

Highlights

Why We Did This Audit

The Parks and Recreation Department's mission includes providing environmentally sound natural resource management of park assets on behalf of residents. The department touches and interacts with the environment through its maintenance activities in ways other departments do not.

This audit focused on evaluating the Parks and Recreation Department's use of environmentally sustainable practices to manage and maintain parkland.

Background

The Natural Resource Management Division within the Parks and Recreation Department is responsible for managing and maintaining over 12,000 acres that include parkland, designated natural areas, park facilities, boulevards, and parkways.

The division's maintenance activities include the care of turf grass, flowerbeds, native plants, bushes, and trees. The division splits these responsibilities between several park maintenance districts, forestry operations, greenhouse and landscape operations, and the conservation corps. Several outside groups work closely with the division to assist in the development, management, and maintenance of park assets.

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PERFORMANCE AUDIT

Preserve and Restore Park Ecology with Sustainable Maintenance Approach

What We Found

The Parks and Recreation department has pockets of sustainable practices to preserve and restore parkland ecology. These practices include the planting of some native or regionally appropriate species, the removal of invasive species, pest management in parkland, and environmental planning for natural areas.



Most of the department's other park maintenance activities focus on the aesthetic maintenance of turf grasses and non-native annual flower beds. The department's maintenance of parkland's natural resources does not maximize sustainable practices to protect the water, air, soil, and native plant ecology. Additionally, the department's care of trees is based on complaints, not a systematic process to ensure a healthy urban canopy.



The department's business plan does not include measurable sustainable maintenance goals. With the assistance of outside organizations, the department has adopted environmental resource plans for designated natural areas and Roanoke Park, however, most parkland lacks environmental resource plans. Lastly, the department's operations and maintenance manual does not incorporate sustainable maintenance practices used by staff in their everyday maintenance activities in parks.

What We Recommend

We make recommendations to strengthen the department's sustainable maintenance practices of natural resources in parkland by:

- Reducing mowing, planting native species, and systematically planting and maintaining trees.
- Reducing or eliminating the use of inputs like water, fertilizers, and pesticides for the maintenance of parkland.
- Incorporating sustainability into measurable goals, policies, plans, and manuals to preserve, protect, and restore our parkland's natural resources.
- Utilizing existing plans, data, and resources to develop an environmental resource plan for parkland.
- Providing staff training on sustainable maintenance practices.



Management agreed with our recommendations.

