

ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2024.** Please include this submission form with the electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Arlington County
Program Title: Forestry and Natural Resource Plan
Program Category: Environmental

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Arlington County Forestry and Natural Resources Plan (FNRP) Problem/Challenge Being Addressed

This nomination is for the development and adoption of Arlington's Forestry and Natural Resources Plan (FNRP), a new element of the County's Comprehensive Plan.

Arlington's natural resources are essential elements of what make the County a great place to live, work and play. Every aspect of these resources, from air, water and soil to plants, animals and fungi, are intertwined in a complex web of relationships that the community relies on for our quality of life and that touch each of us daily. These resources provide immense benefits — from improving our physical and mental health, to making us resilient to the impacts of climate change like increased heat and heavier rains, to making our neighborhoods more comfortable, inviting and prosperous, and providing valuable habitat for sensitive species. This ecological web is increasingly threatened by the intersecting pressures of climate change, increasing urbanization, industry, invasive species, inequitable access to greenspace, and the absence of nature from daily life. Arlington is an inflection point: as it continues to grow, it is essential that we intensify efforts to protect, enhance and manage our natural resources both today and tomorrow for future generations.

The FNRP is meant to address this challenge by providing a holistic environmental planning framework that engages the community as well as the County government. To address these threats comprehensively, the FNRP includes not just operational guidance for County staff and goals for habitat protection in public parks, but also recommendations for conservation and restoration on private property, a focus on environmental justice and commitment to equitable access to nature, as well as a collaborative approach to community conservation emphasizing education, volunteerism and incentives that reach beyond the scope of traditional environmental regulation. The FNRP contains 83 individual policy recommendations called Action Steps, organized into four interconnected Strategic Directions:

1. **Conservation:** Focused on protecting and enhancing natural habitats.
2. **Climate Mitigation, Adaptation, and Resilience:** Reduce carbon footprints, adapt infrastructure for climate resilience, and build community resilience.
3. **Biodiversity:** Ensuring the diversity of plant and animal life is maintained and enhanced.
4. **Operations:** Streamlining County operations to support sustainable practices.

Of these, the County Board selected ten Priority Recommendations to reflect community input and emphasize major changes from past policy that will help Arlington meet these challenges.

Award Criteria

The development of the FNRP aligns with multiple award criteria, showcasing innovation, community impact, and collaboration. Here's how the FNRP stands out:

Innovative Environmental Planning

The FNRP is an innovative approach to environmental planning for an urban jurisdiction, combining natural resource management, urban forestry, and biophilic design into a unique planning tool. For the first time, the County is applying a holistic, ecology-focused perspective to urban forestry and natural resource management challenges which recognizes the interconnections between all elements of Arlington's environment, regardless of whether they are on public or private property.

Community Impact and Adaptability

The community's enthusiastic embrace of the FNRP and its measurable impact on County planning underscore its significance. The success of this initiative serves as a model for other jurisdictions, demonstrating the value of an integrated approach to environmental efforts. As climate change intensifies and environmental challenges grow more complex, the FNRP provides a scalable solution that other urban areas can adapt to their unique needs. This adaptability ensures that the FNRP's benefits extend beyond Arlington, potentially influencing environmental planning on a broader scale.

Collaborative Approach

Collaboration is at the heart of the FNRP. The initiative brings together a diverse array of stakeholder groups, including County commissions, environmental non-profits, park users, civic associations, outdoor recreation groups, and private property owners. This extensive collaboration is evident not only in the comprehensive recommendations of the plan but also in its strong emphasis on education, outreach, and volunteerism. By fostering a sense of community involvement and ownership, the FNRP transcends traditional environmental regulation, creating a robust framework for sustained environmental stewardship.

[How the Program was Carried Out](#)

[Program Overview](#)

In response to recommendations from the County's Comprehensive Plan, we embarked on an ambitious journey to update and combine the Urban Forest Master Plan (2004) and the Natural Resources Management Plan (2010). This initiative culminated in a groundbreaking addition to the County's Comprehensive Plan: the Forestry and Natural Resources Plan.

The development of this plan was led by a dedicated project management team from the Department of Parks and Recreation. This team, which integrated the Urban Forestry, Natural Resources Management, Parks Planning and Development, and Public Relations units, worked in collaboration with a larger interdepartmental group of subject matter experts from across the County government. The consulting expertise of American Forests further strengthened our efforts. Oversight was provided by the Natural Resources Joint Advisory Group; a committee of members of Arlington's Parks and Recreation, Forestry and Natural Resources, and Climate Change, Energy and Environment Commissions. Our process began with a thorough policy review of Arlington's existing environmental policies and extensive benchmarking

research of comparable jurisdictions to inform the process. The resulting draft plan was developed and refined in close coordination with the community, ensuring it truly reflects the collective vision of Arlington's forestry and natural resources.

Public engagement was a cornerstone of this process, lasting three years. Despite the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, County staff engaged extensively with the community using a diverse array of outreach strategies across three different public engagement opportunities between 2020 and 2023. These engagements included 31 focus groups and stakeholder interviews to gather feedback at the beginning of the process, three online comment forms supplemented with promotional videos and infographics to solicit input on the draft plan, online tools enabling the public to provide comments and suggested edits directly in the document, 21 bi-lingual pop-up events around the County, one virtual open house, one in-person public meeting, regular monthly briefings to the County's Natural Resources Joint Advisory Group, and multiple presentations to many County commissions and other community groups. Overall, this effort generated over 5,000 comments that helped shape the plan and its community-wide approach to conservation and resource management.

Adopted by the County Board in December 2023, the Forestry and Natural Resources Plan now serves as a critical policy tool. It guides the review of private development projects, County infrastructure projects, updates to the County Code, as well as the operations of relevant departments, all aimed at realizing our vision of a greener Arlington.

Staffing

As an element of the Comprehensive Plan, implementation of the FNRP is a dispersed responsibility bringing in staff from multiple departments. Implementation planning is led by 1 FTE in the Planning and Development Division of the Department of Parks and Recreation, with part-time support from multiple

subject matter experts in the Parks and Natural Resources Division. Virtually all FTEs within the Parks and Natural Resources Division and many others across the County government contribute to the implementation of the FNRP in the course of their regular duties.

Funding

Funding for the development of the FNRP came out of the Department of Parks and Recreation's operating budget. Policy goals articulated in the FNRP are being implemented through department operating budgets, one-time funding from the County board for increased tree planting and invasives removal, and the Capital Improvement and Capital Maintenance funds as appropriate.

Additional support is provided by community organizations such as Eco Action Arlington and Northern Virginia Conservation Trust, as well as the in-kind donation of volunteer time and effort to support conservation work across the County.

Program Results

The adoption of the FNRP in December 2023 marked the successful culmination of a three-year collaborative environmental planning effort championed by Arlington.

Immediate results of the program included:

- Reflection of the FNRP's policy priorities in the recently approved Fiscal Year 2025 operating budget, including:

- **Proactive Tree Maintenance:** An additional \$1.0 million for proactive tree maintenance to support a 5-year pruning maintenance cycle vs. our current 17.7-year cycle. This increase creates the capacity to maintain approximately 2,800 additional trees per year.
 - **Tree canopy Fund:** Infusion of \$240,000 into Arlington's [Tree Canopy Fund](#) to facilitate tree planting on private property.
 - **Invasive Species Management:** New, one-time funding of \$300,000 to proactively address emerging threats from invasive species to Arlington's natural areas. This creates the capacity to conduct invasives management on 475 acres by 2030 and transitions the County's larger natural areas to a regularly funded, dedicated maintenance program by 2032.
 - **Expanded Nature Center Hours:** \$185,000 to expand the operating hours of Arlington's Nature Centers, increasing the County's environmental education and stewardship capacity.
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- Increased policy support for the Natural Resiliency Program, a part of the Capital Improvement Program. This program allows Arlington to study and implement projects that manage stormwater and natural resiliency in concert with the provision of recreational opportunities. It is funded at \$8.5 million through 2032.
 - The initiation of our 2024-2025 Tree Canopy Survey to update measurements of the County's tree canopy coverage and incorporate LiDAR data, allowing us to bring height and density metrics into our canopy data for the first time. This data will be used to target implementation of the FNRP's tree canopy and equity goals among others.

- Incorporation of the plan’s policy guidance into the review of development applications and County infrastructure projects, including site plans, park and trail design projects, and other long-range planning efforts.
- Similarly, the County is conducting research into the [population and management options for white-tailed deer](#) and an [inventory, assessment, and management strategies for natural surface trails](#) to reduce environmental impact and ensure forest health and water quality in accordance with the FNRP’s recommendations.
- In addition, the County is currently developing a two-year implementation framework for the plan, based on the short-term and priority actions identified in the document. This effort continues the interdepartmental coordination established during the planning process and will identify additional projects, such as updates to the County Code, long-range planning for conservation corridors, and changes to tree and greenspace maintenance practices to be more equitable, that will improve the Arlington’s environment and quality of life over the coming years.

Executive Summary of the FNRP

The Forestry and Natural Resources Plan (FNRP) offers a comprehensive policy framework to address environmental threats, reconnect nature to our daily lives, and ensure the benefits of a healthy ecosystem are maintained for future generations of all species. For the first time, the County has adopted a holistic approach to natural resource management, recognizing that the success of this initiative relies not just on government, but the entire community. Every individual connected to Arlington has a role to play. With this principle as its foundation, the FNRP provides operational guidance for County staff, sets goals for habitat protection in public parks, and extends conservation and restoration recommendations on private property. It emphasizes environmental justice, equitable access to nature, and promotes a collaborative community conservation approach that goes beyond traditional regulatory frameworks to include education, volunteerism, and incentives to drive participation and engagement.

The FNRP's recommendations are structured around four interconnected Strategic Directions:

5. **Conservation:** Focused on protecting and enhancing natural habitats.
6. **Climate Mitigation, Adaptation, and Resilience:** Reduce carbon footprints, adapt infrastructure for climate resilience, and build community resilience.
7. **Biodiversity:** Ensuring the diversity of plant and animal life is maintained and enhanced.
8. **Operations:** Streamlining County operations to support sustainable practices.

These Strategic Directions establish high-level policy goals and outline actionable recommendations to achieve them. Collectively, they form a road map towards a greener Arlington, where the ecosystem flourishes, and the advantages of nature are accessible to all residents and visitors. Despite the challenges facing Arlington's ecosystem, the FNRP brings reasons for optimism. It builds on past successes, leveraging that momentum to drive enduring environmental progress. By promoting a renewed relationship to nature that is rooted in reciprocity and community collaboration, we have an opportunity to transform Arlington for the better.