

July 25, 2025

Honorable Takis Karantonis, Chair
Arlington County Board
Ellen M. Bozman Government Center
2100 Clarendon Blvd, Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201

Re: Funding for Effective Invasive Species Management

Dear Chair Karantonis,

The Forestry and Natural Resources Commission (FNRC) has long been concerned about inadequate and inconsistent funding of the County's invasive species management program.

An invasive species is a species that does not occur naturally in a region and whose introduction causes economic or environmental harm or harm to human health. The Virginia Department of Conservation and Natural Resources has identified 103 species of invasive plants threatening the Commonwealth with more plants under assessment.

In Arlington, invasive species have severely degraded our tree canopy, urban forests, biodiversity and natural habitats. Invasive species also pose a significant risk to climate resilience. By disrupting ecosystem structure and function, they weaken the capacity of natural systems to adapt to climate change. Managing invasive species helps restore a healthy tree canopy and a healthy ecosystem that are more resilient to drought, floods and urban heat islands.

The invasive species management program has proven to be effective at reclaiming and building resilience into the natural lands remaining in Arlington. To be successful, invasive species must be consistently managed. This entails active management, which is an initial suppression for about three years by highly trained contractors licensed to use select application of herbicides, followed by much less intensive maintenance treatments thereafter. Of the 543 acres of remaining natural lands in Arlington, 122 acres are in active management and 247 acres are in maintenance. As the program extends to successfully treat more land, ongoing maintenance will be needed to maintain these lands.

The expansion of the program is not reflected in the budget. From 2012 until 2024 funding remained at just over \$100,000 per year, despite inflation increasing by about 40%. In 2024 and 2025, one-time increases in funding supported additional treatment areas. However, consistent funding for the maintenance piece is also crucial. Large swings in funding make implementing the program difficult, and reduce its effectiveness if newly treated sites cannot be maintained over the long run due to funding shortfalls. In the absence of maintenance, the invasives likely will grow back, setting back the progress made to date.

Commission Members

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The FNRC appreciates County Board support of the program, and periodic increases in one-time funding. The FNRC applauds County staff who manage the invasives management program. In partnership with the Arlington Regional Master Naturalists (ARMN) Park Stewards program, they have successfully leveraged tremendous volunteer support with trained and dedicated volunteers working in 21 parks and logging 3000 hours of volunteer service in the past year. These volunteers help control an abundance of invasive plants using hand tools, but they are not permitted to apply herbicides. For this, they need the support of County contractors to suppress the most aggressive species. Building on the success of these programs, and with adequate funding as the program grows over the long term, the County will be empowered to decrease the environmental and economic damage wrought by invasive species.

In order to achieve this, the FNRC strongly recommends building in adequate funding to ensure sustained maintenance of previously treated sites.

We are raising this issue now, as staff begin deliberations internally to develop the budget for the coming fiscal year, so that the County can take into consideration the importance of building long-term sustainable funding for a robust and successful invasive species management program.

Sincerely,



Caroline Haynes, Chair
Forestry and Natural Resources Commission

cc: Members, Arlington County Board
Members, Fiscal Affairs Advisory Commission
Mark Schwartz, Arlington County Manager
Jane Rudolph, Director, Department of Parks and Recreation