

# Fairfax County Parks Invasive Plant Site Prioritization Model

Fairfax County, Virginia



top: Trail maintenance was identified as a major Japanese Stiltgrass vectoring pathway.  
bottom: Mile-a-minute weed threatens park values.

In Fairfax County, VA, urbanization and forest fragmentation have created ideal conditions for non-native invasive plant species. With over 450 park units totaling over 24,000 acres, the county’s extensive park system is under direct assault from numerous invasive organisms. Left unchecked, invasive plant species threaten to undermine the regenerative capacity of county forestland and ultimately destroy its value.

*A unique prioritization model helped the Fairfax County Parks Authority shift the focus of its invasive suppression program from reactive weed spraying to proactive ecological restoration and protection.*

Recognizing the dynamic nature of invasive species and the need to maximize the resources, the Fairfax County Park Authority turned to Biohabitats’ Institute for Supply Management (ISM) to develop a comprehensive response strategy and site treatment prioritization model. Much more than a simple inventory, the Biohabitats model is a decision-making tool that the Park Authority can use to rank the relative value of different sites within the park system and, in combination with the invasive plant infestation level, prioritize sites for control. By integrating a site’s cultural value into the decision process, this unique application also helps the Authority serve its central function of providing opportunities for citizens to interact

with the natural world.

Based upon the principle: “protect the best first,” the model has shifted the focus in the parks system from “acres treated” towards “acres restored.” It has allowed the county to maximize the return on its investment in invasive plant control by assuring that treatment sites reflect the core ecological and cultural values that exist within this densely populated region.

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