Understanding and Protecting Resource Protection Areas

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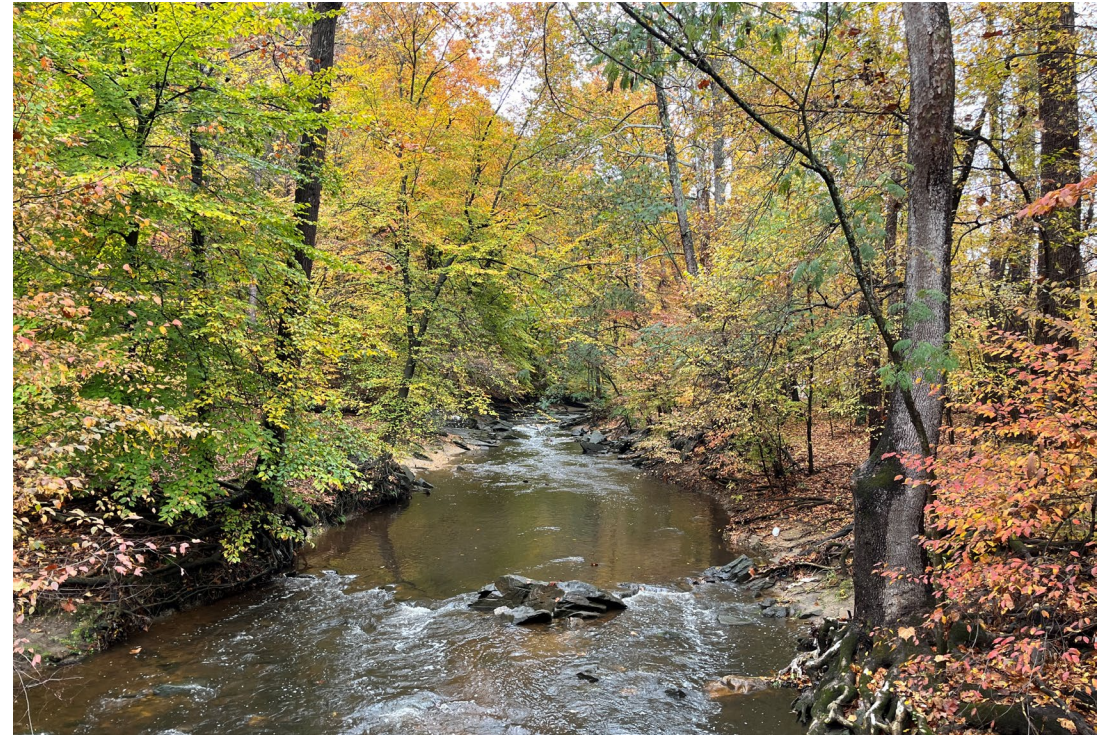
Office of Sustainability and Environmental Management

1/15/26

ARLINGTON
VIRGINIA

Agenda for today's webinar

- What is a Resource Protection Area (RPA)?

- Why are RPAs important?

- How do I tell if my property is in the RPA?

- What kind of projects need approval in the RPA?

- What is the process for project review?

- What updates were made recently for the CBPO?

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What is a Resource Protection Area?

The **Resource Protection Area**, or RPA, includes streams, rivers, and other water bodies and the environmentally sensitive lands within 100 feet of these water resources. These areas are known as stream or wetland buffers, and help protect water quality by:

- filtering out pollutants from stormwater runoff,

- reducing the volume of stormwater runoff,

- minimizing erosion, and

- providing wildlife habitat.

A fully vegetated stream buffer can help protect private property by preventing erosion along a water body. Steep slopes (25 percent or greater) that are adjacent to buffers are also part of the RPA because of the potential for erosion in these areas.
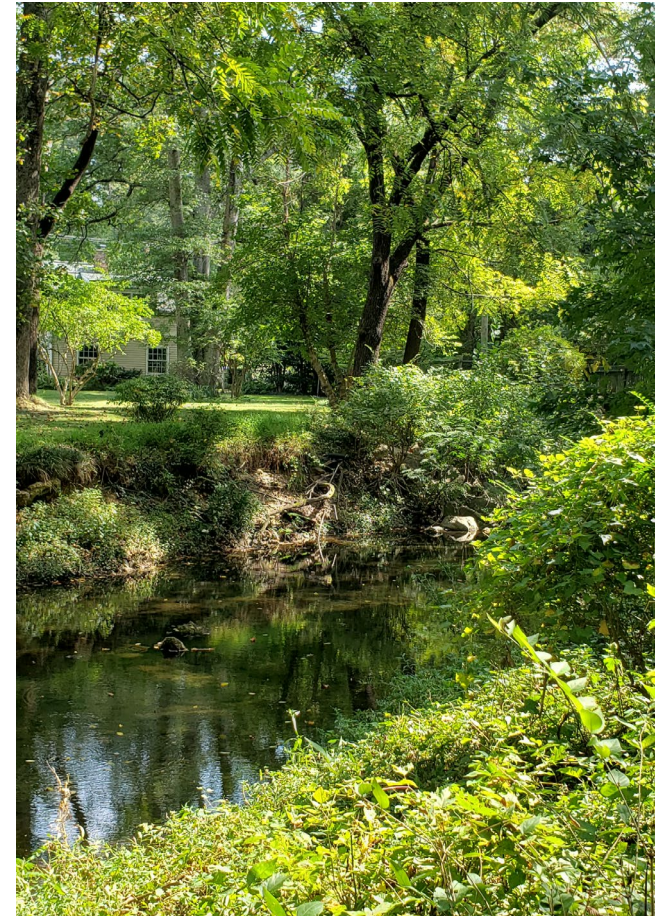
Chesapeake Bay Ordinance: Resource Protection Areas (RPAs) and Resource Management Areas (RMAs)
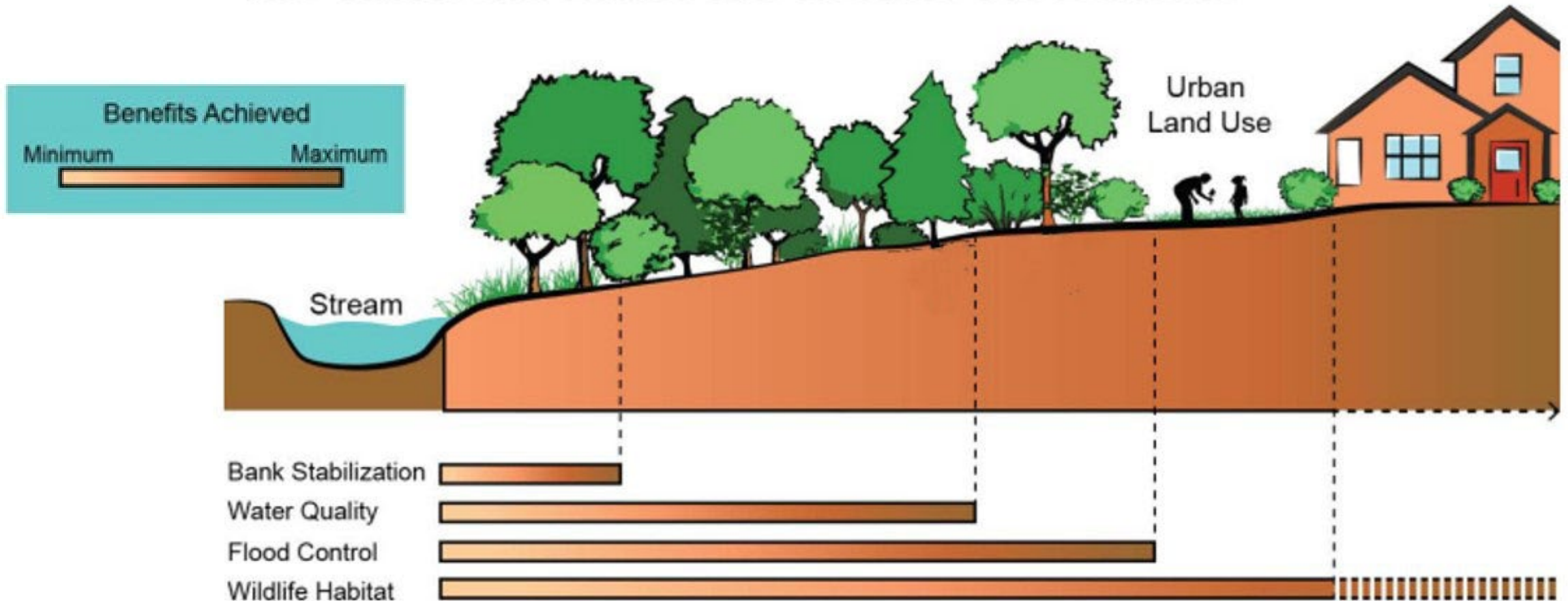
The ordinance defines two types of areas:

- Resource Protection Areas protect stream buffers and other sensitive areas.

- Resource Management Areas cover remaining land area to provide additional protections.
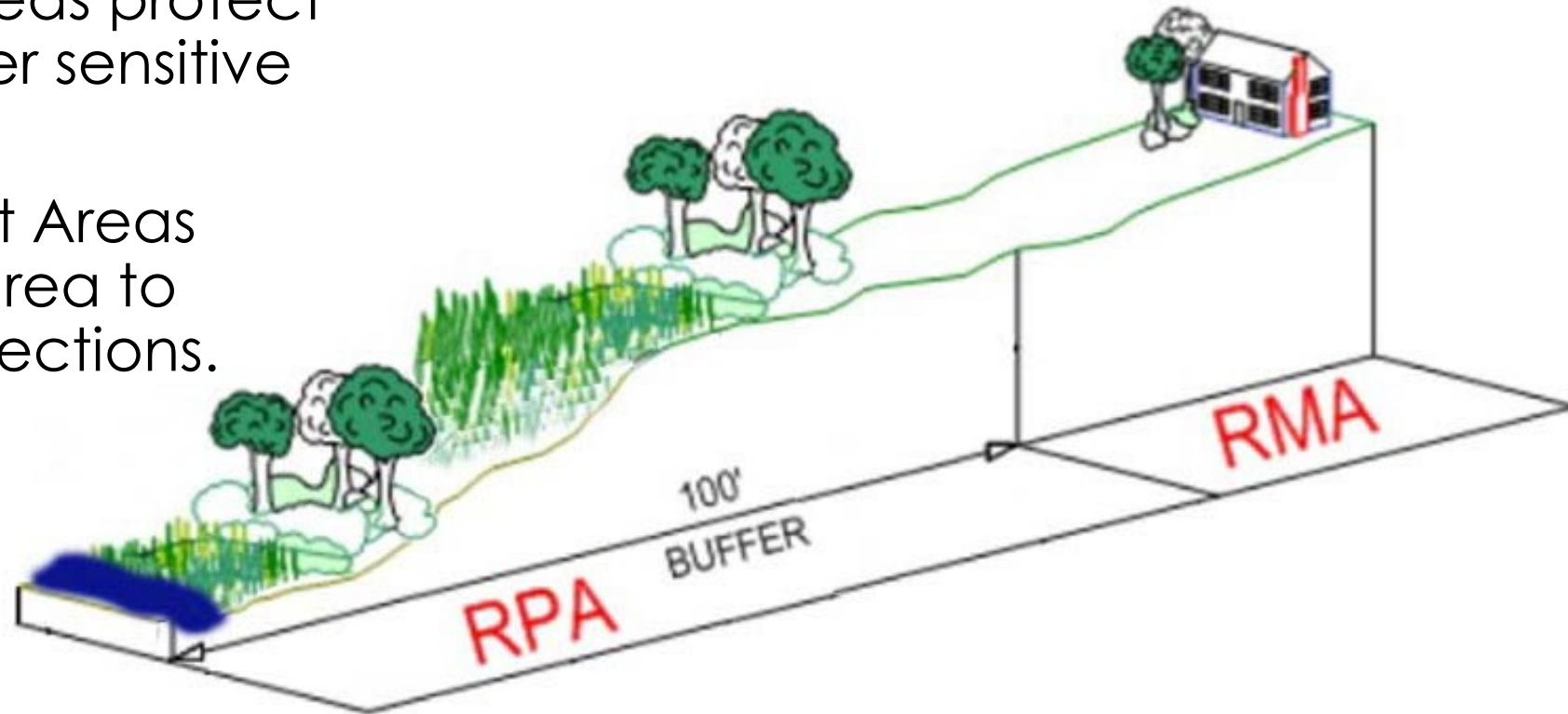
What Do RPAs Do?

The Wider the Buffer the Greater the Benefits

How do I know where RPAs are?

RPAs include any area within 100 feet of a stream.
Check the RPA maps below to find out if there is RPA on your property.

- [View the Interactive Resource Protection Map](#)

- [View the Streams, Watersheds and RPA Map](#) (2025)

- You can also contact Arlington County Department of Environmental Services
at [RPAreview@arlingtonva.us](#) or [703-228-4488](#).

- If your property is in the RPA, it is possible that it is in the floodplain as well. [Learn more about floodplains and flood hazard maps.](#)
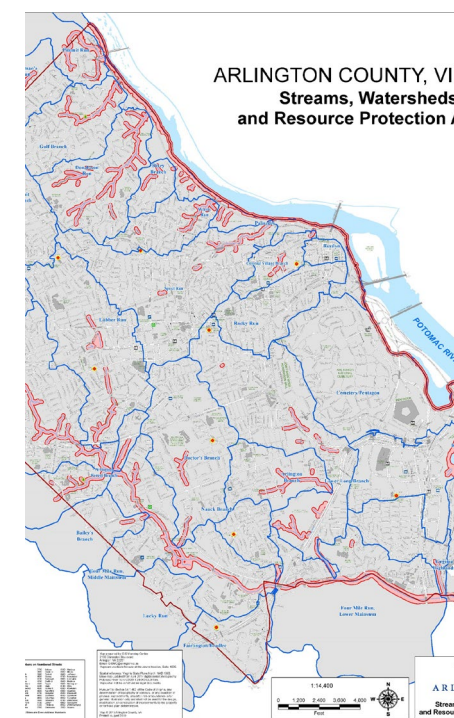
What Needs County Approval in the RPA?

- Development or redevelopment projects on properties where RPA is present (additions, rebuilds).

- Any project requiring a building or land disturbing activities permit on an RPA property.

- Adding new paved surfaces in the RPA (i.e. patios, walkways, parking/drives)

- Adding new structures in the RPA (sheds, gazebos, garages)

- The removal of vegetation in the RPA (except for turfgrass)

- Fences or retaining walls

An exception may be required for some projects. The basic submission for permitting is the Water Quality Impact Assessment (WQIA).

How will my project be reviewed?

- To begin, you'll complete a short form (water quality impact assessment) with basic details about your project. If your project requires a land disturbing activity permit or other permit, you can submit the WQIA form along with your permit application. If not, you may submit it separately.

- The form will ask for information such as:

  - The location of your project and the RPA on your property

  - Whether any trees will be removed

  - Proposed erosion control measures (e.g., silt fencing)

  - Planned landscaping or plantings

- In some cases, you may also need to provide measures to offset potential water quality impacts from your project.

Example: Removal of a Dead/Dying RPA Tree

- Requires written County approval prior to removing a dead, dying or diseased tree.

- Tree assessment by an ISA certified arborist or person accredited by the American Society of Consulting Arborists to document condition/removal need.

- Replacement (1:1) required within 6 months.

- Tree removal cannot occur where pruning is sufficient.

- Requires review and approval for land disturbance for removing dead trees or noxious vegetation.

Chesapeake Bay Ordinance 2025 Revisions

New ordinance components focus on trees and climate change:

Tree amendments focus on codifying tree protections in Resource Protection Areas

Climate change amendments focus on coastal resilience and adaptation to climate change

Tree Conservation in RPAs and RMAs

Adds definition for mature trees and provides extra protection

Prioritizes trees to be used to re-establish the 100-foot buffer.

Requires native plantings for buffer re-establishment, enhancement or mitigation, or to offset new encroachments in the RPA

Requires pruning or trimming over tree removal and stipulates pruning shall be done in accordance with ANSI A300 standards

Arlington was already doing this by policy, but now it is required

Climate Change Adaptation

A Resilience Assessment is required for any proposed land development within the RPA to evaluate the impacts of climate change from flooding, storm surge or sea-level rise.

The WQIA Application Form has been revised to include questions regarding the Resilience Assessment.

If your property has RPA and is affected by flooding, storm surge or sea level rise, the County may require adaptation measures to limit climate impacts from your project and related impacts to adjoining properties

Climate Resiliency Lookup Tool

3608 MILITARY RD, ARLINGTON,...

Results:3

This property falls within the Climate Resiliency Layers shown below:

Resource Protection Area   1
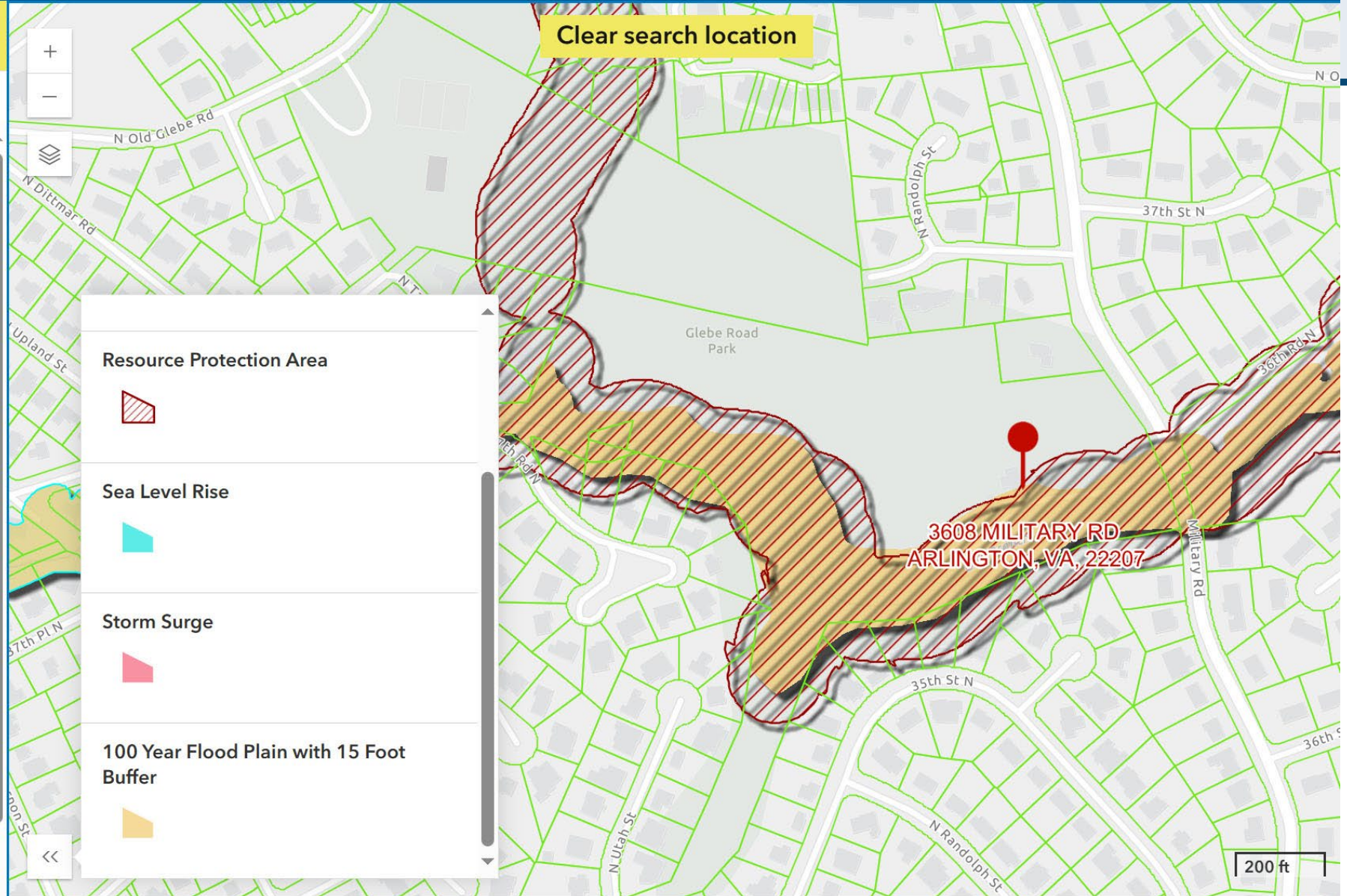
Resource Protection Area Polygons: 146

100 Year Flood Plain with 15 Foot Buffer   2

Climate Resiliency - Floodplain 100yr 15ft Buffer

Climate Resiliency - Floodplain 100yr 15ft Buffer

Clear search location

Resource Protection Area

Sea Level Rise

Storm Surge

100 Year Flood Plain with 15 Foot Buffer

N Old Glebe Rd

N Dittmar Rd

37th St N

N Randolph St

Glebe Road Park

3608 MILITARY RD ARLINGTON, VA, 22207

Military Rd

35th St N

N Utah St

N Randolph St

36th

200 ft

Section 4: Resiliency Assessment

Please refer to the interactive RPAs and Climate Resiliency map to complete this section. Apply a 30-year timeframe.

Completion of additional site-specific Resiliency Assessment (located at Appendix H) is (select all that apply):

☐ **Not Required**. The property is not subject to any potential impacts identified in the RPAs and Climate Resiliency map.

☐ **Not Required**. The project is exempt from the requirements of Arlington County Code Chapter 61.

☐ **Required.** The property is within 15 feet (measured landward horizontally) of a Special Flood Hazard Area. This project must demonstrate compliance with the County's Floodplain Management requirements (Chapter 48 Arlington County Code).

☐ **Required.** Potential impacts to the project site were identified via the RPAs and Climate Resiliency map.

Section 5: Plan and Water Quality Narrative

**Applications that do not include a plat or plan AND a narrative will be required to resubmit.**

Please provide the required minor WQIA information (§ 61-12) at a minimum:

☐ A plat or plan depicting the existing and proposed condition on the parcel(s).
Include 1) the delineated RPA boundary, 2) areas of existing and proposed impervious cover; 3) RPA encroachment measurements 4) the location of existing trees 5) other existing and proposed land covers including vegetation areas/turf, and 6) identify and quantify provided mitigation, including planting and invasive plant control areas. See the RPA template for LDA submissions and sample plat for non-LDA projects and Stormwater Guidance Manual Sections 4.6 and 4.7 for additional guidance.

How can I take care of the RPA?

In Your Yard

- Remove invasive plants
- Plant native trees and shrubs
- Recycle grass clippings and leaves
- Minimize fertilizer and pesticide use
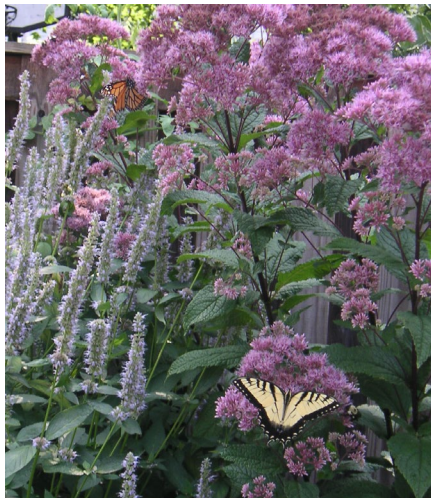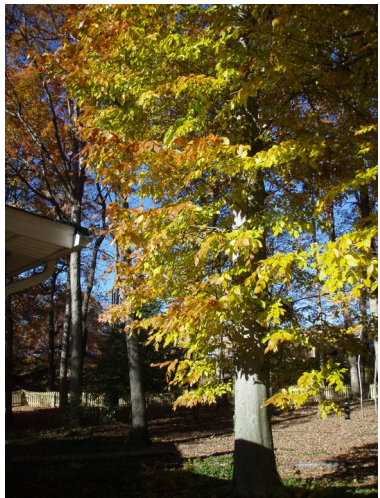
Around Your Home

- Direct downspouts into your yard
- Stabilize eroded areas
- Create a rain garden to filter runoff
- Install a rain barrel or cistern
- Sweep driveways instead of hosing them

Rain Garden Workshop

February 28, 9:30 AM - 12 PM
Lubber Run Community Center

[2026 Rain Garden Workshop | Northern Virginia Regional Commission - Website](#)

REGISTER HERE
or scan the QR code!

Rain gardens are attractive landscape features that allow rain water and snow melt to absorb into the ground, slowing runoff and removing pollutants before the water reaches local creeks and streams.

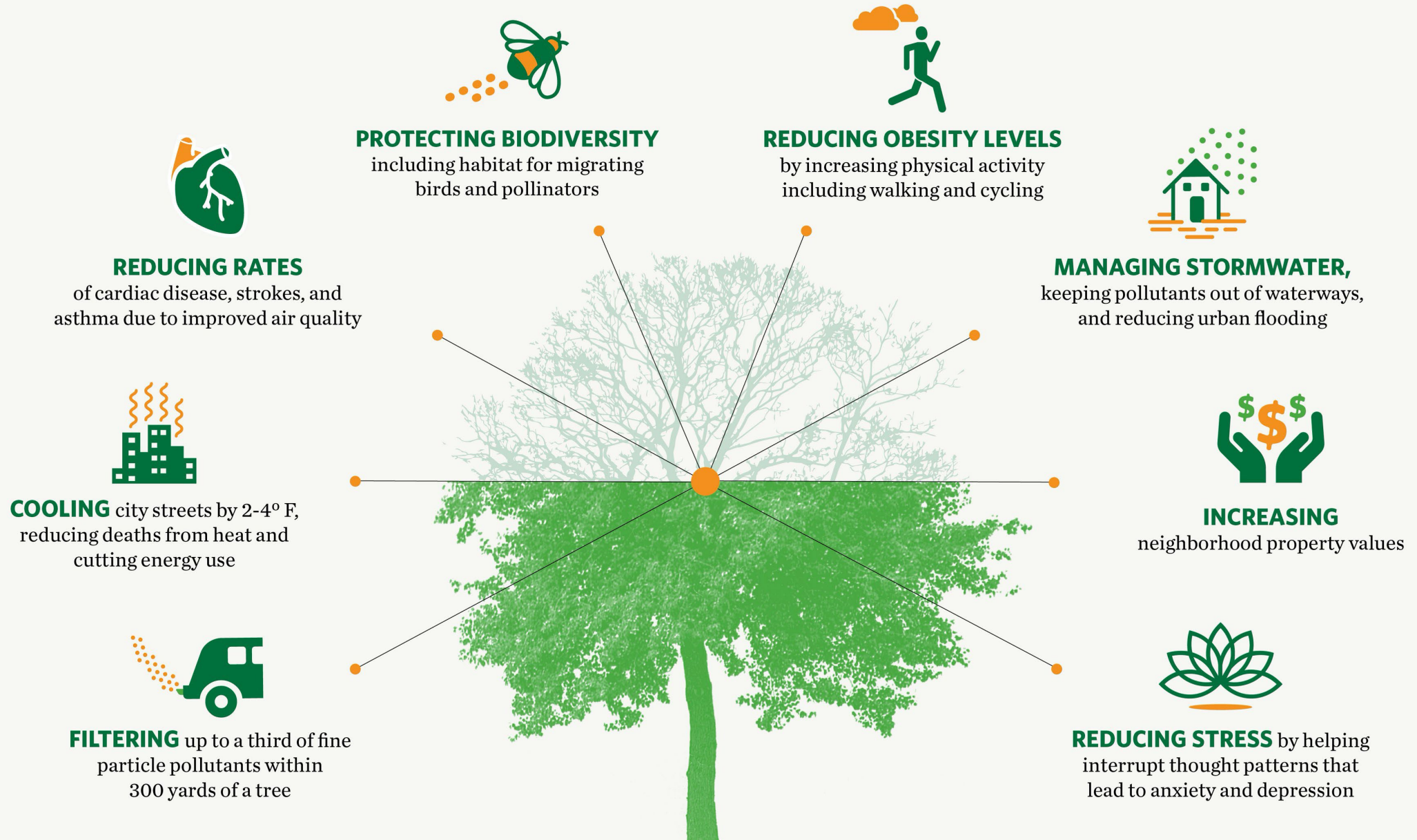Take part in a FREE workshop to learn how to design, construct, and maintain a rain garden for your property that can absorb rain water, improve wildlife habitat, and support the health of waterways and drinking water supplies.

Find additional workshop details and resources at NVRC's website HERE.

ARLINGTON
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NORTHERN VIRGINIA
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SOIL & WATER
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

nvrc
Northern Virginia Regional Commission

Benefits of Urban Trees

Research has linked the presence of urban trees to...

PROTECTING BIODIVERSITY
including habitat for migrating birds and pollinators

REDUCING OBESITY LEVELS
by increasing physical activity including walking and cycling

REDUCING RATES
of cardiac disease, strokes, and asthma due to improved air quality

MANAGING STORMWATER,
keeping pollutants out of waterways, and reducing urban flooding

COOLING city streets by 2-4° F, reducing deaths from heat and cutting energy use

INCREASING
neighborhood property values

FILTERING up to a third of fine particle pollutants within 300 yards of a tree

REDUCING STRESS by helping interrupt thought patterns that lead to anxiety and depression

Tree Resources

Concerned about your trees?   The maintenance of medium to large trees is best left to qualified arborists both in terms of evaluating the need and applying the treatment. While well executed pruning can sometimes reduce the risk of failure, poorly executed pruning can increase the risk. For a list of certified arborists in this area:

https://www.treesaregood.org/findanarborist/findanarborist

You can learn about proper pruning and other tree care from this link:

https://www.treesaregood.org/treeowner

More resources are available here:

https://www.arlingtonva.us/Government/Programs/Office-of-Sustainability-and-Environment/Trees/Tree-Maintenance-and-Health

Know Your Flood Risk

Understand your flood risk:
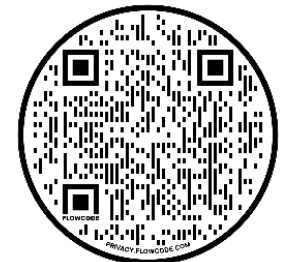https://msc.fema.gov/portal/search

More than 40% of flood insurance claims are from low to moderate risk areas.

Purchase flood insurance.

Arlington residents are eligible for flood insurance discounts.

Contact your insurance agent for rates and coverage.

Where to get more information?

RPAreview@arlingtonva.us

Lots of great information, FAQs, application resources

https://www.arlingtonva.us/Government/Programs/Building/Codes-Ordinances/Chesapeake-Bay

Questions?