



REGION **8**
Northern Virginia

Introduction

The Northern Virginia region includes the counties of Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun and Prince William, the cities of Alexandria, Fairfax, Falls Church, Manassas and Manassas Park, and the incorporated towns of Herndon, Leesburg, Purcellville, Vienna and Dumfries. Northern Virginia accommodates almost a quarter of the Commonwealth's population and is the most culturally diverse region of Virginia. Many of the region's outdoor resources are tourist destinations. The region is characterized by a variety of landscapes, including the Blue Ridge Mountains, Piedmont and Coastal Plain. The region's westernmost areas are farmed. Eastward, expansive subdivisions characterize the landscape, while urban areas near Washington are more densely populated.

Regional Focus

Table 8.1 Most-Needed Outdoor Recreation Opportunities

Northern Virginia Recreational Planning Region

| activity | % of households in | |
|--|--------------------|-------|
| | region | state |
| Natural areas | 53 | 54 |
| Parks | 51 | 49 |
| Trails | 46 | 4 |
| Water access | 39 | 43 |
| Historic areas | 34 | 39 |
| Playing fields, sports and golf facilities | 28 | 22 |
| Scenic drives (driving for pleasure) | 19 | 29 |

Source: 2017 Virginia Outdoors Demand Survey.

Table 8.2 Top 10 Outdoor Recreation Activities By Participation

Northern Virginia Recreational Planning Region

| activity | % household |
|--|-------------|
| Visiting natural areas | 79 |
| Walking for pleasure | 76 |
| Visiting parks (local, state & national) | 65 |
| Driving for pleasure | 60 |
| Swimming/outdoor pool | 54 |
| Sunbathing/relaxing on a beach | 47 |
| Visiting historic areas | 45 |
| Viewing the water | 42 |
| Swimming/beach/lake river (open water) | 36 |
| Visiting working farms, petting zoos, corn mazes, etc. | 36 |

Source: 2017 Virginia Outdoors Demand Survey. Visit www.dcr.virginia.gov/vop to view regional participation rates for more than 100 activities.

Regional Featured Projects

To be considered a regional featured project, a project must meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Has statewide or regional significance.
- Addresses top statewide or regional needs identified by the Virginia Outdoors Demand Survey.
- Has involvement and support from multiple jurisdictions in the region.
- Able to be initiated within the next five years.

Featured projects for the Northern Virginia region:

- Implement the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail.
- Implement the Journey Through Hallowed Ground.
- Implement the Washington and Old Dominion trail plan.
- Implement Fairfax County's Cross County Trail improvements including pavement.
- Implement the Four Mile Run Restoration Master Plan.

- Conduct a study for traffic, signage and access for Prince William Forest Park to include a connection to Dumfries and the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail.
- Implement the September 11 National Memorial Trail.
- Implement the National Park Service recommendations for the National Capital Region Paved Trail Plan.
- Update the 1995 Potomac River Public Access Plan to improve public access to the tidal area of the Potomac River and its tributaries in Northern Virginia for fishing, boating (motorized and non-motorized), swimming and beach use.
- Implement planned improvements and reconstruction at Occoquan Regional Park, a 400-acre park on the Occoquan River in Fairfax County, next to Prince William County.
- Develop Beaverdam Regional Park in Loudoun County as a partnership between NOVA Parks and Loudoun Water.
- Rebuild and reroute the Bull Run Occoquan Trail, an 18+-mile natural surface trail for hiking, equestrian and mountain biking.

The 2016 Arlington County Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment Survey supports the public priorities expressed in the VODS. The top three facilities most important to respondents were:

- Paved multiuse trails (73%)
- Hiking trails (52%)
- Natural Areas and Wildlife Habitats (50%)

In urban Arlington, hiking trails, natural areas and wildlife habitats were the top two outdoor needs identified as being only partly or not met. These two were also identified as top priorities for the county's investment in outdoor recreation facilities.

Outdoor Recreation Economic Impact

Table 8.3 Per-Capita Spending on Parks and Recreation

Northern Virginia Recreational Planning Region

| locality | dollars |
|-----------------------|---------|
| Arlington County | 195.61 |
| Fairfax County | 80.28 |
| Loudoun County | 99.70 |
| Prince William County | 75.17 |
| Town of Dumfries | ? |
| Town of Herndon | 281.62 |
| Town of Leesburg | 184.32 |
| Town of Purcellville | 21.98 |
| Town of Vienna | 194.58 |
| City of Alexandria | 143.17 |
| City of Fairfax | 213.85 |
| City of Falls Church | 203.44 |
| City of Manassas | 40.55 |
| City of Manassas Park | 46.84 |
| Statewide | 71.09 |

Source: Virginia Auditor of Public Accounts, "Comparative Report on Local Government Revenues and Expenditures," 2019.

Table 8.4 Virginia State Parks 2017 Attendance and Economic Impact

Northern Virginia Recreational Planning Region

| state park | location | overnight visitors | day-use visitors | total visitors | economic impact |
|-------------|-----------------------|--------------------|------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Leesylvania | Prince William County | 0 | 624,748 | 624,748 | \$12.6M |
| Mason Neck | Fairfax County | 0 | 131,909 | 131,909 | \$3.6M |

Source: Virginia State Parks



Farmer's market at Market Square, Old Town Alexandria. | Cameron Davidson/Virginia Tourism Corp.

Regional Health

Table 8.5 Health Trends

Northern Virginia Recreational Planning Region

| locality | adult smoking (% of adults) | adult obesity (% of adults with BMI over 30) | physical inactivity (% of adults age 20 or over reporting no leisure time/physical activity) | access to exercise opportunities (% population with adequate access to locations for physical activity) | air pollution – particulate matter (micrograms per cubic meter) |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|---|---|--|--|
| Arlington County | 12 | 16 | 13 | 100 | 10.1 |
| Fairfax County | 11 | 20 | 16 | 100 | 8.8 |
| Loudoun County | 12 | 22 | 18 | 89 | 10 |
| Prince William County | 13 | 26 | 17 | 91 | 9.7 |
| City of Alexandria | 15 | 20 | 20 | 100 | 10 |
| City of Fairfax | 11 | 22 | 16 | 100 | 9.9 |
| City of Falls Church | 13 | 28 | 21 | 100 | 10.1 |
| City of Manassas | 15 | 29 | 20 | 100 | 9.5 |
| City of Manassas Park | 16 | 28 | 21 | 92 | 9.5 |
| Statewide | 17 | 27 | 21 | 81 | 8.7 |

Source: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation



Sailing on the Potomac River | Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation

Outdoor Recreation Interface with Virginia Tourism

The Virginia State Tourism Plan was completed by Virginia Tourism Corp. in March 2013. In 2017, Virginia Tourism compiled “Nature & Outdoors” recommendations in Appendix 13 for each recreation planning region.

Regional Historic Resources

The Northern Virginia region is one of the earliest-occupied and most densely developed portions of Virginia, and its cities and towns contain a concentration of historic buildings. The region is home to internationally known historic sites such as Mount Vernon and Arlington National Cemetery, as well as historic districts including the Alexandria’s Old Town. Individual buildings include the Franklin & Armfield Office, which, between 1828 and 1836 was the site of the largest slave trading company in the country and now houses the Freedom House museum. In spite of ongoing development, this region also contains rural historic districts, most notably the village of Waterford, as well as fortifications associated with the Civil War.

Appropriate conservation activities may include installation of highway markers to commemorate historic locations and events, placement of historic properties on the Virginia Landmarks Register or National Register of Historic Places and placement of historic preservation and open space easements. Conservation targets include: 19th and early 20th century dwellings and commercial buildings/districts; Civil War resources; historic transportation routes and crossroads and significant prehistoric habitation sites. Information about historic buildings, structures and archaeological sites is maintained in the permanent files of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources and is available to local planners.

Table 8.6 Regional Historic Resources

Northern Virginia Recreational Planning Region

| resource | location |
|---|--------------------|
| Mount Zion Historic Park (Mount Zion Old School Baptist Church) | Loudoun County |
| Arlington National Cemetery/Arlington House | Arlington County |
| Mount Vernon | Fairfax County |
| Manassas, Ball’s Bluff, Upperville, Bristoe Station, and Aldie Battlefields | Region-wide |
| Franklin & Armfield Office (Freedom House Museum) | City of Alexandria |

Source: Virginia Department of Historic Resources

Land Conservation

Table 8.7 Conserved Lands

Northern Virginia Recreational Planning Region

| locality | easement acres | ownership acres |
|-----------------------|----------------|-------------------|
| Arlington County | 17.36 | 1,098.93 |
| City of Alexandria | 13.63 | 472.69 |
| City of Fairfax | 5.00 | 113.98 |
| City of Falls Church | 1.10 | 48.53 |
| City of Manassas | 105.14 | 0.00 |
| City of Manassas Park | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Fairfax County | 999.79 | 50,153.71 |
| Loudoun County | 43,819.24 | 10,142.93 |
| Prince William County | 2,302.27 | 49,903.91 |
| Total | | 159,193.20 |

Source: Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation Protected Lands Inventory

Natural Area Preserves and Natural Heritage Resources

For a heavily urbanized area, the Northern Virginia region supports a comparatively high number of rare species and significant natural communities. This is due in part because the region spans three distinct geographical areas — Blue Ridge, Piedmont and Coastal Plain — and partly because the area has a long history of land conservation with several national parks, state parks, national wildlife refuges, local parks and many conservation easements. Some natural heritage highlights of the region include diabase woodland communities, rare plants and communities of the Potomac Gorge, wetlands of the tidal Potomac ad forest and outcrop communities of the Bull Run Mountains.

DCR recommends that conservation activities and land protection efforts in the region focus on unprotected Essential Conservation Sites and all unprotected portions of Natural Area Preserve resiliency areas. Secondly, strategic land conservation should expand upon existing managed areas and seek connectivity via protecting and/or managing intact ecological cores and natural vegetation cover between currently protected lands. Finally, attention on remaining unprotected natural heritage resources within the region should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

The appropriate conservation activities and methods of protection will vary with each site but may include placing the site on Virginia’s Registry of Natural Areas; developing a voluntary management agreement with the landowner; securing a conservation easement through a local land trust; acquiring the site through a locality or local land trust; dedicating the site as a natural area preserve with the current owner; or acquiring the site as a state-owned natural area preserve.

Conservation targets of special significance in the region include:

- Wood turtle habitat.
- Diabase woodlands.
- Expand protection of the natural and scenic resources of the Bull Run Mountains and the Potomac Gorge.

Information about the location of conservation sites and the natural heritage resources they contain, as well as management assistance, is available to local planners from DCR’s Natural Heritage Program. For more on the Natural Heritage Program, see Chapter 11 and Appendix 11.

Table 8.8 Natural Area Preserves

Northern Virginia Recreational Planning Region

| preserve name | owner | locality |
|--------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Bull Run Mountains | Virginia Outdoors Foundation | Prince William County (part) |
| Elklick Woodlands | Fairfax County | Fairfax County |

Table 8.9 Natural Heritage Resources

Northern Virginia Recreational Planning Region

| | |
|--|-----|
| Number of occurrences of rare species and significant natural communities | 433 |
| Number of different rare species and significant community types (natural heritage elements) | 188 |
| Number of globally rare natural heritage elements | 29 |
| Number of species listed as federally endangered or threatened | 3 |
| Number of species listed as state endangered or threatened | 8 |
| Number of terrestrial conservation sites identified by DCR | 91 |
| Number of conservation sites with little or no protection | 65 |
| Number of partially protected conservation sites | 16 |
| Number of well protected conservation sites | 10 |

Information as of Feb. 28, 2018. Source: Virginia Natural Heritage Program