



## **Chapter 8**

# **Lower Potomac Planning District**

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**GREAT PARKS, GREAT COMMUNITIES  
2010 – 2020 Park System Plan**

**Fairfax County Park Authority**

**LOWER POTOMAC PLANNING DISTRICT**

Location & Character.....	1
Park System Summary.....	1
Park Classification.....	5
Park Master Plans.....	7
Themes, Issues and Strategies.....	7
THEME: Connectivity.....	7
THEME: Community Building.....	12
THEME: Service Delivery.....	13
THEME: Facility Reinvestment.....	15
THEME: Land Acquisition.....	16
THEME: Resource Interpretation.....	18
THEME: Cultural Resource Stewardship.....	19
THEME: Natural Resource Stewardship.....	20
Maps, Figures, and Tables	
Map 1: Public Parks by Class in the Lower Potomac District.....	3
Map 2: Protected Land in the Lower Potomac District.....	4
Map 3: Non-motorized Connections and Points of Interest in the Lower Potomac District .....	10
Table 1: Parks in the Lower Potomac Planning District.....	6
Table 2: Lower Potomac Planning District 2020 Facility Needs Analysis.....	14
Table 3: Lower Potomac Planning District 2020 Parkland Needs Analysis.....	16

## LOWER POTOMAC PLANNING DISTRICT

### Location & Character

The Lower Potomac Planning District is the southernmost district in Fairfax County. The district is bounded to the south and southeast by the Occoquan and Potomac Rivers, which have shaped development patterns and contribute significantly to the natural and cultural resources in the district.



Lower Potomac is one of the first visited areas of Fairfax, with Captain John Smith documenting Mason Neck on his first voyage up the Potomac River in 1608. Lower Potomac is the fastest growing district due to the Laurel Hill area development resulting from transfer of the DC prison property to the County.

The addition of 14,000-19,000 BRAC-related jobs to the Fort Belvoir Main Post and the Fort Belvoir North Area (FBNA, previously Engineer Proving Grounds) in September 2011 will initially encourage mostly non-residential development however, residential growth pressures may follow this growth and spur an associated increased demand for recreation facilities in this part of the County. Both increased demand and additional constraints on where recreation facilities can be developed may affect this District in the future.

### Park System Summary

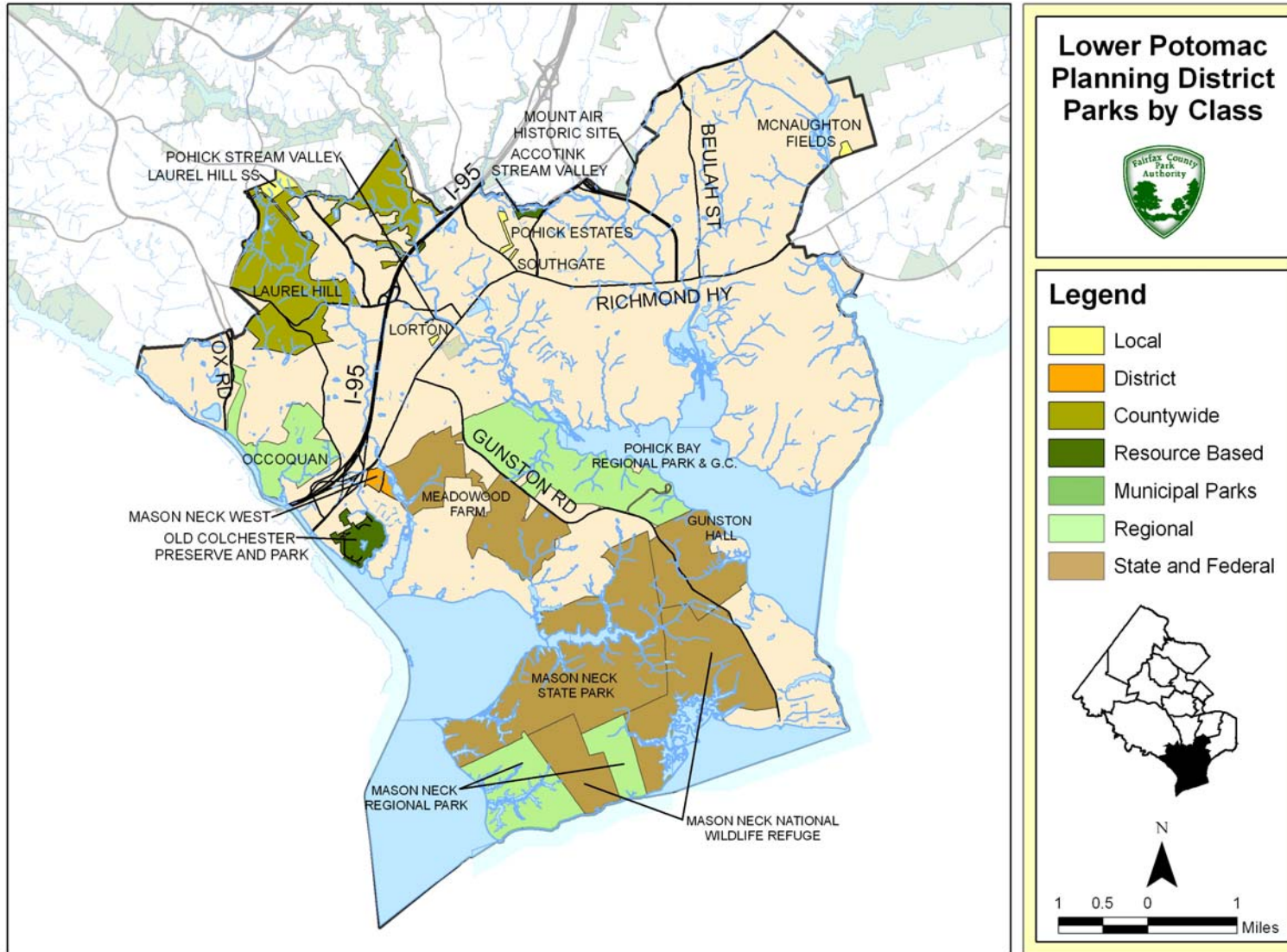
Map 1 depicts the public parkland in the Lower Potomac Planning District. There are 22 public parks with a total of over 10,300 acres in the district. Only 15% of all the public park acreage in the district is owned by the Park Authority, and is within Park Authority Maintenance Areas 3 & 4. The rest is owned by other providers, including the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority (NVRPA), the Commonwealth of Virginia, and the Federal government. Most of this non-county owned parkland is located at Mason Neck.

The parks in the district include special uses, historic sites, local- and district-serving recreational facilities, and stream valleys. Facilities include rectangle and diamond ball fields, golf, disc golf, tennis and multi-use courts, playgrounds, trails and picnic facilities. A majority of the Park Authority's land holdings in the district are concentrated in Laurel Hill Park and smaller parks in the Lorton South - Route 1 area.

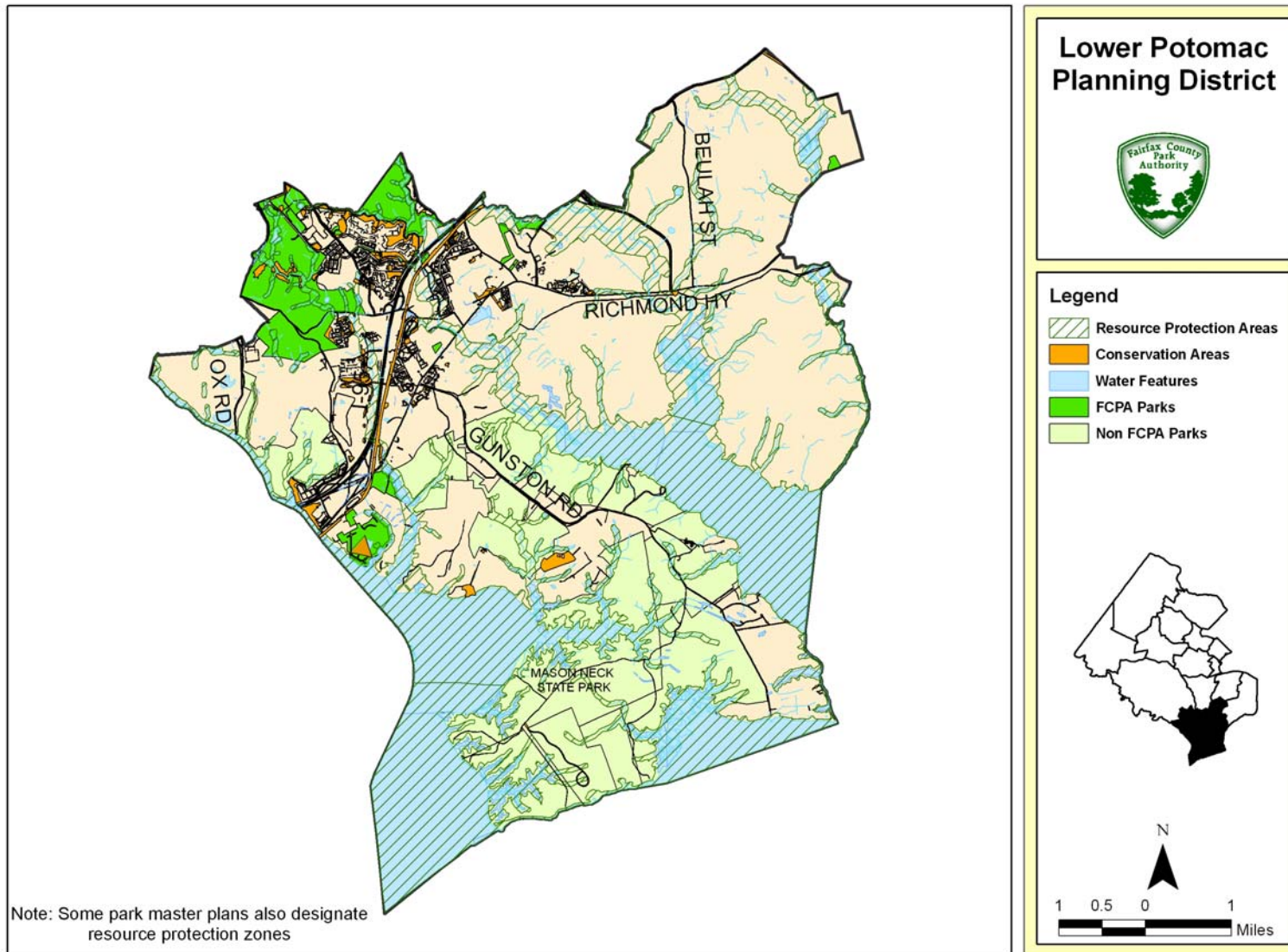
Laurel Hill Park, at 1,350 acres, is the largest county-owned park in the district. The park is envisioned to draw countywide users to a mix of recreational opportunities and natural and cultural resources. The acquisition of Old Colchester Preserve and Park has helped to preserve substantial natural and cultural resources, especially those associated with the County's first settlement.

The majority of parkland in the district is provided by other government agencies, including Mason Neck Regional Park, Elizabeth Hartwell Mason Neck National Wildlife Refuge, Mason Neck State Park, and Meadowood Farm. These adjoining parks located on the Mason Neck peninsula provide habitat for American bald eagles and great blue herons. Over 200 species of birds have been documented in these parks, making them a popular destination for birders. Pohick Bay Regional Park and Mason Neck State Park also provide a variety of recreation facilities, including an outdoor water park and swimming pool, golf course, boating access, kayaking and campgrounds. Map 2 identifies parkland and areas that contain regulatory or other protections, including conservation easements, and Chesapeake Bay Ordinance designated Resource Protection Areas (RPA).

Map 1: Public Parks by Class in the Lower Potomac District



Map 2: Protected Land in the Lower Potomac District



## **Park Classification**

In June 2005, a new Park Classification System was adopted and incorporated into the Park and Recreation chapter of the Countywide Comprehensive Policy Plan. The Park Classification System is a general framework intended to guide open space and public facilities planning by grouping parks according to certain common typical characteristics. The park classification gives an indication of the intended use, general park size range, typical facility types, and the general experience a user may expect at a park:

Local Parks serve surrounding neighborhoods and communities and offer a variety of local-serving recreation opportunities, such as playgrounds, trails, athletic facilities, picnic areas and natural areas. Typically these parks are designed to serve up to a 3 mile radius depending on the facilities and can range from 2 to 50 acres in size.

Local parks may be urban or suburban in character. Urban parks (including pocket parks, civic plazas and common greens) are a type of local-serving park that are generally more compact and located within an urban or transit-oriented setting. These parks generally consist of high quality design and construction, are well integrated into surrounding development, uses and the public realm and primarily serve to define local urban character, support outdoor enjoyment, social gatherings, recreation needs and special events. These parks may be privately or publicly owned and are usually privately maintained.

District Parks are larger parks that serve greater geographic areas of the County (3 to 6 miles) and provide a wide variety of indoor and outdoor recreation facilities and park experiences. Generally, these parks are more than 50 acres in size. These parks typically accommodate visits of up to a half day, longer operational hours and a larger number of users. Many district parks also have extensive natural areas.

Countywide Parks are larger parks that serve the whole County and provide a variety of larger-scale indoor or outdoor recreation facilities, or both, and facilities or resources that are unique within the County. Typically, these parks are greater than 150 acres and provide opportunities for passive and active recreation to a wide range of simultaneous users for experiences of up to a day in length.

Resource-Based Parks have significant cultural and natural resources. These parks support nature, horticulture and history programs, gardening, nature watching and appreciation of local, regional, state and national history. Extensive stream valley parks are part of the resource-based parks network. Typically, trails and interpretative features and facilities are the primary uses. Some resource parks may have separate areas designated for recreation purposes.



Regional Parks are lands and/or facilities administered by the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority (NVRPA). These parks have region-wide significance that supplement and enhance the County and municipal park systems.

While some parks are Resource-Based, note that all park types may include areas designated for natural and/or cultural resource protection. In addition, many state and federal parks augment local and regional parks and also serve to protect natural and cultural resources within the County. Table 1 lists and classifies the parks in the Lower Potomac district according to the County parks classification system or by state or federal ownership. Table 1 also includes information about whether and when parks were master planned and if a master planning action (new master plan development or plan update) is needed.

*Table 1: Parks in the Lower Potomac Planning District*

Park Name	Acres	Supervisor District	Park Classification	Approved Master Plan Date	Master Plan Action Needed
Accotink S.V. <sup>1</sup>	841.13 <sup>+</sup>	BR,LEE,MA, MV,PR	Resource-Based		
Elizabeth Hartwell Mason Neck NWR	2,050.00		Federal		
Fort Belvoir Golf Club – North Thirty-Six	420.00		Federal		
Fort Belvoir Golf Club - South Nine	115.00		Federal		
Gunston Hall Plantation	560.00		Regional		
Jackson Miles Abbot Wetlands Refuge	150.00		Federal		
Laurel Hill	1,350.54	MV	Countywide	2005	✓
Laurel Hill School Site	41.00	MV	Local	*	
Lorton	4.39	MV	Local	1985	
Mason Neck Regional Park	220.00		Regional		
Mason Neck State Park	1,800.00		State		
Mason Neck West	46.10	MV	District	1984	✓
McNaughton Fields	12.33	MV	Local	*	
Meadowood Special Recreation Area	800.00		Federal		
Occoquan Regional Park	420.00		Regional		
Old Colchester Park and Preserve	142.34	MV	Resource-Based		✓
Pohick Bay Regional Park	1,000.00		Regional		
Pohick Estates	5.00	MV	Local	1977	
Pohick S.V. <sup>1</sup>	822.88 <sup>+</sup>	SP, MV	Resource-Based		
Southgate	2.74	MV	Local	*	

1. Resource-Based Stream Valley parks by practice do not have Master Plans.

\* This park was dedicated by a private developer and may be subject to a Conceptual Development Plan associated with an approved rezoning that takes the place of a park master plan.



+ A portion of this park lies outside of the Lower Potomac district.  
Acreages for non-FCPA parks are estimates derived from GIS.

## Park Master Plans

A park master plan is a general guide for appropriate park uses and their approximate location within a specific park site. The plan serves as a long-range vision (10-20 year timeframe) for future development and programming. Issues typically addressed include planned park elements, natural and cultural resource management, and general design concerns. The plan is conceptual in nature and not intended to address detailed issues related to engineered site design or park operations. The plan is just one of many steps in the process that leads to the development of a public park. An archive of park master plans is available at [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/plandev/mparchives.htm](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/plandev/mparchives.htm).

## Themes, Issues and Strategies

In early 2008 the Park Authority interacted with citizens at ten *Great Parks, Great Communities* public workshops in all Supervisory districts and at a variety of community festivals and events in the parks to gather input on **long-term planning for the land, facilities and natural and cultural resources of the park system**. In addition, the Park Authority received public feedback on the park system throughout the year via email and the project web site.

Based on the public feedback and staff expertise, staff identified 26 key issues that fit within eight themes relating to the land, resources and facilities of the Park Authority. **The themes are Connectivity, Community Building, Service Delivery, Facility Reinvestment, Land Acquisition, Resource Interpretation, Cultural Resource Stewardship and Natural Resource Stewardship.**

This section describes how the eight themes relate to the park system in the Lower Potomac District and presents strategies for addressing the issues as they apply to the parks in the district. Some strategies include recommendations for construction of facilities, infrastructure and amenities at parks in the district. As part of the planning process for any proposed construction, the project area should first be assessed for possible impacts to natural and cultural resources.

### ***THEME: Connectivity***

Better integrating parks with surrounding land uses (neighborhoods and employment centers) and increasing park-to-park connections within the system will allow for greater access and enjoyment. Strategy suggestions include adding trails, trail connections, bridges and other forms of improved access to and between parks.

Map 3 illustrates existing and planned connections and points of interest within the Lower Potomac Planning District. The map depicts high-level, conceptual connections and incorporates elements from the adopted Countywide Trails Plan and Park Authority

Trail Strategy Plan. Connections link natural and cultural resources and recreational destinations, supporting recreational activity and frequently offering alternative transportation options.

**Issue: *The Park Authority should work to improve non-motorized access to parks from commercial and residential areas and to increase connectivity between park sites.***

Two stream valley trail corridors within the Lower Potomac district are identified on the County Comprehensive Trail Plan for off-road trail locations. These are along the Accotink and Pohick creeks. Only portions of the Pohick Creek Stream Valley trail north of I-95 have been constructed by the Park Authority. A trail system on Mason Neck, including bike trails has expanded over time to create recreational opportunities throughout the extensive regional, state and federal parkland on this peninsula.

The I-95 interstate and CSX rail line, which parallels I-95 for much of the district, creates a significant obstacle to linking the portions of the district which fall on each side of that transportation corridor. The Occoquan River creates an edge on the southern district border, preventing trail links between Fairfax County and the Town of Occoquan and Prince William County trail systems. In addition, Mason Neck has limited transportation access through the peninsula with one primary road (Gunston Road - Route 242) providing access into Mason Neck.

Strategies:

- LP-C-1. Use criteria provided in the Park Authority's Trail Strategy Plan to evaluate potential new trails, connections and improvements;
- LP-C-2. Complete development of the Laurel Hill Greenway and other trails within Laurel Hill Park;
- LP-C-3. Connect Laurel Hill trail to the South Run Stream Valley Trail and South County Secondary School;
- LP-C-4. Construct trail linking the Laurel Hill Greenway with Old Colchester Preserve and Park;
- LP-C-5. Coordinate with Prince William County and Town of Occoquan to integrate the Laurel Hill Greenway with their jurisdictions' systems; and
- LP-C-6. Seek to develop a non-motorized crossing of I-95 allowing for trail links along Pohick Stream and the Occoquan River. These connections are critical to allowing non-motorized transportation access from the population centers west of I-95 down into Mason Neck.

**Heard from the public: "I am an avid mountain biker and runner and would like to see any trails open to all users, whether they are hikers, cyclists, or horse enthusiasts. Other trail networks in the DC area are successfully shared by these diverse user groups."**

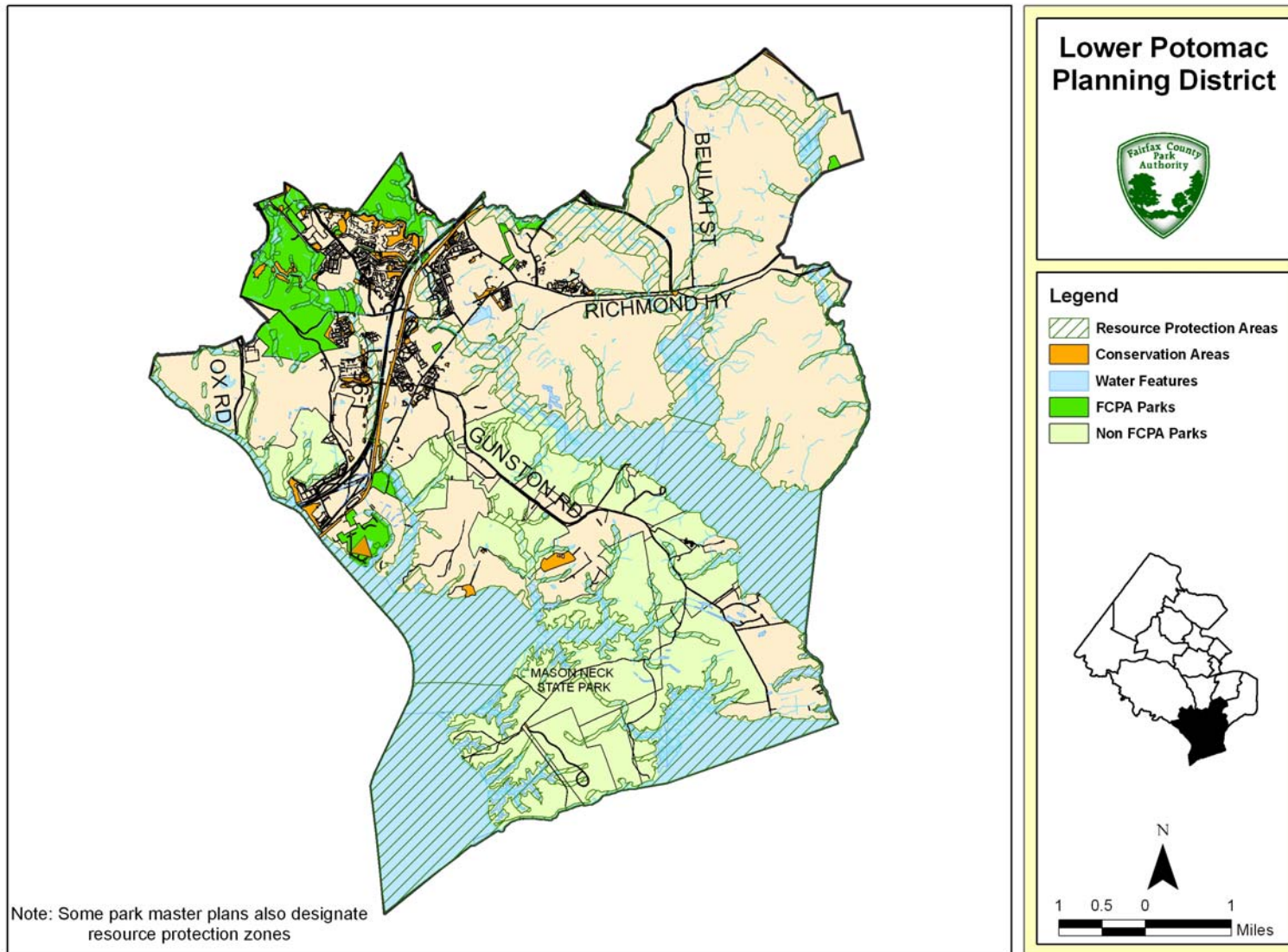
***Issue: Multiple, separate park sites located across Fairfax County should be linked through thematic interpretive connections.***

Thematic connections, emphasized through elements such as signage, maps, or website information, can foster greater public awareness of important features. Increased knowledge of site features could encourage greater support for stewardship and management activities.

There are a number of Major Regional Trails that traverse the Lower Potomac district that create the basis of the non-motorized transportation network. Unlike in many other districts, these were built, or are planned, in conjunction with the major transportation corridors within the district and include the following:

- The Mason Neck Loop of the Virginia Birding and Wildlife Coastal Trail links a network of parks which provide bird and wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities for wildlife watchers. Parks along the route include Accotink Bay Wildlife Refuge, Pohick Bay Regional Park, Mason Neck National Wildlife Refuge, and Mason Neck State Park;
- The Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail – this National Scenic Trail celebrates the heritage of the Potomac and upper Ohio River basins and offers opportunities for hiking, bicycling, and boating;
- Interstate Route One Bikeway – this cross-country bicycle route runs the length of the eastern seaboard from Florida to Maine. One of the two original U.S. Bicycle Routes, the trail runs the length of Richmond Highway (Route 1); and
- This area has also been identified as containing a portion of the proposed Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route National Historic Trail, which is intended to memorialize the route that took the combined Franco-American armies and navy to victory in the American War for Independence.

Map 3: Non-motorized Connections and Points of Interest in the Lower Potomac District



Strategies:

- LP-C-7. Include Mason Neck West Park as part of a Revolutionary War themed trail;
- LP-C-8. Explore feasibility of adding Old Colchester Preserve and Park as a location along the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail;
- LP-C-9. Consider creating an interpretive trail to recognize the Women’s Suffragist movement in partnership with associated interest groups. Turning Point Plaza in Occoquan Regional Park and the Occoquan Women’s Workhouse in Laurel Hill Park should serve as primary interpretive nodes;
- LP-C-10. Include elements of Laurel Hill in historic trail(s) recognizing the social, cultural, political, penal and military past within Laurel Hill, both within Laurel Hill as identified by the master plan, and at other parks within Fairfax County;
- LP-C-11. Explore feasibility of including Old Colchester Preserve and Park on the Occoquan Water Trail, as a gateway location on the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail, and on a historic Fairfax County interpretive trail;
- LP-C-12. Consider including Old Colchester Preserve and Park on a Mason Neck natural areas trail; and
- LP-C-13. Determine suitability of adding Laurel Hill, Old Colchester Preserve and Mason Neck West Parks to the Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail.

***Issue: Park facilities should be served by the public transportation system to provide access to recreational facilities.***

This district is not well served by local public transportation. Fort Belvoir is the only facility served by Metrobus. A handful of Fairfax Connector Routes, including 171, 307, and 331/2, serve the northernmost portions of the district. These Fairfax Connector routes primarily link transit nodes, rather than serving community stops. This system links large park-and-ride lots, the Lorton Virginia Railway Express (VRE) station, and Franconia-Springfield and Huntington Metrorail stations.

While there is some limited weekend transit service, the majority of the transit in the area is to support morning and evening commuting with flows to and from the Metro stations being a primary goal. Transit supporting commuting times and patterns do not serve park users who wish to use parks.

Strategies:

LP-C-14. Work with the Fairfax County Department of Transportation to improve bus transit service to Laurel Hill Park as its planned uses are implemented. This should include coordination with bus stop locations and transit schedules for Fairfax Connector Route 307.

***Issue: The Park Authority should work to improve access to waterways and promote the use of “water trails” throughout the County.***

The Lower Potomac district has a majority of the public water access points within Fairfax County. Boats, kayaks and canoes have access at multiple points within the district. These include Occoquan and Pohick Bay Regional Parks, and Mason Neck State Park. Fort Belvoir also provides a marina, with limited public access available. Pohick Bay and Occoquan Regional Parks provide boat storage. Boat rentals are available at Pohick Bay Regional Park.

The Potomac River Water Trail is an opportunity for residents to enjoy the Potomac River by boat, canoe or kayak. The trail provides access to a number of state, federal, and local parks within Virginia and Maryland and is an element of the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network.

Strategies:

LP-C-15. Determine feasibility of adding water access at Old Colchester Preserve and Park; and

LP-C-16. Work with the Department of Defense to allow public water access via the Fort Belvoir marina.

***THEME: Community Building***

Local parks are places where people can interact and build community. Well-designed and located parks, park facilities and programs support greater social interaction. Community-building park facilities and activities include reservable picnic areas, amphitheatres, dog parks, garden plots, farmers markets, performances and special events. Collocation of facilities with other community uses can also assist in strengthening communities. Strategy suggestions include ways to increase the community-building role of local parks in residential neighborhoods and providing parks and recreation facilities near other civic uses.

***Issue: Local and urban parks should include a combination of facilities, amenities and gathering spaces to attract and promote social interaction among community members.***

A few parks in the Lower Potomac Planning District provide community building facilities that help to promote social interaction and better integrate local parks with the

surrounding community. A number of picnic pavilions and outdoor gathering spaces are planned for Laurel Hill Park. Playground areas are also planned at a number of parks. The Lorton VRE station is home to the Lorton Farmer's Market. The Lorton Arts Foundation is currently developing outdoor concert and event facilities at the Lorton Workhouse, adjacent to Laurel Hill Park.

Strategies:

LP-CB-1. Develop reservable picnic shelters and community gathering spaces as identified in park master plans; and

LP-CB-2. Look for opportunities to develop garden plot areas at parks within the district.

***Issue: Parks should be collocated with other civic uses (libraries, community centers, senior centers, etc.) to promote social interaction among community members.***

The existing parks are not well integrated with other public facilities, such as libraries or schools. The exception is the location of South County Secondary School and Silverbrook Elementary School, Laurel Hill Elementary School, and South County Middle School, which are near Laurel Hill Park.

Strategies:

LP-CB-3. Plan recreational facilities and amenities, where appropriate, to parks in the district that are collocated with other civic uses; and

LP-CB-4. Work with public facility providers, such as schools and libraries to create new park spaces with renovation and improvements made to existing public structures in the district.

***THEME: Service Delivery***

The Park Authority provides quality facilities that are well used, but may not be equitably distributed across all parts of the County or accessible to all groups. Countywide and specialty facilities, in particular, may not serve a true county-wide service area. Residents desire recreational facilities and opportunities at parks near where they live and for all age groups and socio-economic populations. Strategy suggestions include creating more facilities, better distributing facilities across the County, and reducing barriers to use.

Service level standards for over twenty park facility types were established through the 2004 Needs Assessment (<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/needsassessment.htm>) process and incorporated into the Countywide Policy Plan (<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpz/comprehensiveplan/policyplan/parksrec.pdf>) in 2005. Facility standards are countywide goals for providing park and recreation facilities that reasonably satisfy community needs. Standards are expressed in units per population,



and are based on extensive analysis of citizen demand and preferences compared with the existing public facility inventories. Based on the Countywide adopted facility service level standards and projected population growth, Table 2 shows the projected surplus or deficit of several key local serving facilities in the Lower Potomac Planning District for the year 2020. While overall facility needs are quantified in Table 2, the location of needed facilities is determined through the site specific master planning process that considers site conditions, context, resources, and community input. For more detailed information on existing facilities in each park and service levels, please see the Existing Conditions Report.

*Table 2: Lower Potomac Planning District 2020 Local Serving Facility Needs Analysis*

		31,188	2010 population			
		34,375	2020 population			
Facility	Service Level Standard	2010 Existing Facilities	2020 Needed Facilities	2020 Projected (Deficit)/ Surplus	2020 Projected Service Level	
Rectangle Fields	1 field / 2,700 people	2.0	7.1	(5.1)	28%	
Adult Baseball Fields	1 field / 24,000 people	1.0	0.8	0.2	125%	
Adult Softball Fields <sup>+</sup>	1 field / 22,000 people	0.0	0.9	(0.9)	0%	
Youth Baseball Fields <sup>+</sup>	1 field / 7,200 people	1.0	2.7	(1.7)	38%	
Youth Softball Fields <sup>+</sup>	1 field / 8,800 people	0.0	2.2	(2.2)	0%	
Basketball Courts	1 court / 2,100 people	1.5	9.1	(7.6)	16%	
Playgrounds	1 playground / 2,800 people	3.5	6.8	(3.3)	51%	
Neighborhood Dog Parks	1 dog park / 86,000 people	0.0	0.2	(0.2)	0%	
Neighborhood Skate Parks	1 skate park / 106,000 people	0.0	0.2	(0.2)	0%	

<sup>+</sup> 60 ft and 65 ft diamond fields are assigned to the sport where primarily allocated.

**Issue: The Park Authority should provide and equitably distribute facilities to meet established facility service level standards.**

Lower Potomac is projected to have a surplus only in adult diamond fields, and is projected to have deficiencies in all other facility types. This is typical of Fairfax County as a whole, where deficiencies are projected for all facility types other than adult baseball and youth softball diamonds. The district lies within the service areas of South Run, George Washington, Lee and Mount Vernon RECenters. These are large District and/or Countywide parks which provide multiple athletic fields and indoor recreational amenities.

**Heard from the public:** “In terms of recreational/fitness participation, an indoor facility goes a long way to allow persons to maintain their exercise year round.”

Strategies:

- LP-SD-1. Construct planned facilities that are included in park master plans, but have not yet been built, including the planned Sportsplex at Laurel Hill;
- LP-SD-2. Construct planned information center with restroom facilities at Laurel Hill; and
- LP-SD-3. Seek opportunities to address rectangle field deficiencies through capital planning, development review and park master planning processes.

**Issue: *The Park Authority should provide new kinds of parks and facilities and in new ways to meet the needs of the County's changing population.***

No district- or park-specific strategies exist for this issue in the Lower Potomac Planning District.

**Issue: *The Park Authority should re-examine park master plans to determine if parks are planned to best serve the needs of Fairfax County residents.***

Half of the parks in the district have master plans, many of which were completed within the last 20 years. Park Authority land holdings in the area have greatly expanded since 1990, and park planning has not kept pace with land acquisition.

Strategies:

- LP-SD-4. The Master Plan for Mason Neck West Park should be updated. The 1984 plan does not include some existing site improvements or additional adjacent lands that have been acquired. During the master planning process both important cultural resources near this park as well as recreation resources, as appropriate, would be considered;
- LP-SD-5. Develop a master plan for Old Colchester Preserve and Park after appropriate archaeology and cultural landscape reports have been completed; and
- LP-SD-6. Revise the Laurel Hill Master Plan to reflect the acquisition of land from Fairfax County Public Schools related to the South County Secondary School site.

***THEME: Facility Reinvestment***

The Park Authority has a great diversity of facilities and resources in various lifecycle stages. Funding and schedules for replacement or reinvestment are inconsistent and adding new facilities has sometimes taken precedence over renewal of existing facilities. Strategy suggestions include repairing, replacing, upgrading, and improving utilization of existing facilities and equipment.

**Issue: *Repair, replacement, and upgrading of existing park facilities should be addressed through a system-wide lifecycle replacement program that takes into account changing facility needs.***

Strategies:

- LP-FR-1. Replace playground at Pohick Stream Valley Park. Playground replacement should collocate apparatus for ages 2-5 and ages 5-12;
- LP-FR-2. Redevelop athletic fields and associated lighting and infrastructure at McNaughton Fields Park; and
- LP-FR-3. Repair and reinvest in trails within the district.

**Issue: *Parking standards and levels of service should reflect user patterns to minimize impacts on surrounding neighborhoods.***

Strategies:

- LP-FR-4. Consider improving the parking lot at Lower Potomac Park.

***THEME: Land Acquisition***

Additional parkland is needed to protect and buffer natural areas and historic sites and to provide room to develop new recreational facilities. Strategy suggestions include ways to continue to add appropriate land to the Park Authority's land holdings to expand the park system.

Service level standards for both local and district/countywide parkland were established through the 2004 Needs Assessment and incorporated into the Countywide Policy Plan in 2005. Parkland standards represent countywide goals for providing land for the two types of parks (Local and District/Countywide) that support service delivery and facility development and are expressed in units per population. Local parks include both suburban and urban park types. Resource-based parks occur where resources are located and therefore do not require quantitative service level standards. Please refer to the Park Classification discussion earlier in this chapter for additional information on park classification descriptions.

Based on adopted service level standards and projected population growth, Table 3 shows the projected surplus or deficit of parkland in the Lower Potomac Planning District for the year 2020.

*Table 3: Lower Potomac Planning District 2020 Parkland Needs Analysis*

<b>31,188</b>	2010 population
<b>34,375</b>	2020 projected population
<b>29,287</b>	District Size (acres)

	Parkland/Open Space Type	Service Level Standard	2010 Existing Acres	2020 Needed Acres	2020 Projected (Deficit)/ Surplus	2020 Projected Service Level
<b>Public Parkland</b>	Local Suburban	5 acres / 1,000 people	105	172	(67)	61%
	Urban	1.5 acres / 1,000 people plus 1 acre / 10,000 employees				
	District/Countywide <sup>+</sup>	13 acres / 1,000 people	3,208	447	2,761	718%
	Resource-Based	*	7,061			
	<b>Parkland Total</b>		<b>10,374</b>			
<b>Private Open Space</b>	Private Recreation		0			
	HOA Property		448			
	<b>Private OS Total</b>		<b>448</b>			
<b>Public &amp; Private Total</b>			<b>10,822</b>			

+ The District and Countywide Parks that serve this Planning District may be located outside the Planning District and this outlying acreage is not reflected in this table.

\* There is no service level standard for Resource-Based parkland. The amount of resource based parkland owned and/or protected is based on the existence and sensitivity of the resources.

**Issue: Parkland for recreation should be provided according to adopted service level standards and distributed equitably throughout the County.**

Strategies:

- LP-LA-1. Encourage development of additional local parks and facilities in conjunction with residential development;
- LP-LA-2. As publicly owned lands become available through changing uses, consideration should be given to park use as a future land use;
- LP-LA-3. In addition to traditional purchase or dedication of parkland to the Park Authority, investigate innovative methods and opportunities to increase availability of publicly accessible open space; and
- LP-LA-4. Track progress of the Overlook Ridge project, opening new phases to public access as soon as feasible.

**Issue: Urban parks should be provided in higher density/mixed use areas of the County (i.e. Tysons Corner, Transit Station Areas, Commercial Revitalization Districts).**

No district- or park-specific strategies exist for this issue in the Lower Potomac Planning District.

**Issue: Property acquisition is important for protecting historic resources in Fairfax County and ensuring their preservation for future generations.**

Strategies:

LP-LA-5. Seek to acquire and/or protect through purchase, donation, development dedications, or conservation easements land at Mason Neck and adjacent to Laurel Hill Park to buffer existing resources in public protection.

**Issue: *Property acquisition is an important strategy for protecting natural resources in Fairfax County and ensuring open and natural areas for future generations.***

Strategies:

LP-LA-6. Seek to acquire and/or protect through purchase, donation, development dedications, or conservation easements remaining natural areas in the district, especially large tracts connecting to other natural areas and those containing unique or significant natural resources, including land adjacent to the Old Colchester Preserve, at Mason Neck and adjacent to Laurel Hill Park to buffer existing resources in public protection;

LP-LA-7. Continue to acquire property within the Accotink and Pohick stream valleys, in accordance with the stream valley policy; and

LP-LA-8. Encourage owners of large private parcels to place conservation easements on their property to protect natural resources.

***THEME: Resource Interpretation***

Residents may not be aware of or understand the importance of the vast number of natural and cultural resources the Park Authority holds in public trust. Strategy suggestions include adding to the existing interpretive facilities, signs, and programs. Roadway and trail waysides permit park visitors opportunities to stop and view interpretive signage.

Historic sites in county parks in the district reflect different phases of the architectural and agrarian history of Fairfax County during the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. They provide opportunities to interpret the evolution of Fairfax County from colony through the Revolution, Civil War and into the period of the New Nation. Native American sites exist in abundance in the undeveloped portions of our park lands. The Old Colchester Preserve has the potential to be one of the richest archaeological sites in the region.

The district is served by Hidden Pond Nature Center, located in the nearby Pohick district and the Elizabeth Hartwell Environmental Education Center located at Mason Neck State Park.

**Heard from the public:**  
“Continue the excellent archaeological program and increase historical archaeological interpretation at all the parks. Continue maintenance of Old Colchester as a preserve. This one will take a while to assess and plan for interpretation.”

**Issue: *The full range of natural and cultural resources within Fairfax County should be interpreted through facilities as needed.***

Strategies:

- LP-RI-1. Construct appropriate cultural resource signage and facilities at Old Colchester Preserve, Mason Neck West and Accotink Stream Valley Parks;
- LP-RI-2. Establish additional natural and cultural resource interpretive areas within Laurel Hill Park, in accordance with the master plan; and
- LP-RI-3. Replace the Laurel Hill Park waysides along the CCT.

***THEME: Cultural Resource Stewardship***

Many factors threaten the health, protection and viability of natural and cultural resources on county parkland. Strategy suggestions include focusing on managing threats and actively managing existing natural and cultural resources consistent with guidance provided in the countywide [Cultural Resource Management Plan](#) and [Natural Resource Management Plan](#).

The Lower Potomac Planning District has many important cultural resources. The most important of these are related to the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, a number of 18th through 20th century domestic sites, and many Native American sites. A recently-acquired and highly significant cultural resource site is the 18th-century tobacco port of Colchester. Native American sites exist in abundance in the undeveloped portions of our park lands. Some of the important historic resources in the district are Laurel Hill, Old Colchester Preserve and Mason Neck West. The Old Colchester Preserve in particular has the potential to be one of the richest historical and prehistoric archaeological sites in the region.

**Issue: *Historic structures should be stabilized, repaired, renovated and/or restored to ensure their preservation and availability for public viewing and interpretation.***

Strategies:

- LP-CR-1. Old Colchester Preserve Park should continue with the development of a Resource Management Plan in order to prevent degradation of the extensive cultural resources;
- LP-CR-2. Seek partnerships for the restoration of the Barrett House in accordance with the Laurel Hill Master Plan;
- LP-CR-3. Seek partnerships for the restoration of the Stempson House in accordance with the Laurel Hill Master Plan;
- LP-CR-4. Seek partnerships to restore the historic gardens associated with the Laurel Hill House at Laurel Hill Park. Improvements should include restoration of vegetation and landscape features; and

LP-CR-5. Continue to seek partnerships for the restoration of historic structures and features at Laurel Hill as they are transferred into park ownership.

**Issue: *Cultural Resources should be identified and evaluated prior to any proposed construction activity.***

Strategies:

LP-CR-6. For any site subject to proposed construction activity, a preliminary assessment of the property will be carried out using GIS and pedestrian reconnaissance. Should potential resources be present, a cultural resource survey will be conducted and mitigation measures will be developed, as necessary.

**Issue: *Impacts to National Register eligible cultural resources should be avoided where at all feasible. If impacts cannot be avoided mitigation level documentation or data recovery should occur.***

Strategies:

LP-CR-7. Document and record buildings and structures using Historic American Buildings/Historic American Engineering methods (research, measured drawings and archival photographs) and conduct data recovery excavations for archaeological sites, as appropriate.

**Issue: *New, expanded and upgraded facilities are needed to house artifact collections to ensure their preservation for future generations.***

No district- or park-specific strategies exist for this issue in the Lower Potomac Planning District. This is an issue of countywide concern that should be addressed with centralized facilities.

***THEME: Natural Resource Stewardship***

When compared to other planning districts, parkland within the Lower Potomac district has extensive fragile natural resources. These resources are primarily related to the water resources and the protection associated with the large continuous forested area. Laurel Hill, Old Colchester Preserve and Accotink Stream Valley Parks comprise the majority of the natural resources in the Lower Potomac district within the Park Authority responsibility. Laurel Hill contains over 28 acres of natural and cultural gardens, two ponds and several thousand feet of stream valley. The land around the Potomac River is largely protected by Regional, State and Federal land holdings. The result is a district with a mosaic of intense development and large areas of protected natural open space.

**Heard from the public: “Ensure cover for urban wildlife habitat through a well-managed system in which careful attention is given to tree cover and indigenous Virginia plants.”**



***Issue: Natural habitats and the wildlife they support are disappearing and are fragmented.***

While some natural areas of the district are extremely fragmented, significant portions of natural areas remain along the Potomac and within the Laurel Hill Park. Some of the natural areas are concentrated in the low-lying lands since many of the uplands have been converted to built features. Transportation and utility corridors and other easements crisscross natural areas, often resulting in less than ideal management practices. Neighborhoods are built too close to existing corridors for movement of animal and plant species. This also has the effect of increasing citizen/wildlife conflict and limiting natural migration in these corridors. Habitat for many animal species has been significantly impacted through disruption or conversion by humans, over-browsing by deer and over-simplification of habitat by invasive plant species.

Strategies:

- LP-NR-1. Seek to acquire and protect remaining natural areas in the district especially large tracts, those connecting to other natural areas and those containing unique or significant natural resources;
- LP-NR-2. Protect and improve existing corridors, linkages and watersheds;
- LP-NR-3. Provide new linkages between remaining public and private natural areas;
- LP-NR-4. Manage utility corridors and other easements consistent with natural resource goals, not just utility service goals; and
- LP-NR-5. Designate permanent resource protection zones on parkland that define appropriate uses and development.

***Issue: Water resources and stream valleys are degraded due to development and associated stormwater runoff.***

Strategies:

- LP-NR-6. Work with the Department of Public Works and Environmental Services (DPWES) and private land owners to capture and treat stormwater. This could take the form of incorporating Low Impact Development (LID) methods with new residential and commercial development as well as significant renovation projects to provide new or enhanced stormwater facilities;
- LP-NR-7. Continue to work with Regional, State and Federal land holders in the district to maintain a consistent policy on water resource management and protection, as has been done with the Laurel Hill Watershed Management Plan team;
- LP-NR-8. Continue to prioritize significant riparian buffer revegetation within the Laurel Hill complex to balance the development of open spaces in the near future, such as at Fort Belvoir; and

LP-NR-9. Use continuing education opportunities to encourage private property owners to adopt wildlife and water friendly landscaping practices to improve water quality and habitat with continuing education opportunities.

**Issue: *The Park Authority does not have an adequate inventory of natural resources on parkland.***

Strategies:

LP-NR-10. Direct development of park infrastructure to areas that, when inventoried, reflect few or poor quality natural resources, unless otherwise incompatible;

LP-NR-11. Ensure that natural resources are assessed prior to any park development. Use design principles that minimize natural resource impacts and include monitoring and restoration of impacted natural areas as part of development plans;

LP-NR-12. Conduct natural resource inventories and develop and implement natural resource management plans for natural areas, especially at Laurel Hill and the Old Colchester Preserve; and

LP-NR-13. Identify, preserve, protect and enhance wetlands within the Dogue Creek, Accotink Creek and Pohick Creek stream corridors.

**Issue: *Non-native invasive plants are threatening natural resources by reducing the diversity of native species and impacting wildlife habitat.***

The somewhat fragmented nature of the natural areas in the district coupled high levels of human disturbance have generally resulted in degraded natural areas within smaller parks and these sites show high occurrences of invasive plant species. In the Lower Potomac area, as in the rest of the county, invasive plant species are well established in developed areas and often cover large percentages of vegetated areas.

Strategies:

LP-NR-14. Educate citizens on the problems associated with invasive plant species. Work with them to eliminate or limit invasives on private property near parks and to prevent new introductions of invasive species; and

LP-NR-15. Expand non-native invasive plant management and habitat restoration on parkland by implementing the Non-Native Invasive Plant [Prioritization Plan](#) and [Assessment](#).

**Issue: *The County has a goal to expand tree canopy. The Park Authority should contribute to this goal wherever possible by ensuring existing forested areas are sustainable and expanding canopy where possible.***

Strategies:

LP-NR-16. Ensure sustainability of tree canopy on parkland by developing and implementing management plans and controlling threats such as non-native invasive plants and deer herbivory;

LP-NR-17. Encourage tree planting and natural landscaping techniques on private land;

LP-NR-18. Incorporate natural landscaping techniques on parkland, avoid tree loss from development and where possible increase tree canopy;

LP-NR-19. Designate permanent resource protection zones on parkland that define appropriate uses and development; and

LP-NR-20. Expand and enhance tree cover by planting trees at appropriate locations within the district parks particularly Laurel Hill.

***Issue: The Park Authority should utilize innovative practices in construction of recreational facilities and buildings to minimize impacts to the environment and to demonstrate stewardship.***

Strategies:

LP-NR-21. Continue to support the Green Building techniques utilized in the development of the clubhouse at Laurel Hill Golf Course.