

Fairfax County Park Authority Natural Capital Project



Presented to the Northern Virginia Urban Forest Roundtable
November 13, 2009

Fairfax County Park Authority Natural Capital Project



Presentation Outline

- Background
 - Park Authority Natural Resource Management
 - Bond Funding
- Project Charter
- Bond Funds - Findings to Date
- Next Steps

Fairfax County Park Authority Natural Capital Project
Park Authority Natural Resource Management



- Over 22,000 acres of parkland comprised of 375 parks, mostly in a natural state.
- Agency Natural Resource Management Plan in place since 2004.
- The Agency Natural Resource Management Plan calls for inventories, assessments and management of natural resources on parkland.
- Estimate need dozens of staff and several million dollars per year to implement.

Fairfax County Park Authority Natural Capital Project
Park Authority Natural Resource Management



- 3 full time natural resource staff with minimal budget (less than \$2,000).
- Bond funds traditionally used for land acquisition and development.
- Some project funding from the County.
- Increasing pressure to be self-supporting/user fee based.

Fairfax County Park Authority Natural Capital Project
Park Authority Natural Resource Management



- Resource management occurs on limited, project basis.
- Robust volunteer program for invasive plant control.
- Invasive plant control occurring on about 300 acres.
- Site specific natural resource managements plans have been developed for 5 parks.
- Deer management occurring on a portion of parkland.

Fairfax County Park Authority Natural Capital Project
Park Authority Natural Resource Management

What now?

- Thousands of acres needing management.
- Sounds plans in place.
- Success in gaining attention and interest for funding natural resource management but no regular, recurring funding has been allocated.



Fairfax County Park Authority Natural Capital Project



The Natural Capital Argument

- Ecosystem Services are valuable and ecologists, economists and governments are taking notice.
- Argument for funding predicated on investing in protecting/promoting these services that provide tremendous benefits.
- The benefits provided annually by approximately 18,000 acres of natural areas on parkland far outweigh the cost to maintain them.

Fairfax County Park Authority Natural Capital Project

Bond Funding

A general obligation bond is a common type of municipal bond in the United States that is secured by a state or local government's pledge to use legally available resources, including tax revenues, to repay bond holders.

A long term debt typically used for capital projects.

Fairfax County Park Authority Natural Capital Project

Project Charter

The purpose of this project is to explore options for funding natural resource management. Specifically, we need to explore the concept of natural capital and how it may aid us in securing natural resource management funding.

The ultimate goal is to obtain staff and funding; however at a minimum this project aims to:

- Determine feasibility of using a natural capital concept to secure support and funding and develop a strategy to do so
- Evaluate appropriateness of use of current bond dollars for natural resource management
- Explore possibility of issuing a future bond for natural resource management

Fairfax County Park Authority Natural Capital Project

Bond Fund Rulings

- State code defines 'projects' that counties can issue bonds for and specifically **excludes 'current expenses'**.
- Attorney opinion May 2008 '...bond proceeds cannot be spent on consultant studies or environmental reports unless they are **tied to the acquisition, construction, development, etc. of buildings or land.**'
- Attorney opinion July 2008 'Bonds cannot be issued to provide for current expenses, and the meaning of the word **stewardship connotes management and not a capital improvement...**'

The results is we only spend bond dollars for resource management where bond projects are occurring, hardly a strategic way to prioritize!

Fairfax County Park Authority Natural Capital Project

Bond Funds Findings – Broward County



- Use bond funds for initial site maintenance (key is that view as one time project).
- \$14 million was included in their 2000 bond for ecological restoration

Fairfax County Park Authority Natural Capital Project

Bond Funds Findings – San Francisco



- Considers urban forestry capital and natural capital projects as capital projects and appropriate bond expenditures.
- Their 2008 bond includes \$4 million in funding for urban forestry projects.
- Does not include contracting out a comprehensive urban forestry treatment plan.

Fairfax County Park Authority Natural Capital Project

Bond Funds Findings – Metro Parks Tacoma



- \$1 million in their 2005 bond for Environment, Greenspace and Natural Areas and \$300K for Reforestation.
- Strong citizen support for bond funds for restoration of natural areas, but disagreement among staff.
- Able to use bond funds for restoration for larger scale land conversion projects and for any site that has a capital project planned.

Fairfax County Park Authority Natural Capital Project

Conclusions

Can the Natural Capital argument be effective?

Can bond funds be used for natural area restoration?

Next Steps

- Complete research and benchmarking.
- Work with attorney on proposed capital definition.
- Brief Park Authority Board and decision makers.
- Use results from pending Urban Forest Management i-Tree valuation for Fairfax County to argue for funding (both capital and general fund).