

PARKS AND RECREATION

INTRODUCTION

Fairfax County is nationally recognized for the quality and diversity of its park and recreation system. (See Figure 1). Within the context of the Comprehensive Plan, these parklands and recreational facilities play a key role in shaping both the landscape and the quality of life through conservation of natural and heritage resources, protection of environmental quality, provision of public facilities and human services, and management of urban growth.

The existing and proposed system of parks, recreation and open space is intended to offer residents, workers and visitors the opportunity to make constructive use of their leisure time in safe, accessible and enjoyable parks, and community recreational facilities and programs. Additionally, the park system serves as a primary public mechanism for the preservation of environmentally sensitive land and water resources and areas of historical significance.

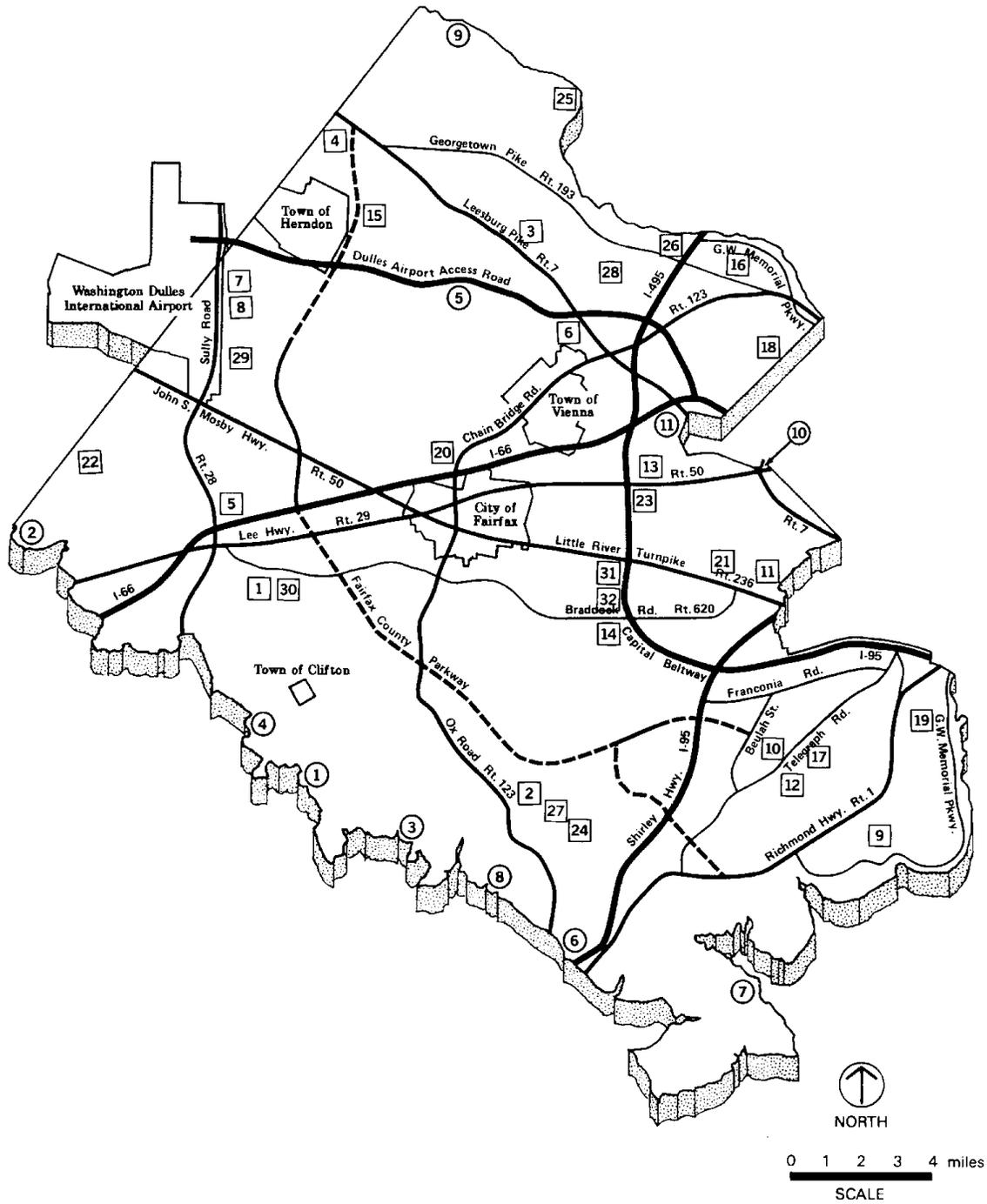
A total of seven public agencies at the local, regional, state and federal level provide recreational lands and facilities. These public providers traditionally employ a variety of standards for determining appropriate levels of service and resource protection. Inherent in the establishment of such public facility standards are concerns for the equitable distribution of resources and services to all sectors of the community, and the need to balance the demand for a full range of active and passive recreational opportunities with site and fiscal restraints. The private sector's role within the park and recreation system is also influenced by public facilities standards, in particular, through the application of facility standards to new development and, in general, by decisions regarding which types of facilities will be wholly or partially funded by public monies.

In recent years the pressures of population growth, changing land use patterns and changing life styles have severely strained the County's capability to maintain service levels which citizens have come to expect. The pace of urban development is rapidly foreclosing the availability of land suitable for future parks, while escalating land costs further constrain opportunities for purchase of public parklands.

Additionally, adverse impacts of nearby development on parks and recreation resources are pervasive and growing. These impacts include routing of road and utility rights-of-way through parklands, increased siltation and erosion, loss of buffer areas and fragmentation of wildlife habitats.

These concerns necessitate a comprehensive and integrated approach to planning and acquisition for the County's parks, recreation and open space system which utilizes the resources of the public and private sector to maximum advantage. Land use decisions should be guided by the County goals cited below and the following general objectives:

- Diversity of park and recreation opportunities within the system and between components should be encouraged;
- Diversity in facilities, site locations and potential future use of recreation areas should be maintained;
- Development of facilities and sites which cannot be adequately maintained and unnecessary duplication of facilities should be avoided;



COUNTYWIDE AND REGIONAL PARKS

FIGURE 1

LEGEND

FAIRFAX COUNTY PARK AUTHORITY

- 1 Braddock
- 2 Burke Lake
- 3 Colvin Run Mill
- 4 Dranesville Tavern
- 5 Ellanor C. Lawrence
- 6 Freedom Hill
- 7 Floris School
- 8 Frying Pan
- 9 George Washington
- 10 Greendale Golf Course
- 11 Green Spring Farm
- 12 Huntley Meadows
- 13 Jefferson Golf Course
- 14 Lake Accotink
- 15 Lake Fairfax
- 16 Langley Oaks
- 17 Lee District
- 18 Marie Butler Leven Preserve
- 19 Mt. Vernon District
- 20 Oak Marr
- 21 Pinecrest Golf Course
- 22 Pleasant Valley
- 23 Providence
- 24 Recreation Lake
- 25 Riverbend
- 26 Scotts Run Nature Preserve
- 27 South Run
- 28 Spring Hill
- 29 Sully
- 30 Twin Lakes Golf Course
- 31 The Wakefield Chapel
- 32 Wakefield

Note: There are over 30 Stream Valley Parks throughout the county.

NORTHERN VIRGINIA REGIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

- 1 Bull Run Marina
- 2 Bull Run
- 3 Fountainhead
- 4 Hemlock Overlook
- 5 Meadowbrook Gardens
- 6 Occoquan
- 7 Pohick Bay
- 8 Sandy Run
- 9 Upper Potomac
- 10 Upton Hill
- 11 Washington and Old Dominion Railroad trail runs along train right-of-way across northern part of county to Loudoun County.

Source: Fairfax County Park Authority

- Competition between park and recreation providers should be discouraged; and
- Significant natural and heritage resource areas should be incorporated into the park system and protected as a public trust.

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS GOALS

Environmental Protection - The amount and distribution of population density and land uses in Fairfax County should be consistent with environmental constraints inherent in the need to preserve natural resources and to meet or exceed federal, state and local standards for water quality, ambient air quality and other environmental standards. Development in Fairfax County should be sensitive to the natural setting, in order to prevent degradation of the County's natural environment.

Growth and Adequate Public Facilities - Growth in Fairfax County should be held to a level consistent with available, accessible, and adequate public facilities as well as with rational plans to provide new public facilities to maintain existing public facilities. The County's plans for development should take into account financial limitations associated with increased needs for public facilities.

Culture and Recreation - Fairfax County should provide local systems and participate in regional programs for safe, accessible and enjoyable parks (including active, passive, and historical parks); recreational programs; libraries; and cultural programs and facilities. Fairfax County should also support and encourage the identification and preservation of its heritage resources for the aesthetic, social and educational benefits of present and future citizens.

Open Space - Fairfax County should support the conservation of appropriate land areas in a natural state to preserve, protect and enhance stream valleys, meadows, woodlands, wetlands, farmland, and plant and animal life. Small areas of open space should also be preserved in already congested and developed areas for passive neighborhood uses, visual relief, scenic value, and screening and buffering purposes.

Objective 1: Provide, through local and regional programs, parklands and recreation facilities needed for current and future residents and for the conservation of environmental and heritage resources.

Policy a. Plan, acquire, develop and maintain the following types of parks through the Fairfax County Park Authority and in conjunction with the private sector. (see Parks and Recreation Appendix I for the Park Classification System)

- Neighborhood Parks
Residential Neighborhood Parks
Urban Parks
- Community Parks
- District Parks
- Countywide Parks
Stream Valley Parks, Natural Resource Parks, Heritage Resource Parks,
Multiple Resource Parks, Special Purpose Areas

Policy b: Acquire additional land to expand existing parks or provide new parks through a combination of purchase in fee simple, easements, dedication, donation, and/or other appropriate means.

Policy c: Support the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority in its mission to plan, acquire, develop and maintain regional parks and facilities to serve the population of Northern Virginia.

Policy d: Support the efforts of State and Federal agencies to protect and enhance significant ecological and heritage resources in Fairfax County.

Policy e: Provide incentives for private landowners to preserve open space and protect ecological and heritage resources through the use of easements, land use valuation, and other programs designed to ameliorate pressures which force the conversion of real estate to more intensive uses.

Policy f: Provide active and passive recreational opportunities in accordance with adopted Fairfax County standards. (See Parks and Recreation Appendix 2.)

Objective 2: Preserve appropriate land areas in a natural state to conserve ecological resources, protect environmentally and historically significant areas, and maintain open space in developed areas.

Policy a: Maximize the effectiveness of limited funding by establishing priorities for the acquisition of significant environmental and heritage resources and open space.

Policy b: Use the park system in conjunction with the Environmental Quality Corridor system to establish an integrated network of greenways linking major resource areas and providing migration routes essential to biological diversity.

Policy c: Identify and protect through public acquisition or other appropriate means representative high quality occurrences of significant ecological resources for inclusion in the park system.

Policy d: Identify and protect through public acquisition or other appropriate means significant heritage resources for inclusion in the park system.

Objective 3: Ensure the long term protection, maintenance and preservation of park resources.

Policy a: Protect park resources from the adverse impacts of development on nearby properties.

Policy b: Protect the character, quality, and public use of stream valley parklands through dedication to the Fairfax County Park Authority of designated land or through use of trail and/or conservation easements with guaranteed public access.

Policy c: Provide compensation for use of parklands for other than park purposes in accordance with adopted policies of the affected park agency.

Policy d: Coordinate the management of environmental, heritage, and recreational resources within County Government and with regional, state, and federal agencies, particularly with regard to contiguous land holdings.

Policy e: Ensure adequate maintenance for existing facilities.

Objective 4: Maximize both the required and voluntary dedication, development and renovation of lands and facilities for parks and recreation to help ensure an equitable distribution of these resources commensurate with development throughout the County.

Policy a: Provide neighborhood park facilities on private open space in quantity and design consistent with County standards; or at the option of the County, contribute a pro-rata share to establish neighborhood park facilities in the vicinity; or in larger developments, at the option of the County, provide Neighborhood Parks as a component of the new residential community. The extent of the facilities or contribution to be provided shall be in general accord with adopted standards for Neighborhood Parks (Appendix 1).

Policy b: Mitigate the cumulative impacts of development which exacerbate or create deficiencies of Community Park facilities in the vicinity. The extent of facilities, land or contributions to be provided shall be in general accordance with the proportional impact on identified facility needs as determined by adopted County standards. Implement this policy through application of the Criteria for Assignment of Appropriate Development Intensity.

Policy c: Assess the impact on Neighborhood and Community Parks in the areas that are being considered for replanning to higher densities. Offset any impact of the proposed development beyond the capacity of existing facilities. At the replanning stage, give attention to providing land for park purposes to offset the impacts of development and trails to link park facilities with the Countywide Trails System.

Policy d: Seek dedication to FCPA of lands that meet the criteria for water resources preservation areas and stream valley parks as defined respectively by the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Area Designation and Management Regulations and the Fairfax County Park Authority Stream Valley Policy.

Policy e: Encourage developers to cooperatively develop public Urban Parks, trails and active recreation facilities in the Tysons Corner Urban Center, the Suburban Centers, and Community Business Centers.

Objective 5: Provide for meeting current and future park and recreational needs through a combination of the development of new and existing sites and the optimal use of all existing facilities (including non-Fairfax County agencies).

Policy a: Maximize the use of existing public facilities for community recreation purposes and provide non-motorized access.

- Policy b: Enhance existing recreation and resource protection opportunities through acquisition of adjacent lands, including those segments of EQCs needed to complete the public stream valley trail system.
- Policy c: Coordinate with Fairfax County Schools on the location, phasing and design of school and park sites to enhance the potential for development of community recreation facilities.
- Policy d: Coordinate with the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority to provide mutually beneficial active and passive recreation facilities and to develop a regional open space system.
- Policy e: Use adopted Fairfax County standards and criteria to establish priorities for funding requirements in the Five Year Capital Improvement Program and future bond referenda.
- Policy f: Encourage community participation in the maintenance of parks.

APPENDIX 1

PARK CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

The proposed Park Classification is a model intended to guide open space and public facilities planning, and also to assist in the development of public and private land management plans, by grouping parks according to their management character. As defined by service areas, the County should provide five primary types of parks: Neighborhood, Community, District, Countywide and Regional. These are augmented by state and federal park areas within Fairfax County boundaries.

Some park classifications contain sub units to indicate different types of recreational uses. For example, District, Countywide and Regional Parks may all contain areas managed primarily for protection of natural or heritage resources; golf courses may be classified as Special Purpose Areas in either Countywide or Regional Parks depending on the managing agency. Criteria for each park type are provided in the individual descriptions below. The general areas of consideration are:

1. Purpose - indicates the type of use the park is intended to receive.
2. Management Responsibility - indicates which agency(ies) normally manage the site; also identifies the relative emphasis which should be given to public use versus resource protection.
3. Location - indicates the location, means of access, range of user populations and typical size of sites.
4. Character and Extent - indicates some of the facilities that typically could be found in the park type, the extent of development and any special considerations. All listed facilities are subject to the master planning process for individual sites.

A. NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS

A.1 Residential Neighborhood Parks

Purpose

To provide easily accessible, low density use recreational areas, visual relief from urban congestion, and scenic value and buffering between adjacent land uses.

Management Responsibility

Fairfax County Park Authority and/or Homeowners/Resident Associations. Management decisions should give priority to public or resident use, respectively, but consideration should be given to the quality of the park environment and the ease of non-motorized access.

Location

The park should be located to serve residential development within a 15 minute walk or less, depending on service area. Service areas is approximately 1/2 mile.

Character and Extent

Provides primarily passive recreation uses for residential populations. Application of these acreage and facility standards to developments which create populations of fewer than 500 should be proportional to the size of development. Access is primarily on foot or bicycle with very limited, if any, parking. Park size will typically be less than 10 acres with a desirable minimum of 2.5 acres of developable land. Planned facilities may include a tot lot, playground, picnic tables, multi-use court, tennis courts, open play area, gardens and trails.

A.2 Urban Parks

Purpose

To provide visual enhancement, open space and pedestrian oriented amenities in designated centers.

Management Responsibility

Employment Center land owners, Fairfax County Park Authority, or joint public and private sector operations.

Location

The Tysons Urban Center, Suburban and Community Business Centers with pedestrian access.

Character and Extent

Urban style plazas, miniparks, and greenways, including trails, oriented to pedestrian and/or bicycle use by resident work force and adjacent residents. Informal activities and programmed events during lunch hours and after work hours are intended to foster social interactions between users and provide leisure opportunities. Park size is typically less than five acres.

B. COMMUNITY PARKS

Purpose

To provide a variety of moderate density active and passive recreational opportunities convenient located for short term visits.

Management Responsibility

Fairfax County Park Authority; public use is a primary factor in management of park.

Location

This park should be located in Suburban Neighborhoods within a 15-20 minute walk or bicycle trip or a 10 minute drive by users. Whenever feasible, locate adjacent to elementary or intermediate schools to maximize use of active recreation facilities; in Centers, proximity to retail/office parking is desirable. Service area is 3/4 or 1 1/2 miles in densely and non-densely settled areas, respectively, with dense areas defined as those planned to a density of 2,500 people per square mile. The park serves several neighborhoods and will typically be between 10-50 acres in size.

Character and Extent

All facilities planned for a Neighborhood Park could also be located in a Community Park. In addition lighted or unlighted athletic fields, tennis courts, parking, trails, picnic shelter with restrooms, gardens, nature center, community center and undeveloped natural areas may also be included. Application of acreage and facility standards to development proposals which create populations of fewer than 500 should be proportional to the size of the development.

C. DISTRICT PARKS

Purpose

To provide area-wide services to several sectors of the County with high density recreation opportunities clustered in a relatively natural setting; intended to support an extended visit such as an afternoon.

Management Responsibility

Fairfax County Park Authority. The park environment, as a major attraction, should receive consideration in management plans, but the park should be managed for public use.

Location

This park may be located in Suburban Neighborhoods or Suburban Centers. Access should be available by the Countywide Trail System to encourage pedestrian and bicycle trips; access by public transit is also desirable. Service area is approximately 3-6 miles depending on population density. A District Park is typically between 50-200 acres in size.

Character and Extent

All facilities planned for a Neighborhood or Community Park could also be located in a District Park. In addition major sports complexes with lighted facilities, parking, picnic shelters with restroom/concession areas, amphitheater, maintenance facilities, trails and large undeveloped areas may also be planned. Some District Parks may contain valuable resources suitable for management as separate natural or historical subunits.

D. COUNTYWIDE PARKS

Purpose

This category of park is intended to provide a wide range of recreational and educational experiences for all County residents and visitors and to protect and preserve significant environmental and heritage resources. Countywide parks include the following types described individually below:

- | | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Stream Valley Park | Multiple Resource Park | Heritage Resource Park |
| Natural Resource Park | Special Purpose Area | |

Management Responsibility

The Fairfax County Park Authority is responsible for the management of the five types of Countywide Parks described below.

D.1 Stream Valley Parks

Purpose

To preserve and protect designated Environmental Quality Corridors (EQCs), provide wildlife corridors, continuity of access between communities and Countywide trail routes.

Location

Stream valley parks encompass designated portions of Environmental Quality Corridors and contiguous lands to which the public may have access for passive recreational use.

Management Responsibility

The Fairfax County Park Authority has primary responsibility for management of public segments of the designated EQCs in the interior areas of the County. Protection of private adjoining lands within EQCs may be secured by conservation easements with public access along major designated stream valleys secured by trail easements.

Character and Extent

Stream valley parks are treated as critical environmental areas. Their use is restricted primarily to activities of a passive nature. Facilities may include trails, sitting areas, small picnic and playground areas, open play areas and interpretive wayside exhibits.

Where feasible, acquisition and development of Community Parks adjacent to stream valley parks should be encouraged to expand recreational and resource protection opportunities and to provide support facilities for Countywide trail users including parking, restrooms and emergency access.

D.2 Natural Resource Park

Purpose

To preserve, protect and perpetuate areas of significant or unique environmental, ecological and scenic values in Fairfax County.

Management Responsibility

Fairfax County Park Authority, Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority, state and federal agencies. This designation, absent public access, may also be applicable to private properties protected by conservation easements. Management plans should give total consideration to the resource and allow public use only as it is compatible with resource protection.

Location

The park will be located where the resource occurs and the size should be sufficient to protect the resource. The service area for this type of park is highly variable depending on whether it is of local, regional, state or federal significance. Access is dependent on the management of the park. A natural area managed for preservation would have restricted access. Natural Resource Parks located contiguous with designated Environmental Quality Corridors shall be included as part of the EQC.

Character and Extent

Natural Resource Parks are selected for inclusion in the park system because of their unique flora, fauna or geological features. Some parks may also contain unique archaeological or historical features. They provide educational resources and environmental resources to the community. In general, Natural Resource Parks should not be developed except to provide passive access by the public and to protect fragile areas. Facilities development should be limited but could include trails, interpretive centers, wildlife observation areas, scientific study areas, picnic areas and limited access with parking. The Natural Resource Park may include historical or passive recreational subunits. Where a natural resource area occurs as a subunit in another type park, it is designated as a Managed Conservation area.

D.3 Heritage Resource Park

Purpose

To preserve and protect significant heritage resources of the County.

Management Responsibility

Fairfax County Park Authority, Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority, state and federal agencies. This designation, absent public access, may also be applicable to private properties protected by historic preservation easements. Management of public sites should include public education and enjoyment objectives; but protection of the resource takes priority.

Location

The park will be located where the resource occurs and the size should be sufficient to protect the resource. Service areas are highly variable depending on whether the resource is of local, regional, state or federal significance. Criteria is included in the Heritage Resources section of the Plan. Heritage Resource areas may occur as subunits within other park types.

A Heritage Resource Park may be developed to the extent necessary for public use without harming the resource itself. Facilities may include historical features and demonstration areas, interpretive centers, trails, picnic areas and parking.

Character and Extent

These park sites preserve significant historic structures, archaeological sites (historic period and Native American), and historic cemeteries.

D.4 Multiple Resource Area

Purpose

These parks are comprised of diversified resources that are managed for several purposes, one of which is recreation.

Management Responsibility

Fairfax County Park Authority, Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority, state and federal agencies. On occasion, private or quasi-public areas may fit this category.

Location

The service area for a multiple resource area varies widely depending on the character of the area. This type of park is oriented to the kinds of activities that involve an individual or group for a time period ranging from most of the day to a week. They are normally 200 acres or greater in size. Typical activities and facilities may include campgrounds and day camp area, water oriented activities, swimming pools, sports complexes, trails, visitor centers, picnic areas, playgrounds, amphitheatres, equestrian facilities, maintenance facilities and parking. Developed sites or preservation areas contained within these multiple resource areas will be classified as natural, historical or recreational subunits.

D.5 Special Purpose Areas

Purpose

To provide outdoor or indoor recreation activities that require specialized equipment, or separate facilities, or should be separated from other facilities within the park.

Management Responsibility

The management of a special purpose area could be the jurisdiction of any agency or private enterprise. Management will normally be for both public or private use.

Location

Accessibility and service area will depend on the intended use of the area.

Character and Extent

Facilities which could be classified as special purpose areas might include golf courses, ice rinks, indoor recreation centers, horticulture centers and gardens, archery ranges, shooting ranges or marinas. This list is not intended to be all inclusive. Some special purpose areas may be found within District, Countywide or Regional Parks. If so, they will be classified as part of the park.

E. REGIONAL PARKS

Purpose

To provide low density outdoor recreation opportunities in a natural setting.

Management Responsibility

The Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority (NVRPA) administers regional parks. The various facilities and activities in a regional park should be compatible with the park environment. The park resources should be given priority in management plans since public use depends on the resources.

Location

The NVRPA administers facilities in Fairfax, Arlington and Loudoun Counties and the cities of Fairfax, Falls Church and Alexandria. The service area is the entire Northern Virginia area; facilities should be accessible within a 1-1.5 hour drive and also by foot, bicycle and equestrian trails. Access to the park should be controlled.

Character and Extent

These parks preserve and protect regionally significant areas of particular ecological, scenic or historic value but are also intended to be developed for recreational use. Facilities may include any of those found in District, Natural Resource or Heritage Resource Parks. They may also include Multiple Purpose or Special Areas. However, areas of intensive use should be concentrated to preserve as much land as possible in its natural state. Conflicting uses should be separated but all uses should be compatible within a given park. Park size depends on the character of the resource. For example, the W&OD Trail is 42 miles long.

APPENDIX 2 STANDARDS AND CRITERIA FOR ESTABLISHMENT OF PARK AND RECREATION FACILITIES

Public park and recreation providers traditionally employ a variety of standards and criteria for determining appropriate levels and areas of service. Frequently those standards are expressed in terms of the relationships between population versus acres of parkland or specific kinds of facilities. In the application of such criteria, care should be taken that minimum standards are not translated into acceptable levels of service.

Private sector providers, on the other hand, rely for the most part on market demand to determine the types of services they can profitably provide.

Since the goal of park and recreation providers is to meet the needs and desires of the public, both the private and public sector will benefit from coordinated planning to achieve this end. If Fairfax County is to achieve its goal of a comprehensive parks, recreation and open space system, established standards should be incorporated into both public and private land use decisions.

The County utilizes two sets of guidelines to accomplish its objectives for the provision of park and recreation services. The first is the Park Classification System, presented in Appendix I. The second guideline is a set of population-based standards for open space acreage and the development of specific types of recreation facilities. The guidelines described below should be considered as interim until such time as a countywide recreation demand survey is completed and long range plans developed by the Fairfax County Park Authority and Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority.

ACREAGE STANDARDS

COMMUNITY-SERVING PARKLAND

In order to provide equitable amounts of land for both active and passive recreational opportunities, two sets of acreage standards for community-serving parkland should be utilized:

1. **Provide a minimum of 8.5 acres per 1000 population for active recreation use.** Applicable acreage includes developable land in the following sites:
 - FCPA Community and District Parks.
 - 50% of grounds at elementary schools.
 - 10 acres or more on half the land of intermediate and high schools or 20 acres of secondary school sites.
 - Active recreation areas in Suburban and Community Business Centers.

This acreage standard is based on the average amount of land required to develop active recreation facilities per adopted standards. Where additional land is required due to site characteristics the total acreage required to accommodate these facilities should take precedence over the minimum acreage standards.

- **Provide a minimum of 8.5 acres of open space per 1000 population for passive recreation.** Applicable acreage includes Homeowner/Residential Association common open space and undeveloped areas in Neighborhood, Urban, Community, District, and Countywide Parks, excluding Natural Resource and Heritage Resource Parks.

REGIONAL PARKS

The Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority has adopted a standard of 25 acres of parkland per 1000 population in the Northern Virginia service area.

FACILITY STANDARDS

Until such time as a countywide recreational demand survey is completed, facility standards currently in use should be applied to the planning and development of public recreational facilities. These include interim standards adopted in 1976 for selected facilities and National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) guidelines for other facilities. An appropriate mechanism for applying facility standards to private sector development should also be developed.