Forest Credit team, Cosme (center) and Lucío (right) reviewing the Forest Credit loan application of Migel Angel Recio Guzman (left). Migel wanted to borrow 25,000 Dominican pesos (about \$455), in exchange for conserving four acres of high quality forest. We gave him the loan! In April, we lent about \$50,900 to 53 families, in exchange for the conservation of about 354 acres of native and mostly riparian forest. Forest Credit is designed to address a kind of credit gap. It's very difficult to farm, even on a small scale, without access to credit. But very few banks in our project area are designed to meet the needs of small-holder farmers. That's where we fit in. We offer modest annual loans, mostly around \$1,000, in exchange for pledges not to cut well-defined tracts of reasonably high-quality forest on small-holder lands. Loan sizes are based on the quality and size of these “credit reserves.” A small charge of non-compounding interest is added to the repayment obligation, to help keep the program stable.

Panama



Above: This photo shows a ground-layer view of part of a trail network that we are creating as an anti-poaching measure in our Tree Bank Panama forest site. The site lies in northwestern Panama, near the border with Costa Rica. This extremely dense old-growth rainforest extends for miles in several directions, and is home to our project partners, the local Naso indigenous people. In terms of species count, this region is among the most biodiverse places on Earth, but it is not secure. One of its biggest problems is the indiscriminate poaching of its birds and mammals. Loss of the animals threatens the trees as well, since the trees depend on the animals for pollination, seed dispersal, soil maintenance, and other ecological services. In addition to removing poachers, the trail network will foster eco-tourism — something our colleagues there are eager to encourage. Profits from eco-tourism should create a powerful local incentive to conserve this forest.

Sangha Means Community: A Message From Maddie

This piece was originally sent out as an email on February 5, 2025 and added to our blog:

Just a few months ago I wrote how we will continue to focus on our conservation work – work that takes time to yield results and requires us to have faith that our environmental plight will improve for the better. (If you haven't already, you can read it on our blog at www.earthsangha.org/single-post/when-we-collect-an-acorn). Now I feel compelled to write a more forthright piece. I'm generally loath to write explicitly about politics, but I feel that I have a duty to our community, and to myself, to express honestly my fears and my anger at what has amounted to a coup of our nation.

Our Sangha, our community, is made up of a tremendously diverse group of people: people of all ages, ethnicities and nationalities, immigration statuses, religions, sexualities and gender identities, those with disabilities and chronic illnesses, and experiences and backgrounds. I'm enormously proud that in any given month we can work with several different faith groups, students of all ages, and volunteers, some of whom are novices and some who are experts in their own right. Many of our volunteers are currently or are retired from public service careers at the federal, state, or local level. This diversity has made the Sangha what it is today: a critical resource for local ecological restoration and plant conservation in the DC area and abroad.

We couldn't do what we do without this extended community of volunteers, students, colleagues in the public sector, and of course our own staff. But we cannot effectively go about protecting habitat and conserving native plants with constant attacks against our wider community. Specifically I'm referencing attempts to round up and deport families, attacks on trans youth and adults, wholesale demolition of federal agencies and attacks on public servants, rampant climate change denial, the demolition of data and information from federal websites that we used to guide our work (including environmental justice tools we use for our Plant Grants), and tariffs that will undoubtedly make our work more expensive and harder to accomplish. I am equal parts furious and terrified of what the future may hold.

I'm not inclined towards catastrophizing, but I'm afraid for my own safety as a publicly-out trans woman. I worry that my friends and colleagues at EPA, USAID, NOAA and elsewhere won't have jobs anymore – or that those very agencies may no longer exist. I'm devastated for the students who have volunteered with us who have discussed their LGBTQ+ identities or immigration status and what the future holds for them.

But this isn't just about me and my feelings. Already the attacks on conservation work have begun. Climate change data is being lost. The Department of Interior is exploring undoing hundreds of square miles of protected lands by rescinding National Monument declarations. Federal grant money, such as funding from the Inflation Reduction Act is, apparently, being frozen. If we are going to address the challenges that conservation faces in the near future, we must stand together in solidarity as a community.

For that, we're definitely up for the challenge – I have infinite faith in the staff and volunteers here! But we cannot do it alone. And it's not fair to expect that we ask others for help if we're not

first willing to provide help for our own community. To whatever extent we can, I promise that the Earth Sangha will always be a refuge for anyone concerned about our planet and its natural areas, regardless of disability status, skin color, ethnicity or nationality, sexuality, gender identity, age, religion, or background. We will not comply with any discriminatory orders, and we will endeavor – as we always have – to treat everyone with dignity and respect as we focus on taking care of each other and the planet we all call home.

Please stay safe and know that you always have a place with us, with your Sangha. — *Maddie Bright*, Executive Director



Above: The Sangha's staff posing with a raccoon pelt from Nature Forward's outreach table at our Spring Open House. Top left to right: Olivia (intern), Katie (Development Coordinator), Justin (intern), Kayla (Horticulture Coordinator), Maddie (Executive Director), Katherine (Director of Development), Astra (intern), & Shogofa (intern). Bottom: Mikaela (intern) & Michaelanne (Restoration Manager). Missing: Co-Founders Chris & Lisa who were on grandparent duty watching Maddie and Katherine's toddler, Maeve.

Nursery Expansion Updates:

Sometimes no news is good news and, in this case, (frustratingly for you all, I know!) we don't have a lot of updates! We are continuing to make progress with our formal agreement with Fairfax County Department of Public Works and Environmental Services (DPWES), and our colleagues at DPWES Urban Forest Management Division have taken concrete steps to bring water over to our prospective new nursery site.

In March, in order to avoid price increases from new tariffs, we purchased two greenhouse kits for the new nursery site (a big thank you to our friends at DPWES for unloading and storing them for us!). We're hoping to make our next large purchase – a small tractor – soon because we also anticipate price increases there.

Some other large expenditures that must wait until we're situated on-site because they're infrastructural include things like PVC pipe for water and irrigation control parts. We are also committed to reusing material from the current nursery – whether that's the absolutely essential squirrel exclosures Sangha Stewards Walter and Joel have made, or reusing our metal shade structure to support sprinkler lines, or even just taking lumber and cinder blocks with us.

For this growing season, we don't anticipate having a new nursery site open to the public, but rest assured we're continuing to paddle furiously under the surface towards a bigger, more sustainable nursery.

New Earth Sangha Logo:

Eagle-eyed website visitors may have noticed our new logo – an update to our white oak (*Quercus alba*) leaf design and a new “waterfall” wordmark. Our goal is not just to depict one of our most ecologically significant canopy trees, but also to evoke the contours of the natural landscape through the linework of the leaf and the “waterfall” lettering in the wordmark. We also hope the new typeface evokes some of the nostalgia of Art Nouveau design elements from seed and garden catalogs of old. Thanks to Kayla for the design work!

Katherine has also been rolling out updates to our website to make the website easier to navigate and more attractive. Let us know what you think!

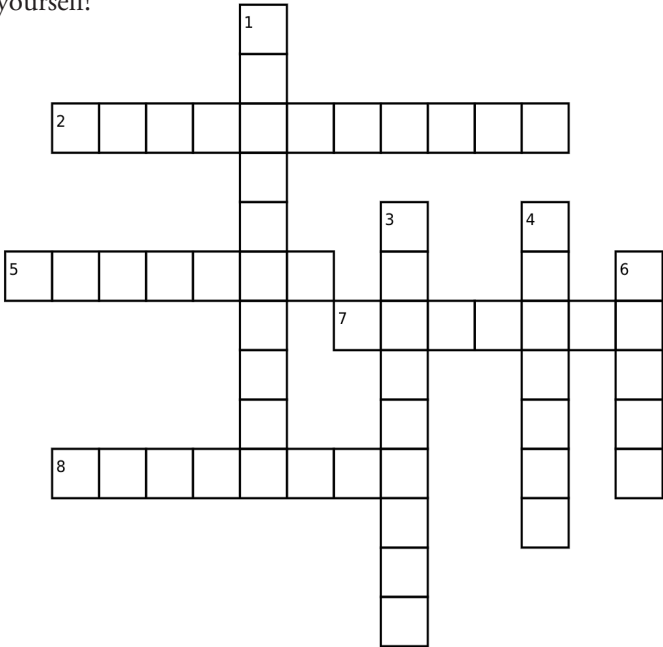
Rare Species Cultivation:

Last year we distributed 600 state-rare *Ripariosida hermaphrodita* (Virginia mallow) (pictured right) to the Kingman Island restoration project in Washington, DC. This year, we’ve already distributed 100 Virginia mallow to the National Park Service’s C&O Canal Park. We are continuing to work with our partners on public lands to find suitable protected habitat for this rare species.



Crossword Corner:

Who’s ready to learn some botany? We’ve hidden the answers throughout this issue of The Acorn. Before you start Googling the answer, go back and see if you can find it for yourself!



- Down:

 - 1. grasses, sedges, and rushes
 - 3. describes a plant with a short growth period in the Spring
 - 4. a period of little or no precipitation
 - 6. describes soil with medium moisture
- Across:

 - 2. the process of creating new plants
 - 5. a region of transition between two environments
 - 7. the underground modified stem of a plant
 - 8. a non-native plant intruder



The Earth Sangha is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) charity based in the Washington, DC, area. We are devoted to the restoration and conservation of native plant communities.

Donate: Donations are tax-deductible. You can mail us a check (made out to “Earth Sangha”) or donate on our website at earthsangha.org/donate.

Volunteer: We work with volunteers at our Wild Plant Nursery and our field sites in Northern Virginia. Sign up to volunteer at earthsangha.org/volunteer.

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Platinum-rated: The Earth Sangha has a platinum rating from GuideStar Exchange for commitment to transparency.

One of the Best: The Earth Sangha is recognized by Spur Local (formerly the Catalogue for Philanthropy) as “one of the best small charities in the Washington, DC, region.”



Above: FCPA Invasive Management Area Site Leader, Peter Jones, with another car load of trees/shrubs destined for Justice Park! These plant donations (and the caging material not pictured!) were made possible by support from Fairfax County’s Tree Preservation and Planting Fund.