NOVA Parks

Program Description

The Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority (NOVA Parks) was founded in 1959 under the Virginia Park Authorities Act. Currently there are six jurisdictional members: the counties of Arlington, Fairfax, and Loudoun and the cities of Alexandria, Fairfax, and Falls Church. NOVA Parks enhances the communities of Northern Virginia and enriches the lives of their residents through the conservation of regional natural and cultural resources. It provides diverse regional recreational and educational opportunities and fosters an understanding of the relationships between people and their environment. Regional parks supplement local facilities and are distinguished from county and local parks in that they are designed to appeal to and serve the broad-based population of the entire Northern Virginia region or may be of a size or scope that a single jurisdiction could not undertake alone. The Washington and Old Dominion (W&OD) Railroad Regional Park, which extends from Alexandria through Arlington, Falls Church, Fairfax, and Loudoun, is just one example of many NOVA Parks facilities that have region wide characteristics.

NOVA Parks now owns, leases, and holds easements on 13,000 acres of land, of which 8,591 acres are in Fairfax County. The Regional Park system serves a population of 2 million people. Parklands within the system include: Aldie Mill, Battle of Upperville/Goose Creek Bridge, Carlyle House, Mount Defiance, Mount Zion, and Tinner Hill Historic Parks, Meadowlark Botanical Gardens, the W&OD Trail (Washington and Old Dominion Railroad Regional Park), Algonkian, Ball's Bluff Battlefield, Beaverdam Reservoir, Blue Ridge, Brambleton, Bull Run, Bull Run Marina, Cattail Ordinary, Cameron Run, Fountainhead, Gateway, Gilbert's Corner, Hemlock Overlook, Occoquan, Pohick Bay, Potomac Overlook, Red Rock, Sandy Run, Seneca, Springdale, Temple Hall Farm, Upton Hill, and Piscataway Regional Parks, the Upper Potomac properties, the Rust Sanctuary, and Webb Sanctuary, and Winkler Botanical Preserve.

In its conservation role, NOVA Parks is involved in implementing portions of the Environmental Quality Corridors concept, which defines an open space land system designated for long term protection in the County. In this role, NOVA Parks places emphasis on acquisition of the shoreline properties along the Potomac, Bull Run and Occoquan Rivers, while the Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) concentrates on acquiring land along the County's interior stream valleys.

Program Initiatives

From FY 2019 through FY 2023, NOVA Parks received $26,121,592 in support from its regional membership jurisdictions, plus an additional $28,856,549 in grants, donations, bonds, and other capital revenue, representing an actual capital program level of $54,978,141. Accomplishments during these years include, as examples: comfort station renovations at Bull Run and Pohick Bay campgrounds; HVAC and fire suppression upgrades at Carlyle House; construction of a conservatory at Meadowlark Botanical Gardens; opening of the dual pedestrian and cyclist trails on the W&OD in Falls Church; renovation of the Nature Center at Potomac Overlook Regional Park; design and construction of the new Beaverdam Reservoir Park; development of Cameron Run Winter Village; construction of the Jean R. Packard Center at Occoquan Regional Park; improvements to rowing facilities at Sandy Run; acquisition of a shoreline inholding at Pohick Bay Regional Park; an additional 130 acres for Springdale Regional Park and Winkler Botanical Preserve; improvements to the Bull Run Festival of Lights; linkage of Gateway Park and local trails with the W&OD Trail; and ongoing renovations and upgrades to existing roads, parking, and restroom facilities.

A portion of the capital improvement program includes the repair and renovation of existing and aging facilities, such as roof replacements, road repairs, replacement of mechanical systems, and similar work to preserve and repair existing facilities. Additional elements of the CIP include land acquisition, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) improvements, energy improvements, expansion of existing facilities, and new features to meet the needs of the region.

Funds from Fairfax County to support NOVA Parks' capital improvement program have historically been supported by General Obligation Bonds. The last referendum in fall 2020 provided $12.0 million to sustain the County's capital contribution of $3.0 million annually for FY 2021 through FY 2024. As part of the FY 2024 – FY 2028 Adopted Capital Improvement Program (CIP), County staff recommended removing NOVA Parks from the General Obligation Bond Plan and supporting this contribution through the General Fund.

NOVA Parks' Capital Fund revenues consist primarily of capital appropriations received from the six-member jurisdictions. Fairfax County's contribution for FY 2025 is proposed at $3.45 million. Funds for FY 2026 and beyond have not been formally allocated to specific projects and the following schedule lists only projects planned for FY 2025.

Current Project Descriptions

1. **ADA Improvements (Region-wide):** $400,000 for accessibility improvements throughout the park system.
2. **Algonkian Regional Park (Loudoun County):** $500,000 for improvements and renovations to rental cottages.
3. **Beaverdam Reservoir Park (Loudoun County):** $320,000 for the development of a marina facility, trails, picnic shelters, and boat storage.
4. **Bull Run to Occoquan Trail (Fairfax County):** $40,000 to be used as a match for an existing grant to redesign and construct 1.5 miles of trail along the Occoquan Reservoir.
5. **Bull Run Light Show (Fairfax County):** $75,000 to add additional lighting features and install underground electrical extensions.
6. **Cameron Run Ice & Lights (City of Alexandria):** $75,000 for additional winter village enhancements and improvements.
7. **Cattail Ordinary (Loudoun County):** $120,000 for the development of an entrance, parking, and trail system for a recently donated 86-acre park.
8. **Gateway Wetlands Park (City of Fairfax):** $900,000 for the expansion of the existing facilities to provide boardwalk trail and interpretive exhibits.
9. **Golf Course Improvements (Region-wide):** $225,000 for capital improvements at all NOVA Parks golf courses.
10. **Headquarters** (**Fairfax County):** $65,000 for automated systems and building renovations.
11. **Habitat Restoration and Invasive Species Removal (Region-wide):** $75,000 for tree plantings, invasive species removal, and habitat restoration initiatives.

12. **Land Acquisition (Region-wide):** $400,000 for land and easement purchases, to be supplemented by grant funds.

13. **Meadowlark Botanical Gardens (Fairfax County):** $70,000 to expand and improve gardens including the children's garden.

14. **Meadowlark Botanical Gardens – Walk of Lights (Fairfax County):** $75,000 to add additional lighting features and enhancements to the light show experience.

15. **Miscellaneous Improvements (Region-wide):** $515,000 for capital maintenance projects, interpretive and signage improvements, rental house maintenance, branding and other maintenance not specifically assigned to a particular public use facility or park location.

16. **Occoquan Regional Park (Fairfax County):** $250,000 for the planning and design of an indoor/outdoor adventure facility and preliminary design, and possible grant match for a mountain bike trail.

17. **Park Development Support and Planning (Region-wide):** $1,000,000 for staffing, project management, development, planning, and strategic initiatives.

18. **Park Energy Projects (Region-wide):** $200,000 for various projects to increase the energy efficiency of parks including new AC systems, solar power, and EV charging stations.

19. **Park Road and Parking Renovation & Maintenance (Region-wide):** $276,000 for the ongoing maintenance and improvement of road and parking facilities.

20. **Pohick Bay and Bull Run Camp Improvements (Fairfax County):** $100,000 for the addition of Wi-Fi access and various miscellaneous improvements.

21. **Potomac Overlook Renovations (Arlington County):** $90,000 for renovations to the nature exhibits and to replace a shelter roof.

22. **Sandy Run Renovations (Fairfax County):** $175,000 for the replacement of the large dock and repair to the other existing docks.

23. **Temple Hall Farm Regional Park (Loudoun County):** $15,000 for seasonal event facility improvements.

24. **Vehicles and Equipment (Region-wide):** $1,325,000 for capital equipment at all parks, central maintenance, and headquarters.

25. **W&OD Railroad Regional Park (Fairfax, Arlington, Loudoun Counties and Cities of Fairfax and Falls Church):** $750,000 for various trail enhancements including widening and repairs including the redesigning and constructing the trail's crossing of Shreve Road.

26. **Waterpark Maintenance (Region-wide):** $300,000 for renovations and repairs at all NOVA Parks waterparks including Volcano Island (Loudoun County), Great Waves (City of Alexandria), Dunes (Arlington County), and Atlantis (Fairfax County).

27. **Winkler Botanical Preserve (City of Alexandria):** $200,000 for the improvement and maintenance of existing donated facilities as well as design and engineering for parking expansion.

Project Cost Summaries

NOVA Parks

($000's)

	Project Title Project Number	Source of Funds	Budgeted or Expended Through FY 2024	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029	Total FY 2025 - FY 2029	Total FY 2030 - FY 2034	Total
1	ADA Improvements (Region-wide)	G	***C***	***$400***					$400		$400
2	Algonkian Regional Park (Loudoun County)	G	***C***	***$500***					$500		$500
3	Beaverdam Reservoir Park (Loudoun County)	G	***C***	***$320***					$320		$320
4	Bull Run to Occoquan Trail (Fairfax County)	G	***C***	***$40***					$40		$40
5	Bull Run Light Show (Fairfax County)	G	***C***	***$75***					$75		$75
6	Cameron Run Ice and Lights (City of Alexandria)	G	***C***	***$75***					$75		$75
7	Cattail Ordinary (Loudoun County)	G	***C***	***$120***					$120		$120
8	Gateway Wetlands Park (City of Fairfax)	G	***C***	***$900***					$900		$900
9	Golf Course Improvements (Region-wide)	G	***C***	***$225***					$225		$225
10	Headquarters (Fairfax County)	G	***C***	***$65***					$65		$65
11	Habitat Restoration and Invasive Species Removal (Region-wide)	G	***C***	***$75***					$75		$75
12	Land Acquisition (Region-wide)	G	***C***	***$400***					$400		$400

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($000's)

	Project Title Project Number	Source of Funds	Budgeted or Expended Through FY 2024	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029	Total FY 2025 - FY 2029	Total FY 2030 - FY 2034	Total
13	Meadowlark Botanical Gardens (Fairfax County)	G	***C***	***$70***					$70		$70
14	Meadowlark Botanical Gardens - Walk of Lights (Fairfax County)	G	***C***	***$75***					$75		$75
15	Miscellaneous Improvements (Region-wide)	G	***C***	***$515***					$515		$515
16	Occoquan Regional Park (Fairfax County)	G	***C***	***$250***					$250		$250
17	Park Development Support and Planning (Region-wide)	G	***C***	***$1,000***					$1,000		$1,000
18	Park Energy Projects (Region-wide)	G	***C***	***$200***					$200		$200
19	Park Road and Parking Renovation and Maintenance (Region-wide)	G	***C***	***$276***					$276		$276
20	Pohick Bay and Bull Run Camp Improvements (Fairfax County)	G	***C***	***$100***					$100		$100
21	Potomac Overlook Renovations (Arlington County)	G	***C***	***$90***					$90		$90
22	Sandy Run Renovations (Fairfax County)	G	***C***	***$175***					$175		$175
23	Temple Hall Farm Regional Park (Loudoun County)	G	***C***	***$15***					$15		$15
24	Vehicles and Equipment (Region-wide)	G	***C***	***$1,325***					$1,325		$1,325

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($000's)

	Project Title Project Number	Source of Funds	Budgeted or Expended Through FY 2024	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029	Total FY 2025 - FY 2029	Total FY 2030 - FY 2034	Total
25	W&OD Railroad Regional Park	G	***C***	***$750***					$750		$750
26	Waterpark Maintenance (Region-wide)	G	***C***	***$1,300***					$1,300		$1,300
27	Winkler Botanical Preserve (Alexandria)	G	***C***	***$200***					$200		$200
	Total Project Cost			**$9,536**	**$6,827**	**$7,855**	**$7,092**	**$7,269**	**$38,579**		**$38,579**
	Total Fairfax County			**$3,453**	**$3,556**	**$3,662**	**$3,770**	**$3,864**	**$18,305**		**$18,305**

Notes: Numbers in bold italics represent funded amounts. A "C" in the 'Budgeted or Expended' column denotes a continuing project.

Key: Source of Funds

B	Bonds
F	Federal
G	General Fund
S	State
U	Undetermined
X	Other