



Albemarle County

Executive Summary

File #: 17-112, **Version:** 1

AGENDA DATE: 1/4/2017

TITLE:

Priorities for Natural Resources Program

SUBJECT/PROPOSAL/REQUEST: Discussion to establish priorities for natural resources program

ITEM TYPE: Regular Action Item

STAFF CONTACT(S): Foley, Walker, Kamptner, Blair, Graham, Hannah

PRESENTER (S): David Hannah

LEGAL REVIEW: Not Required

REVIEWED BY: Thomas C. Foley

BACKGROUND: In December 2015, a Natural Resources Manager was hired by the County. The manager's responsibilities include developing priorities and recommendations for a natural resources program; which is outlined in the FY15-17 Strategic Plan. Specifically, the direction has been to "establish and begin implementation of priorities for a natural resource program." This work session seeks Board direction on those natural resource priorities. Following the Board's input, staff will then finalize a 3-year work plan, identify what can be accomplished with existing resources and what will require additional resources, and develop an implementation schedule. This finalized work plan will then be brought to the Board for approval and, if additional resources are needed for some strategies, a request for additional funding. Implementation of the work program will begin before June 2017.

STRATEGIC PLAN: Natural Resources Stewardship: Thoughtfully protect and manage Albemarle County's ecosystems and natural resources in both the rural and development areas to safeguard the quality of life of current and future generations.

DISCUSSION: During the summer of 2016, the Natural Resources Manager (Manager) convened a stakeholder group to assess the County's natural resources and develop ideas for effectively managing them. See Attachment B for a summary of the Advisory Work Group (AWG) details.

Based on feedback from the AWG and discussions with County staff and community members, the Manager has developed a set of priorities and recommendations for the Board to consider which are provided as Attachment A of this report.

Most of the priorities focus on the lands designated Rural Area (RA) in the Comprehensive Plan. This focus is necessary given the large land base the RA occupies, growth potential and increasing development pressure in the RA, and indicators (e.g., water quality) that the condition of resources in the RA needs to be improved.

Guiding principles associated with the strategic objective of effectively managing the County's natural resources include the following:

- County will work in partnership with other localities, agencies, nonprofits, and organizations whenever

possible to increase efficiency and effectiveness.

- County will use the numerous resources in the area - nonprofit organizations, City of Charlottesville, UVA, community support - to help steward natural resources.
- Citizen involvement and volunteers are potential significant resources to include in implementing priorities.
- Incentives for properly managing natural resources are preferred to regulations.

The priorities and recommendations fall into the following five categories:

1. Continue the Growth Management Policy. Some new efforts can be undertaken to improve natural resources in the Development Areas.
2. Support and assist landowners in conserving and properly managing their land. Increased outreach and education coupled with developing incentives to create native habitat are recommended.
3. Strengthen conservation easement programs. The County should consider further strengthening the terms of ACE easements, placing a higher priority on granting easements on lands with high natural heritage value, expanding easement holdings through the Public Recreational Facilities Authority (PRFA), and promoting conservation easement programs of other organizations.
4. Strengthen land protection regulations. Requiring the use of native plants when possible and controlling non-native invasive plants are recommended.
5. Develop and implement on-the-ground conservation and restoration projects.

Three additional issues should be considered by the Board.

1. Water Protection Ordinance (WPO). Stream buffers and the WPO were often discussed by the AWG. Concern was expressed about possible gaps or inconsistencies in the WPO, as well as a general lack of knowledge about the WPO on the part of many people. The AWG expressed interest in reviewing the WPO to assess its effectiveness, clarify its requirements, and determine if revisions should be considered.
2. Climate Change. The AWG recommended the County address climate change in a substantive manner. Strategy 8a in the Natural Resources chapter of the Comprehensive Plan calls for developing a Community Resilience Plan. Such a plan will not be simple and will require the involvement of many organizations and citizens.
3. Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP). The County's Natural Heritage Committee will develop a BAP in 2017. The plan will include recommendations for Board consideration. The recommendations will likely complement or expand some of the priorities in this report.

BUDGET IMPACT: With Board direction, staff plans to develop a base work program that fits within the available resources and will not require additional budget commitments. Beyond that base work program, staff will provide an enhanced work program for any remaining priorities, including a schedule and budget request associated with the expanded effort. As part of approving the work program, this will allow the Board to consider whether an enhanced program is needed at this time.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff requests the Board review the priorities and recommendations in Attachment A and direct staff if any changes are desired. With this direction, staff will finalize the priorities into a work program for Board approval, along with a schedule for implementation. Staff will plan on regular updates to the Board as implementation begins.

In addition, staff requests that the Board review the three additional considerations set forth on pages 6 and 7 of Attachment A and provide feedback.

ATTACHMENTS:

A - Priorities and Recommendations for Natural Resources Program

B - Summary of the Natural Resources Advisory Work Group for Albemarle County

