



ARLINGTON COUNTY, VIRGINIA

County Board Agenda Item
Meeting of September 28, 2010

SUPPLEMENTAL REPORT

DATE: September 27, 2010

SUBJECT: Request to Advise Adoption of the Natural Resources Management Plan

DISCUSSION: The following changes are proposed to the draft Natural Resources Management Plan that was attached to a Request to Advise dated September 8, 2010.

Change language in Chart on Page 1, Recommendation # 3, last sentence; and change last sentence of Recommendation # 3 on Page 12 to read as follows (with deleted text struck through and new text underlined):

Explore expansion of current County review processes to help ensure that land-disturbing activities on private property would not adversely impact documented natural resources on ~~County-owned properties~~ property owned and/or managed by Arlington County Government, Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority, Arlington Public Schools, Northern Virginia Conservation Trust, or any other land trust.

Change language on Page 13, last sentence beginning in the left-hand column, to read as follows (with deleted text struck through and new text underlined):

Staff will explore mechanisms to design a process that would allow the environmental review of any site plan, applications for special use permits, variances or other requests for discretionary County approval on private property that will occur within 100 feet of a documented natural resource feature on ~~County-owned property~~ property under easement for protection of natural resources or on property owned and/or managed by Arlington County Government, Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority, Arlington Public Schools, Northern Virginia Conservation Trust, or any other land trust.

County Manager:

GA

County Attorney:

BRC

Staff: Jamie Bartalon, PRCR

48.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The *Natural Heritage Resource Inventory* (NHRI), which was conducted between 2005 and 2008, provides Arlington County with natural resources data so it can systematically define and address issues relating to the protection and management of natural resources within the County. This *Natural Resources Management Plan* (NRMP), which resulted from the NHRI and was called for in the 2005 *Public Spaces Master Plan*, defines natural resource problems and recommends policies and actions to preserve Arlington’s documented natural resources for future generations. In offering a strategic approach, this Plan views natural resource management through both broad and narrow lenses. This layered strategy, in addition to offering new concepts, identifies areas for agency cooperation, reduces redundancies and leverages current efforts.

Most importantly, this approach emphasizes the importance of managing natural resources as a unified system rather than a set of unrelated natural features.

There are 19 primary recommendations, with additional suggestions offered throughout the body of the Plan. Discussion and recommendations focus on natural lands management; urban forest management; native vegetation; invasive plant species; geological resources; wildlife resources; park management and planning issues; land acquisition and conservation easements; cooperative management opportunities; partnership development and natural resource education. A number of appendices at the end of the Plan provide supporting information and maps.

Recommendation	Priority	Fiscal Impact	Implementation Timeline	Responsibility
1 Adopt a general policy goal of “Zero-Loss” of County-owned natural lands.	Priority 1	None	N/A	County Board
2 Establish a new administrative category of County-owned open space, known as Natural Resource Conservation Areas (NRCAs).	Priority 1	None	One Year	PRCR in conjunction with relevant commissions
3 Develop a new GIS-based environmental review process to protect significant individual natural resources on Arlington County-owned open space from ongoing maintenance activities, redevelopment or new construction on County-owned properties or private properties within 100’ of a designated natural resource feature. Revise current Administrative Regulation 4.4 (Environmental Assessment Process) to incorporate the use of this GIS layer into the review process for all County-initiated land disturbing activities. Explore expansion of current County review processes to help ensure that land disturbing activities on private property would not adversely impact documented natural resources on <u>County-owned properties property owned and/ or managed by Arlington County Government, Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority, Arlington Public Schools, Northern Virginia Conservation Trust, or any other land trust.</u>	Priority 1	None	One Year	Workgroup from PRCR, DES, E2C2
4 Effectively manage Arlington’s natural resources by establishing a single management unit with specialized skills in natural lands preservation and natural resources management.	Priority 1	To Be Determined	As soon as possible	PRCR

sive plant control, erosion abatement and infrastructure repairs or projects to address public safety. As the primary proprietor for parkland in Arlington County, the decision for inclusion as an NRCA and specific management objectives would be made by designated staff within PRCR through consultation with the Parks and Natural Resources Division Chief.

County staff has identified a number of parks or areas that are recommended for initial inclusion within this new protective class of open space. Additional lands could be added in the future as appropriate. Recommendations are based on a combination of overall high quality or environmental sensitivity of natural resources present, existence of rare or significant features and potential for restoration. This new protected class of open space increases the opportunity for the County to obtain future grants for natural lands restoration projects. The recommended list includes parcels within the following parks: Gulf Branch Park (lower), Windy Run (lower), Donaldson Run, Fort C. F. Smith Historic Site, Long Branch/Glencarlyn Park, Barcroft Park and Arlington Forest Park. The combined area of the recommended parcels totals approximately 126 acres. Staff recommended parcels are displayed by map in Appendix 1.

Recommendation 3: Develop a new GIS-based environmental review process to protect significant individual natural resources on Arlington County-owned open space from ongoing maintenance activities, rede-



Over 950 trees and shrubs were measured to determine the largest of each species

velopment or new construction on County-owned properties or private properties within 100' of a designated natural resource feature. Revise current Administrative Regulation 4.4 (Environmental Assessment Process) to incorporate the use of this GIS layer into the review process for all County-initiated land disturbing activities. Explore expansion of current County review processes to help ensure that land-disturbing activities on private property would not adversely impact documented natural resources on ~~County-owned properties~~ property owned and/or managed by Arlington County Government, Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority, Arlington Public Schools, Northern Virginia Conservation Trust, or any other land trust.

For proposed projects on Arlington County-owned properties, there currently exist two primary environmental review processes:

the Environmental Assessment process, administered through A.R. 4.4, and restrictions or limitations applied by the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance for projects within designated Resource Protection Areas (RPAs). However, a number of categorical and blanket exemptions are provided within both processes that allow certain types of projects to proceed without environmental review. The *Natural Heritage Resource Inventory* indicates that there are a number of circumstances in which a project or maintenance regime that would be exempted from review could adversely impact now-identified significant natural resources located along County streets, in streams, on the edge of woodland and paved trails and in close proximity to picnic areas, playgrounds and pavilions in developed multi-use parks. Regardless of location, Recommendation #3 places all significant, individual natural resources, geological features, significant

trees, rare plants, and seeps and springs within a Natural Resource Conservation Area, multi-use park, street or general open space on a new “Environmental Review” GIS layer. The content of this layer would be a special compilation of resource data already collected and mapped on other existing layers, and County departments would be required to check this layer prior to planning any project on public property. Any County-sponsored project proposed within 100 feet of a targeted resource would trigger an abbreviated environmental review by the County’s Natural Resource Management Unit (see Recommendation #4) prior to proceeding. Projects currently exempted from existing environmental review, except certain emergency repairs to infrastructure, would be included in this review process. In addition, County planning agencies should consult this layer at the beginning of each park Master Planning process. This review would allow planners the opportunity to avoid potential design conflicts with significant natural resources in advance, rather than mitigating impact after the required Environmental Assessment. In addition to the suggested changes to A.R. 4.4, a separate abbreviated environmental review process is suggested to protect significant natural resources on County property that may be adversely impacted by proposed development or land disturbance on nearby private properties. Staff will explore mechanisms to design a process that would allow the environmental review of any site plan, applications for special use permits, variances or other requests for discretionary County approval for projects on private property that will occur within 100 feet of a docu-

mented natural resource feature on County-owned property property under easement for protection of natural resources or on property owned and/or managed by Arlington County Government, Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority, Arlington Public Schools, Northern Virginia Conservation Trust, or any other land trust.

Recommendation 4: Effectively manage Arlington’s natural resources by establishing a single management unit with specialized skills in natural lands preservation and natural resource management.

Prior to the start of the *Natural Heritage Resource Inventory*, Arlington County lacked a comprehensive knowledge of the volume, location or quality of remaining natural resources on either public or private property within its boundaries. In order to implement the changes and recommendations in this Plan, effectively manage documented natural resources, maintain established GIS information, monitor the health of the local natural environment, and liaise with other public landowners in Arlington, the County should focus these responsibilities under a single management function. This work unit would provide expertise in the areas of forest ecology, urban wildlife management and other associated natural sciences. Most of the jurisdictions in our region have addressed the need for natural lands management by establish-

ing staffing levels that range from a single permanent position in small jurisdictions to Division-level work units in Fairfax and Montgomery Counties. It is suggested that this new functional unit reside within the Parks and Natural Resources Division of the Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources. Implementation should be accomplished as quickly as fiscally possible in order to maintain momentum in the County government’s expressed



Globally rare wetlands in Arlington

desire to serve as a responsible steward of the local environment.

Recommendation 5: Develop an individual natural resource management plan for each County park designated as a Natural Resource Conservation Area, or containing NRCAs within its boundaries.

Sufficient countywide natural resource data have been collected and mapped to permit staff to develop site-specific natural resource management plans. Preservation, conservation and protection of resources will be more effective when applied at the local park level. The development and production of individual park plans would be the responsibility of the natural