

Executive Summary

Conservation corridors can be defined as linear strips of vegetation that usually differ from the adjacent surroundings and function to conserve soil, water, plants, wildlife, or fish resources. They serve as natural links (or connections) between significant or core habitat areas to allow for the movement of birds, animals, and humans. Habitat connectivity is the degree to which the landscape facilitates or impedes ecological processes and animal movement through the preservation of contiguous, undeveloped habitat. Conservation corridors may also be thought of as green infrastructure, *"a strategically planned and managed network of natural lands, working landscapes, and other open spaces that conserves ecosystem values and functions and provides associated benefits to human populations."* The term green infrastructure is also commonly used to describe stormwater management methods; for purposes of this paper, green infrastructure is used in the context of conservation corridors.

Preserving and maintaining high-quality natural areas that are connected by a network of functional corridors provides numerous benefits, including:

- Mitigating against the negative impacts of habitat fragmentation;
- Improving the biodiversity of plant and animal species;
- Providing flood water storage and improving water quality;
- Mitigating impacts of climate change by providing carbon sequestration, temperature reduction in summer and associated air quality benefits;
- Providing opportunities for passive recreation and which may be associated with mental and physical health benefits.
- Providing positive economic impacts as reflected in a 2016 Trust for Public Land study, which determined that every \$1 invested in land conservation in Virginia returns \$4¹, by providing the above-stated benefits.

Included in this paper are references and information on corridors, such as: brief summaries of adopted plans, policies, and codes at state and county levels, examples of Comprehensive Plan policies, and potential policy areas that could be addressed in the Policy Plan update.

Adopted Plans, Policies, and Codes

Fairfax County has numerous existing plans, policies and codes that discuss conservation corridors, as shown in *Table 1*. Proposed entitlement applications (primarily Rezoning, Special

¹ The economic analysis conducted for the report focused on lands that were conserved, through fee simple purchase and purchase of conservation easements from willing sellers, using state dollars.

Exception and some Special Permit applications) must meet the county **code** requirements discussed below, as well as state, local, or federal requirements, and are also reviewed for conformance/harmony with policies in the Comprehensive Plan. The **policies** listed below help determine an entitlement application’s conformance with county codes and the Comprehensive Plan. All other development, typically referred to as “by-right-development” must meet the county code requirements, in addition to state, local, or federal requirements. County **plans**, such as those listed below, describe a vision or goal on a specific topic, with strategies for implementation which may include new or revised policies or codes. General overviews are provided for the referenced documents and are not intended to include all guidance or regulations pertaining to conservation corridors.

Table 1: Fairfax County Plans, Policies, and Codes related to Conservation Corridors

<u>Document Title</u>	<u>Plan</u>	<u>Policy</u>	<u>Code</u>
Comprehensive Plan, Policy Plan		X	
Comprehensive Plan Area Plans and Site-Specific Guidance		X	
Urban Design Guidelines		X	
Zoning Ordinance			X
Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance (County Code Chapter 118)			X
Agricultural and Forestal District Program			X
Community-Wide Energy and Climate Action Plan (CECAP)	X		
Resilient Fairfax Plan	X		
Strategic Plan	X		
One Fairfax	X		
Board of Supervisors Environmental Vision	X		
Tree Action Plan	X		
Parks and Recreation Open Space Access Strategy (PROSA)	X		
Fairfax County Park Authority Natural Resources Management Plan	X		
Fairfax County Park Authority Park Policy Manual		X	
Department of Public Works and Environmental Services (DPWES) Watershed Management Plans	X		

County Policy

The following provides summaries of County planning documents that provide, either directly or indirectly, conservation corridor guidance in the land development process.

Comprehensive Plan

A comprehensive plan is general in nature, and with its goals, objectives, and accompanying maps, shows a locality’s long-range recommendations for the general development of its land. Per [Virginia Code Sec. 15.2-2223](#), the purpose is to guide and accomplish “a coordinated, adjusted and harmonious development of the territory” in order to “best promote the health,

safety, morals, order, convenience, prosperity and general welfare of the inhabitants, including the elderly and persons with disabilities.”

The Code of Virginia provides for localities to designate areas for conservation; active and passive recreation; and floodplain and drainage in their comprehensive plans ([Sec. 15.2-2223.C.1](#)). Additionally, [Sec. 15.2-2223. F.](#) states *“The comprehensive plan is encouraged to consider strategies to address resilience. As used in this subsection, “resilience” means the capability to anticipate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from significant multi-hazard threats with minimum damage to social well-being, health, the economy, and the environment.”*

The Policy Plan of Fairfax County’s Comprehensive Plan provides objectives, policies, and guidelines to guide planning and development activities while also protecting the environment, among other redevelopment goals. The Plan is an advisory document with certain guidance implemented through regulations such as the Zoning Ordinance, and the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance.

Environment Element of the Policy Plan

The [Environment Element](#) of the Policy Plan provides guidance for achieving a balance between the need to protect the environment, while planning for the orderly development and redevelopment of the county. Existing policies, contained in Objectives 2, 9, 10, 11, and 12 provide both county directives and land development guidance related to preserving land for the purposes of establishing corridors as well as tree preservation and improving water quality.

- The intent of Objective 2 is to prevent and reduce surface and groundwater pollution, and to protect and restore stream ecological value. Certain policies encourage cluster development when designed to maximize protection of ecologically valuable land, protective easements in areas outside of private residential lots as a mechanism to protect wooded areas and steep slopes, the protection and/or restoration of stream channels and associated buffer areas, the preservation of wooded areas and steep slopes adjacent to stream valley EQC areas.
- The intent of Objective 9 is to identify, protect and enhance an integrated network of ecologically valuable land and surface waters. The two policies associated with this objective are the preservation of Environmental Quality Corridors (EQC) and providing incentives for EQC preservation through density transfers. The policy recommends protection and restoration of environmentally-sensitive areas, including 100-year floodplains, areas of 15% or greater slopes in stream valleys, wetlands connected to stream valleys, buffer areas, and upland habitats that augment the habitats and buffers provided by the stream valleys. One of the purposes for establishing EQCs is related to connectivity. EQCs can establish corridors that facilitate the movement of wildlife and/or conserve biodiversity, including natural corridors wide enough to facilitate wildlife movement and/or the transfer of genetic material between core habitat areas. EQCs are delineated through the entitlement process based on policy criteria. EQCs often include

areas upstream of Resource Protection Areas and 100-year floodplains, which are afforded regulatory protections. Disturbances within EQCs such as access roads, stormwater management facilities, and restoration efforts may occur if certain conditions are met. Other disturbances should only be considered in extraordinary circumstances and only where mitigation/compensation measures are provided that will result in a clear and substantial net environmental benefit.

- Objective 10 establishes policies for the preservation of tree cover, new tree plantings on developing sites and public rights of way and using open space/conservation easements to preserve woodlands, monarch trees, and/or rare stands of trees.
- Objective 11 promotes open space/conservation easements to preserve environmentally-sensitive areas and natural areas in already developed areas.
- Objective 12 seeks to improve identification and mitigation of environmental impacts, and monitoring and enforcement of environmental policies. One policy includes requiring public and private development proposals to identify environmental constraints and opportunities and demonstrate how impacts would be mitigated.

Land Use Element of the Policy Plan

The [Land Use Element](#) of the Policy Plan provides guidance for an appropriate pattern and pace of development and indicates how this development should relate to the existing and future community. It also provides a logical framework for land-use decision-making at a conceptual level as well as on an area-wide and site-specific basis.

- Objective 17 encourages the use of open space/conservation easements, in part to enhance buffering and screening between uses, protect environmental resources, preserve wildlife habitat, and retain open space in developed areas.

Parks and Recreation Element of the Policy Plan

The [Parks and Recreation Element](#) of the Policy Plan provides guidance for a comprehensive approach to planning and acquisition for an integrated system of parks, recreation, and open space, which utilizes the resources of the public and private sectors to maximum advantage.

- Objective 1 includes a policy for acquiring EQC segments to complete the public stream valley network; or obtaining use of privately-owned resources where acquisition is not feasible or desirable.

Public Facilities Element of the Policy Plan

The [Public Facilities Element](#) of the Policy Plan is used by the County during the review of a new or expanding facility to ensure the proposed facility aligns with the objectives and policies of the Comprehensive Plan.

- The intent of Objective 6 promotes the design, retrofit and maintenance of public facilities and sites in an environmentally sensitive manner. Two policies state that utility corridors should be designed and maintained as natural areas to the extent practicable.

Area Plans and Site-Specific Guidance

The [Area Plans](#) of the Comprehensive Plan contain detailed long-range planning recommendations organized by geographic areas of the county and in certain cases contains site-specific plan amendment (SSPA) text generally related to conservation corridors.

Eighteen planning districts or sub/urban centers contain text and guidance related to corridors. While the guidance is primarily related to environmental quality corridors (EQCs), some areas contain guidance for establishing corridors/greenways for the purposes of creating a connected network of parks, open spaces and streetscape areas (McLean Community Business Center), the establishment of a cultural corridor (Mount Vernon Planning District), or a green network comprised of a large central park, existing stream valley parks, trail network, cultural resource parks, and urban parks (Tysons Urban Center).

The Richmond Corridor Area guidelines include a stormwater management approach of “Ecological Spines” for locations where piped streams may be daylighted and/or Low Impact Development (LID)/green stormwater infrastructure may be integrated. Some of the benefits of the Ecological Spines approach are to provide passive recreational opportunities, augment downstream EQCs and RPAs, and provide ecological benefits through establishment or enhancement of riparian buffer areas.

Urban Design Guidelines

Volume I of the [Urban Design Guidelines](#) applies to all Community Revitalization Districts (CRDs) and Community Revitalization Areas (CRAs) (except Lake Anne) identified in the Comprehensive Plan and includes broad recommendations and urban design ideas for streets, streetscapes, parks, landscaping, parking, building exteriors, and special placemaking features. Volume II provides recommendations for each CRD/CRA, tailored to the community’s preferences for the specific area.

The Guidelines encourage the rethinking of streets as part of larger urban systems; designed to incorporate nature, provide stormwater management functions, regulate ambient temperatures and air quality, and serve as wildlife corridors and habitats. The Guidelines also state that trails and open spaces should connect neighborhoods and wildlife habitats by serving as natural corridors for people and animals. The Guidelines Sustainable Design Toolbox includes reforestation within riparian corridors to enhance the environment, provide shade, and create a sense of place.

Volume I of the Guidelines is undergoing an update which would include the latest best practices for tree planting, stormwater management and cool street designs, among others. The update is expected to be completed in spring 2025.

Fairfax County Park Authority Park Policy Manual

The Park Authority adopted its first Stream Valley policy in 1973 in its [Park Policy Manual](#). This policy listed specific stream valleys identified for acquisition through development dedications or other means that would comprise the Stream Valley Park Plan. This Plan formed the basis of the Environmental Quality Corridor System that was incorporated into the county's Comprehensive Plan in 1975 and that played a major role in shaping development patterns. The current policy manual includes Stream Valley/Greenway Parks in Appendix 7 (Park Classification System), describing their purpose such as providing genetic corridors. The designation may also be applicable to private properties protected by conservation easements.

County Codes

County codes provide the regulatory framework for development within the county. Codes range from providing guidance on site and building design, to construction and beyond.

Zoning Ordinance

The [Zoning Ordinance](#) is intended to promote the health, safety, and general welfare of the public and to implement the Comprehensive Plan for the orderly and controlled development of the County. One specific intent is to promote the conservation of natural resources and encourage the preservation of stream valleys, steep slopes, lands of natural beauty, forests, scenic vistas, and other similar areas. While conservation corridors are not specifically noted in the Zoning Ordinance, there are standards and requirements related to, or have the potential of, creating connectivity, including but not limited to:

- Certain application [submission requirements](#) for delineating EQCs;
- Open space/landscaped open space requirements in most [zoning districts](#);
- [General standards](#) for protecting/restoring natural ecosystem components in planned districts;
- [Residential-Conservation zoning district \(R-C\)](#);
- [Landscaping and screening requirements](#), including transitional screening buffers;
- [Cluster subdivisions](#); and
- [Floodplain regulations](#).

Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance (County Code Chapter 118)

The [Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance](#) (CBPO, County Code [Chapter 118](#)) was adopted to protect local streams and one of the world's most productive estuaries (§118-1-4.(a)), the Chesapeake Bay, from pollution due to land use and development. In an effort to protect and

improve the quality of these waterways, Fairfax County designated certain environmentally sensitive areas as Resource Protection Areas (RPAs):

1. Tidal wetland;
2. Tidal shore;
3. Water body with perennial flow;
4. Nontidal wetland connected by surface flow and contiguous to a tidal wetland or water body with perennial flow;
5. Buffer area that includes any land within a major floodplain and any land within 100 feet of a feature listed in 1-4.

RPAs provide benefits such as protecting water quality, filtering pollutants out of stormwater runoff, reducing the volume of stormwater runoff, preventing erosion and performing other important biological and ecological functions. The CBPO regulates development, uses and activities within RPAs. Generally, no development, land disturbance, or vegetation removal is allowed within the RPA boundary without prior county approval.

Recent updates incorporated provisions for the preservation of mature trees and coastal resilience and adaptation to climate change.

Agricultural and Forestal District Program

The [Agricultural and Forestal \(A&F\) District program](#) is designed to preserve and protect open spaces, forested areas, and agricultural lands in Fairfax County. The authority for the establishment of Local A&F districts is derived from [Title 15.2, Chapter 43](#) of the Code of Virginia, entitled the "*Local Agricultural and Forestal Districts Act*". The program allows property that meets certain criteria to be taxed on the use value of the land rather than the market value. The ordinance provisions require all district owners to not intensify the use of their land for the life of the district, and compliance with a Soil and Water Quality Management Plan, a Forest Management Plan, or other commitments to address specific environmental concerns, such as erosion control or endangered species management.

Based on the most recent [2023 Annual Report](#), Fairfax County has a total of 39 A&F Districts encompassing approximately 2,900 acres.

Related County Plans

In addition to the above, numerous other county plans discuss the importance of, and provide recommendations for, establishing conservation corridors. While there are recommendations from these plans that warrant consideration and potential incorporation in the updated Policy Plan, some of their recommendations are captured in existing Policy Plan policies or may be applicable to programs overseen by other County agencies.

- The [Community-Wide Energy and Climate Action Plan \(CECAP\)](#) was adopted by the Board in 2021 as a roadmap for Fairfax County to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and provide a way to engage the community in emissions reduction efforts. A strategy and associated

actions related to conservation corridors are supporting the preservation, restoration, and expansion of natural systems, green spaces, and soil quality (Strategy 12). The expansion of natural resources could encompass the creation or protection of wildlife corridors, the connection of isolated habitats (e.g., connecting two or more small meadows to create a larger, less fragmented habitat), and the connection of urban forests.

- The [CECAP Implementation Plan](#), published in December 2022, includes an Implementation Action Recommendation to “Update the Comprehensive Plan, Zoning Ordinance and associated codes and policies in regards to...sustainable development and land use, and natural resources, to be in alignment with CECAP and RF climate goals” (Implementation Action NR.10).
- The [Resilient Fairfax](#) Plan was adopted by the Board in 2022 as a method for Fairfax County to address the impacts of climate change. This plan includes two goals with associated strategies and implementation actions related to conservation corridors. These goals and strategies support developing a consolidated natural resources management plan, stream corridor, wetlands and floodplain restoration, flood resilience guidance including green infrastructure; and inventorying and updating the Comprehensive Plan policies related to land use patterns that may mitigate impacts to floodplains, wetlands, Environmental Quality Corridors, Resource Protection Areas, and trees in order to enhance resiliency.
- The [Strategic Plan](#) was adopted by the Board in October 2021 and revised in May 2023. The Plan includes Environment and Energy strategies to promote county policies, practices and regulatory programs to protect, conserve, establish and rehabilitate natural resources (e.g., tree cover, open green spaces, parkland) that provide ecological and health benefits.
- The [One Fairfax](#) plan, adopted in 2017, is a joint racial and social equity policy of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors and School Board. One of the focus areas is to achieve a healthy and quality environment to live and work in that acknowledges the need to breathe clean air, to drink clean water now and for future generations.
- The Board of Supervisors 2017 [Environmental Vision](#) provides an overview of the visions and supporting objectives of the board in support of environmental sustainability. One objective related to conservation corridors is the protection and restoration of natural receiving waters such as stream corridors in order to protect water resources. Additional objectives include continued creation of a network of green space corridors and hubs, through direct purchase or conservation easements, to connect people, wildlife such as pollinators, and their ecological resources; and conserving rare, threatened, endangered, and unique natural heritage and biodiversity of the county.
- The [Tree Action Plan](#), updated in 2019, includes five framework goals with recommendations. Under the goal of *Protect and Improve What We Have* it is recommended that efforts be made to establish corridors connecting natural areas, as well as placing an emphasis on preserving the best remaining forests and their connectivity to adjacent or nearby natural areas. Another recommendation is for plantings on commercial and public properties and extending outward into linear corridors both to expand the environmental benefits and provide connection through the landscape as part of the *Expand What We Have* goal. This goal also recommends expanding and establishing corridors between existing forested and natural areas.

- The [Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Access \(PROSA\) Strategy](#), endorsed by the Park Authority in 2023, provides a framework for equitable access to the FCPA park system, partly by enriching habitat connectivity between environmental corridors. The two primary metrics used for assessing habitat connectivity are tree canopy and habitat quality at Fairfax County parks. A countywide, site-specific, and field-verified inventory of all habitat types throughout the park system is currently underway by Park Authority ecologists. Once this multi-year project is complete, the highly robust field-verified inventory will serve as the foundation for the habitat health analysis. The current assessment does not include meadows, wetlands, or other types of habitats, but these may be included as more data becomes available. Identified actions for improving habitat connectivity include planting trees during park development in areas with lower tree canopy; improving habitat health on existing park sites with a priority to remove invasive species; and considering opportunities to improve habitat connectivity when acquiring parkland.
- A related Park Authority plan is the [Natural Resource Management Plan](#) (updated in 2019). A management theme of the plan is *Managing Wild Populations and Restoring Ecosystems*, which includes actions to enhance connectivity of parkland to provide natural corridors that allow for the movement of populations over time and preserve ecosystem function and biodiversity with a focus on buffering sensitive natural resources.
- The County has developed comprehensive [watershed management plans](#) for each of the county's thirty watersheds. The plans identify issues affecting the watersheds and provide guidance for protecting and restoring the county's stream corridors. Each year, projects from the plans are put into the stormwater management annual work plan. The work plan is developed to balance work done in each of the watersheds and districts, and to spread resources among infrastructure maintenance, dam safety, flooding issues, water quality, watershed restoration, and plan implementation. These plans are consulted during entitlement application reviews and comprehensive plan amendments.

Regional and State Initiatives

The following provides brief summaries of a few regional and state initiatives related to conservation corridor planning that could help inform new or enhanced Plan policies.

- **Northern Virginia Regional Commission (NVRC) Conservation Corridors Planning Project:** In 2012, the NVRC prepared the [Conservation Corridors in Northern Virginia Assessment Report](#). One goal of the project was to identify and map high-value habitat cores and corridors across the region. The report includes maps depicting conserved lands, high value core and contributing landscapes (intact habitats), cultural heritage and recreation, and water resource assets. The report also provides conservation strategies and planning approaches for different scales, e.g. at the county level.
- **Virginia ConservationVision:** The Virginia Natural Heritage Program (VNHP) in the Department of Conservation and Recreation created [Virginia ConservationVision](#), a digital atlas to be used for green infrastructure planning. It consists of a suite of maps and spatial data, intended as a resource for guiding strategic conservation efforts by

government agencies, private conservation organizations, and regional and local planners.

- **Virginia Natural Landscape Assessment (VaNLA):** One of the map models created for Virginia ConservationVision is the [VaNLA](#), developed to identify networks of natural lands for Virginia. This project is a landscape-scale geospatial analysis for identifying, prioritizing, and linking natural lands in Virginia with many potential uses:
 - identify targets for protection activities such as conservation land purchases or easements;
 - guidance in comprehensive planning efforts by localities;
 - review proposed projects for potential impacts to ecological cores and corridors;
 - guide private property owners and public and private land managers in making decisions that enhance ecological values;
 - inform citizens about the patterns and extent of landscape fragmentation;
 - target lands for habitat restoration.

Conservation Corridor Policy Examples

The following provides a short list of examples from other local jurisdictions comprehensive plans addressing conservation corridors.

- **Arlington County Comprehensive Plan:** [Forestry and Natural Resources Plan](#), *Strategic Direction 3: Biodiversity. The central focus of this Strategic Direction — recognizing the foundational value of connected habitat to ecological systems — is to increase and improve connected habitat throughout the County.* A listed Action includes: *3.3 Establish a County-wide natural infrastructure and conservation connectivity network.* Three strategies are described, including 3.3.1 Document Existing Habitat on Private and Public Lands and Identify Connective Corridors. In addition to riparian areas, this strategy states that *habitat hubs and corridor levels can be designated in relation to the local possibilities and target species. For example, pocket parks and roadside plantings may not support the movement of larger animals but could comprise a corridor adequate for pollinator movement if designed to meet the requirements for each stage of life.*
- **Loudoun County Comprehensive Plan:** [Chapter 3 – Natural, Environmental, and Heritage Resources](#), *Natural Heritage Resources, NHR Policy 6: Preserve, protect, and create a network of privately and publicly protected open space, favoring large contiguous areas rather than smaller disconnected areas; maintaining natural, environmental, and heritage resource assets; preventing habitat fragmentation; and reinforcing the unique character of the diverse communities in the County.* Strategies and action items related to this policy include coordination with appropriate state agencies to determine presence of natural heritage resources on development application sites;

identifying wildlife corridors and encouraging their protection; and creating links to adjacent open spaces and natural resources as part of development proposals.

- **Prince William County Comprehensive Plan:** [Environment Plan](#), EN-POLICY 3: *To further support a minimum of 39 percent of the total area in the County excluding acreage of Marine Corps Base Quantico, should be retained as protected open space. Action Strategy EN3.13 Protect the biological diversity, processes, and functions of natural habitats, identify and prioritize a network of preservation corridors or large woodland areas to be incorporated into an overall habitat protection network.*

Policy Recommendations

Overall, Fairfax County has numerous plans, policies, and codes aimed at establishing and managing open space or corridors, for the purposes of habitat conservation, stormwater management, and/or recreation. Through the review of existing county policies, related county and regional efforts, and knowledge obtained through work experience, staff has initially identified several topics where policies could be enhanced or added in the Environment Element related to conservation corridors.

Identified topics are presented in three general groups: new policy topics, improved existing policies, and formalized practices. These are presented for consideration; policy text based on these topics will be developed in the coming months. Additional policies may be identified through coordination with County staff and stakeholders.

▪ New Policy Topics

- **County-Wide Corridor Planning:** Through coordination with appropriate stakeholders, establish a County-wide natural infrastructure and conservation connectivity network for use in the land development review process.
- **Site-Level Corridor Planning:** Existing or potential conservation corridor areas adjacent to a proposed development site should be identified; and tree preservation, native landscaping, green infrastructure, and other environmental features within a site should be encouraged adjacent to those areas. Habitat nodes and corridors should be designed in relation to the local conditions and target species.
- **Climate Resiliency:** The preservation and connection of natural resources, such as forested areas, meadows, wetlands, and other green spaces can mitigate against climate change impacts and extreme weather events.
 - Recognize the adverse impacts of flooding, urban heat island effect, poor air quality, etc., and develop and/or identify existing policies that can mitigate those impacts, such as increased tree conservation/plantings, green infrastructure, etc., and explore opportunities for connectivity between these elements within a site and the surrounding area.

- **Equitable Development:** establish policies for identifying environmental features that could provide the greatest benefits in vulnerable communities and explore opportunities for connectivity between these features within a site and the surrounding area.
- **Community Health:** Recognize the health benefits from conservation corridors and seek creation/expansion of corridors in areas where the built environment may be creating adverse health impacts.
- **Improve Existing Policies**
 - **Environment Element, Objectives 1, 2, 10 and 11:** certain policies could be implemented through a lens of establishing or enhancing corridors, where appropriate. The following are some examples:
 - Air Quality Objective 1, Policy c (in part):
 - Maximization of tree planting/tree cover restoration.
 - Planting of street trees within road medians and along thoroughfares where consistent with safety. This concept should be expanded to include native perennial plantings to promote pollinator movement.
 - Water Quality Objective 2, Policy d (in part):
 - Site buildings to minimize impervious cover associated with driveways and parking areas and to encourage tree preservation.
 - Where feasible, convey drainage from impervious areas into pervious areas. Encourage cluster development when designed to maximize protection of ecologically valuable land.
 - Encourage the preservation of wooded areas and steep slopes adjacent to stream valley EQC areas.
 - Water Quality Objective 2, Policy l (in part): In order to augment the EQC system, encourage protection of stream channels and associated vegetated riparian buffer areas along stream channels upstream of Resource Protection Areas (as designated pursuant to the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance) and Environmental Quality Corridors.
 - Tree Cover Objective 10: all policies within this objective should consider conservation corridor establishment/enhancement subject to specific site conditions.
 - Open Space/Conservation Easements Objective 11: all policies within this objective should consider conservation corridor establishment/enhancement subject to specific site conditions.
 - **Environment Element, Objective 9:** Two of the four purposes for establishing environmental quality corridors are habitat quality and connectivity. There should be greater clarity that EQC establishment is not limited to the stream valley core. Certain habitat areas outside of the stream valleys may be appropriate to include in an EQC, as is noted in the Habitat Quality purpose, as well as in Objective 2, policies d and l.

- **Environment Element, Objective 12:** Policy a requires public and private development proposals to identify environmental constraints and opportunities and demonstrate how impacts would be mitigated. This could be expanded to explicitly include identification of areas to protect for conservation corridor purposes.
- **Formalize practice:**
 - **Invasive Species Management:** a routine commitment for development projects is to provide an invasive species management plan for target areas such as along the limits of clearing and within any tree preservation areas. Currently, the topic of invasive plant species in the Environment Element is limited to the EQC policy. Recognizing the impacts of invasive species and creating land development policies to address them county-wide will provide benefits to existing and new conservation corridors and meet the goals and objectives of county plans. For example, PROSA states that a metric used to measure habitat health is the presence of invasive plant species within forested areas of parkland. Successful invasive plant control supports healthy ecosystems and habitat connectivity.