

"Federation Corner" column
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Conceded: proposed InterCounty Connector (ICC) environmental impacts cannot be mitigated

By Jim Fary

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The staff of Maryland National Capitol Parks and Planning Commission (MNCPPC) in its report to the Planning Board on the proposed ICC conceded that the loss of interior forest cannot be replaced in the watersheds that the proposed ICC would fragment. The proposed ICC will go through high value interior forest in Rock Creek Park, in the Northwest Branch, and in the Paint Branch. Interior forest is very important because it is where neotropical song birds nest (birds that winter in the tropics, but nest in the North). For example, the scarlet tanager needs interior forest to successfully nest. There simply is not enough interior forest remaining in mid-Montgomery County to replace the loss of interior forest that the proposed ICC would destroy. MNCPPC said that it would be necessary to go purchase interior in other parts of the County to compensate for loss of interior forest in the mid-County.

Here are the actual quotes from the staff report:

"...interior forest loss is one natural resource impact that cannot be mitigated through design techniques or the construction of additional mitigation projects. Once an interior forest stand canopy is bisected for a roadway, that forest stand is no longer valuable for forest interior dwelling species. Furthermore, the impacts of interior forest loss extend well beyond the direct impacts associated with roadway construction" (p. 9 of staff report).

The staff report goes on to say that with a 200' wide band of construction activities (the proposed ICC impact), the interior forest loss is 800', since 300' on either side changes from "interior" to "edge." We will thus be exchanging wood thrush and scarlet tanager habitat for deer habitat and facilitating the tree-destroying invasion of alien vines and grasses that MNCPPC is now working so hard to combat. Further, on p.10, the report acknowledges that the "...amount of interior forest on private properties in the affected watersheds is insufficient to provide the required acreage of replacement interior forest." So staff recommends looking at sites outside the affected watershed, for replacements.

We could sympathize with the difficulty in finding replacement forest of equal value to what is lost, but our conclusion is to keep what we've already got! So, for our families and our future, oppose the proposed ICC. We want the children of our grandchildren to see scarlet tanagers and other neotropical birds.