

Fairfax County Park Authority

LOB #343:

NATURE CENTER MANAGEMENT, HORTICULTURE, AGRICULTURE, STEWARDSHIP EDUCATION

Purpose

This LOB identifies, protects, conserves and interprets Fairfax County's natural, horticultural and agricultural resources; leads and educates the community towards best stewardship of those resources and provides an example for these resources' preservation and management beyond current generations.

Description

This LOB includes seven discrete programs. These are Frying Pan Farm Park, Green Spring Gardens Park, Ellanor C. Lawrence Park, Hidden Oaks Nature Center, Hidden Pond Nature Center, Huntley Meadows Park, and Riverbend Park which combined accomplish the stewardship educational goals for the natural, horticultural, and agricultural resources of Fairfax County and the region.

- This LOB contains five teaching-interpretive natural history centers, an interpretive horticultural center with over two dozen demonstration gardens, and an operating historic farm site which includes an equestrian facility. The combined seven centers provide over 10,000 educational programs/events, both in-house and outreaching to Fairfax County Public Schools for the Virginia Standard of Learning (SOL), senior centers, scouts, businesses, volunteer groups, and residents and visitors.
- The majority of these programs/events are fee-based, which helps sustain each element's operational budget and eases the overall effect on Fairfax County's general operating budget.
- Each element of this LOB provides a central interpretive exhibit, and actively demonstrates stewardship practices relevant to its mission. The seven sites also operate no-fee admission during daily visiting hours for over 1,500,000 visitors annually. Typically each site is open daily during various daylight hours, six to seven days/week, closed on certain major holidays.
- Each site provides educational internet sites, paper publications, teaching tools, and guidance for the general public.
- Provides volunteer opportunities for over 800 volunteers, engendering further responsible stewardship results within the community.
- This LOB has established partnerships with four Friends groups, which also provide financial and volunteer support for County programs/events and interpretive tools.
- This LOB contains management and/or support for five major Countywide programs: Master Gardeners, Master Naturalists, Garden Plot rentals, Home Grown Farmers' Markets, and an extensive 4-H partnership program.
- County merit, limited-term exempt, contract, and volunteer staff at each site teaches, interprets and conducts "best practices" resource stewardship, imbuing in each citizen the value of Fairfax County and its environmental, horticultural and agricultural preservation for future generations.
- This LOB has been in existence for over 45 years.

Fairfax County Park Authority

Benefits

This LOB directly manages and teaches stewardship for natural, horticultural and agricultural landscapes. It provides best management practice tools to ensure the preservation and sustainability of these resources, so they will be enjoyed by current and future generations of Fairfax County's residents and visitors.

Mandates

This LOB is compliant with the following:

- Copy Park Authority Policy 202, Wildlife Conflict Resolution
<http://www.fairfaxCounty.gov/parks/parkpolicy/park-policy-manual.pdf>
- Park Authority Policy 201, Natural Resources
<http://www.fairfaxCounty.gov/parks/parkpolicy/park-policy-manual.pdf>
- Park Authority Natural Resource Management Plan
<http://www.fairfaxCounty.gov/parks/resource-management/nrmp.htm>
- Federal Endangered Species Act
<http://www.fws.gov/endangered/laws-policies/>
- Federal Clean Water Act
<http://www2.epa.gov/laws-regulations/summary-clean-water-act>
- Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act
<http://www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/regulationspolicies/mbta/mbtintro.html>
- Virginia State Water Control Law
<http://www.deq.virginia.gov/LawsRegulations/Laws.aspx>
- Virginia Endangered Plant and Insect Species Act
<http://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/plant&pest/endangered.shtml>
- Virginia Wildlife Laws and Regulations
<http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife/laws/> and <http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/permits/>
- Virginia Pesticide Control Act
<http://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/pesticides/laws.shtml>
- Fairfax County Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance
<http://www.fairfaxCounty.gov/dpwes/environmental/cbay/>
- Fairfax County Wetlands Zoning Ordinance
<http://www.fairfaxCounty.gov/dpz/environment/wetlands/permitshow.htm>

Fairfax County Park Authority

Trends and Challenges

The main trends include increased fee-based program services; increased public demand for natural, horticultural and agricultural stewardship interpretive programs; and increased visitation.

The major challenges that this LOB faces include maintaining service information for public requests; responding timely to information requests; responding to increased scheduled uses of buildings and services; and balancing the need to evolve to be self-sustaining and meet the public's perception of what a resource-based park should be.

Resources

Category	FY 2014 Actual	FY 2015 Actual	FY 2016 Adopted
LOB #343: Nature Center Management, Horticulture, Agriculture, Stewardship Education			
FUNDING			
Expenditures:			
Compensation	\$3,003,195	\$3,092,896	\$3,384,056
Benefits	189,380	191,000	230,734
Operating Expenses	994,233	970,636	844,272
Capital Equipment	9,790	1,418	0
Total Expenditures	\$4,196,598	\$4,255,950	\$4,312,093
General Fund Expenditures	\$2,484,017	\$2,570,585	\$2,530,807
Transfers Out:			
Transfer Out to General Fund	\$27,125	\$27,125	\$28,700
Total Transfers Out	\$27,125	\$27,125	\$28,700
Total Revenue	\$2,076,904	\$2,230,649	\$2,209,269
POSITIONS			
Authorized Positions/Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs)			
Positions:			
Regular	56 / 55.25	56 / 55.25	56 / 55
Total Positions	56 / 55.25	56 / 55.25	56 / 55

Fairfax County Park Authority

Metrics

Metric Indicator	FY 2013 Actual	FY 2014 Actual	FY 2015 Actual	FY 2016 Estimate	FY 2017 Estimate
Number of participants in Stewardship Education programs	17,853	19,605	21,173	22,866	24,695
Number of visitors	741,127	1,255,651	1,524,890	1,646,881	1,778,631
Number of participants in school programs	35,550	33,339	33,591	33,926	34,265
Value and number of volunteer hours provided by Master Gardeners	\$168,642, based on 7,310 volunteer hours	\$169,126, based on 7,331 volunteer hours	\$184,560, based on 8,000 volunteer hours	\$196,095, based on 8,500 volunteer hours	\$207,630, based on 9,000 volunteer hours

Stewardship education at the nature centers, Green Spring Gardens and Frying Pan Farm Park continues to show growth in number of participants and visitation to the sites. The growth has been and is predicted to remain at 8 percent in program participants and overall park attendance until FY 2017. Stewardship education includes scout badge programs, nature classes, equestrian riding lessons, boating programs, fine arts activities, and camps.

Although school field trips continue to grow at a modest 1 percent, future estimates are difficult to predict as the school system's administrators are the decision makers of whether or not to visit the Park Authority's sites for their field trips. In recent years, the schools system's changes in standards of learning, schedules, and travel expenses have been factors that have caused slight changes in the number of participants.

Master Gardeners are a group of volunteers that are part of horticulture training, practical gardening experiences, educating and promoting proper horticulture practices and providing horticulture programs at different sites and events throughout the County. This popular program provides the FCPA with thousands of volunteer hours that directly benefit the citizens of Fairfax County. The data for number of hours of services as well as number of contacts are now captured in a new software program installed and operating in FY 2015. As the number of people interested in gardening increases, more volunteers are predicted to join the group and provide their required number of hours of service.