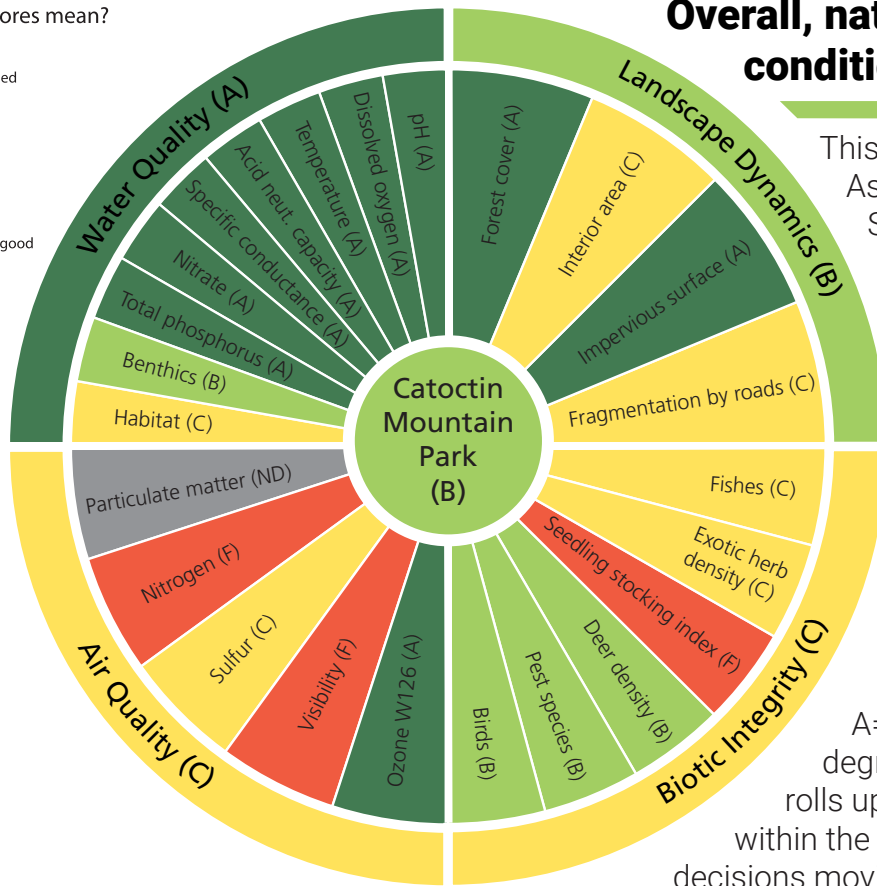


What is the status of Catoctin Mountain Park natural resources?

What do the scores mean?

- F** 0–20%
Very degraded
- D** 21–40%
Degraded
- C** 41–60%
Moderately good
- B** 61–80%
Good
- A** 81–100%
Very good
- ND** No data



Overall, natural resources condition is good.

This summary of Resource Assessments for Management Strategies (RAMS) presents the condition of indicators from the 4 Vital Signs Framework categories: Water Quality, Biotic Integrity, Air Quality, and Landscape Dynamics. Indicator scores are displayed in the summary wheel to the left, using spotlight colors and letter grades to indicate resource condition (Green—A=Very good and Red—F=Very degraded). This visual guide rolls up natural resource conditions within the park to inform management decisions moving forward.



Air Quality Although difficult to manage, air quality is important to monitor. Data are unavailable for particulate matter. Visibility is very degraded, and nitrogen deposition is occurring at levels harmful to plants. Ozone is at non-damaging levels for plants.



Landscape Dynamics Overall, landscape dynamics are in good condition. Impervious surface and forest cover score as “very good”. Interior forest area forms the core forest habitat and is in moderately good condition. Fragmentation by roads also scores as “moderately good.”



Water Quality Water quality is very good. Several indicators, including pH and nitrate, score as “very good”. Stream habitat is moderately good. To limit impacts on benthic communities, currently in “good” condition, management to maintain stream habitat should be considered.



Biotic integrity Biotic Integrity is moderately good. Seedling stocking index, which assesses forest regeneration ability, is very degraded. Although deer density receives a “good” score, deer depress seedling stocking. Continued management of deer is needed.

How are park resource conditions measured?

What do the scores tell us?

These scores provide a snapshot of resource condition based primarily on Inventory and Monitoring (I&M) data. It is important to track resource condition even if resources are difficult to manage. Resource conditions at the park and landscape level can be used to guide management strategies.

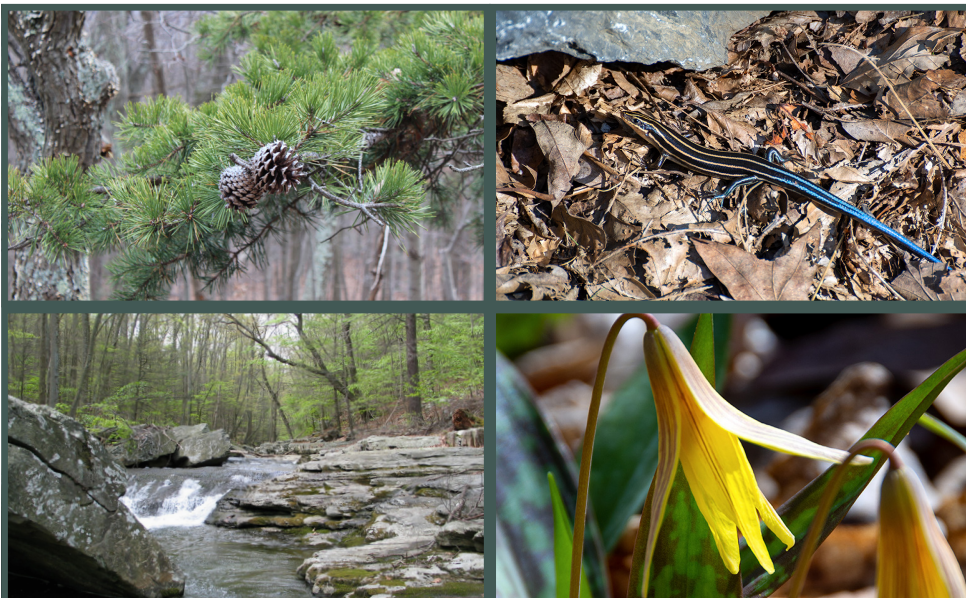
How is natural resource condition assessed?

The status of each indicator is monitored within National Capital Region (NCR) parks. A target threshold for the indicator is based on scientific peer-reviewed literature and/or consensus. We compare each natural resource condition to the target threshold value and assign a score. Indicators may be measured as a pass/fail score, as with deer density; on a graduated scale, as with the Bird Community Index; or may be the actual value of the data, as with interior forest area. For more detailed information on how scores are calculated, please see the RAMS methods document (currently in progress).



Monitoring protocols vary among indicators

The frequency and time of year sampled varies by indicator and category. Most Water Quality indicators are sampled monthly at multiple sampling locations within the park. Physical habitat and benthic communities are sampled less frequently at multiple sites. Many biotic integrity data are collected in rotating subsets of total plots each year, with each plot sampled once every four years. Birds are sampled at different locations, and deer density may be calculated from surveys. Air quality data are collected continuously by the Air Resources Division at monitoring sites within or near parks. Landscape dynamics data are from a national GIS database showing classes of land cover.


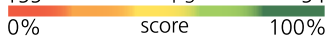


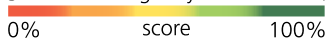


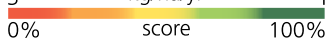


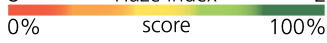


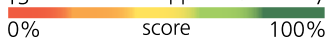





Monitoring helps park managers understand and assess resource condition. Photos clockwise from left: [Photo descriptions here](#)


Clockwise from left, photos by: NPS, John Zuke, John Zuke, NPS


Air Quality monitoring and thresholds


Air Quality reference condition table


Metric	Reference condition	Park average	Overall score (%)	Condition
 Particulate matter (PM _{2.5} µg/m ³)	155  54 0% score 100%	ND	ND	 ND
 Nitrogen (kg/ha/yr)	3  1 0% score 100%	5.10	0%	 Very degraded
 Sulfur (kg/ha/yr)	3  1 0% score 100%	1.90	55%	 Moderate
 Visibility (Haze index)	8  2 0% score 100%	13.50	10%	 Very degraded
 Ozone (W126m ppm-hrs)	13  7 0% score 100%	6.50	100%	 Very good
Air Quality overall condition			41%	 Moderate

 **Particulate matter (PM)** is composed of extremely small droplets and solid particles suspended in air. PM is found in smoke, haze, and dust. It is not measured in every park.

 **Nitrogen** deposited from the air in excess may have harmful effects on living organisms, especially herbaceous plants and water systems. Excess nitrogen may also enable nonnative plant species to outcompete native plants.

 **Sulfur** deposition onto soil, plants, and water can increase acidity in park ecosystems, leading to changes in water and soil chemistry that impact ecosystem condition.

 **Visibility** is reduced when tiny particles in the air scatter and absorb light. High values for visibility supports viewshed integrity. This indicator measures how well and far park visitors can see.





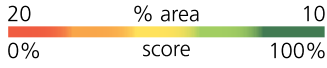


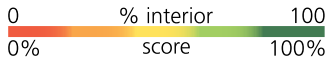


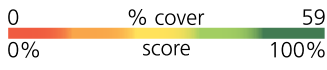


 **Ozone (W126)** is monitored and scored against a high ozone concentration threshold, which are conditions that most likely will affect vegetation. When ozone is too high, it can burn plant tissues and reduce overall plant survival.





Camp Misty Mount in fall. Photo by NPS


Landscape Dynamics monitoring and thresholds


Landscape Dynamics reference condition table

Metric	Reference condition	Park average	Overall score (%)	Condition
 Fragmentation by roads (km/km ²)		1.43	57%	 Moderate
 Impervious surface (% area)		0.15	100%	 Very good
 Interior forest area (% interior)		59.30	59%	 Very degraded
 Forest cover (% cover)		90.08	100%	 Very good
Landscape Dynamics overall condition			79%	 Good

 **Fragmentation by roads** decreases the quality of wildlife habitat, with high road densities fragmenting habitats and increasing the risk of wildlife mortality by collisions with vehicles.

 **Impervious surfaces** negatively impact the condition of various ecological indicators, particularly stream invertebrates, due to increased stormwater runoff.

 **Interior forest area** forms the core of a habitat, and increased interior area improves forest condition.











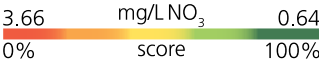

















 **Forest cover** provides habitat, wildlife corridors, and ecological value important to park natural resources and overall landscape condition.


View of Catoclin Mountain Park.
Photo by Carol M. Highsmith




Water Quality monitoring and thresholds


Water Quality reference condition table


Metric	Reference condition	Park average	Overall score (%)	Condition
 Habitat (PHI score)	0  100 0% score 100%	61.67	45%	 Moderate
 Benthics (BIBI Score)	1  5 0% score 100%	4.11	78%	 Good
 Total phosphorus (mg/L PO ₄)	0.09  0.01 0% score 100%	0.02	81%	 Very good
 Nitrate (mg/L NO ₃)	3.66  0.64 0% score 100%	0.71	90%	 Very good
 Dissolved oxygen (mg/L)	3  6 0% score 100%	8.50	100%	 Very good
 Temperature (degrees C)	30.8  19 0% score 100%	18.70	97%	 Very good
 Specific conductance (µS/cm)	230  171 0% score 100%	152.40	96%	 Very good
 pH (pH value)	5  6.8–8.5 9 0% 100% 0%	7.74	100%	 Very good
 Acid neutralizing capacity (µeq/L)	20  200 0% score 100%	648	100%	 Very good
Water Quality overall condition			87%	 Very good


 **Habitat** is assessed using Physical Habitat Index indicators such as riffle quality, stream bank stability, and woody debris.


 **Benthic** biota are scored based on the expected benthic faunal assemblage in an unimpaired site.


 **Total phosphorus** is scored based on region-specific threshold categories.


 **Nitrate** is scored based on region-specific threshold categories.

 **Dissolved oxygen** in low concentrations can cause metabolic impacts and death of fishes, invertebrates, and aquatic plants.

 **Temperature** thresholds reflect optimal living conditions for freshwater organisms.





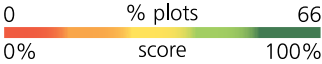


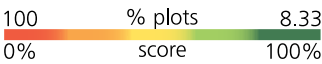











 **Specific conductance** is related to salinity, and measures water's ability to conduct electricity.


 **pH**, when extreme, limits habitat suitability for aquatic plants and animals.


 **Acid neutralizing capacity** indicates a waterbody's susceptibility to acid rain and runoff inputs.


Biotic Integrity monitoring and thresholds


Biotic Integrity reference condition table


Metric	Reference condition	Park average	Overall score (%)	Condition
 Fishes (FBI score)	1  5 0% score 100%	3.00	50%	 Moderate
 Seedling stocking index (% adequately stocked plots)	0  66 0% score 100%	0.00	0%	 Very degraded
 Exotic herb density (% plots with exotics)	100  8.33 0% score 100%	59.50	42%	 Moderate
 Birds (BCI score)	20  77 0% score 100%	56.00	63%	 Good
 Deer density (density per sq acre)	20  8 0% score 100%	9.28	70%	 Good
 Pest species (% plots infested)	100  0 0% score 100%	73.50	74%	 Good
Biotic Integrity overall condition			50%	 Moderate


 **Fish** are an important part of the ecosystem. The condition of fish communities reflects the condition of overall aquatic habitat.

 **Seedling stocking index** is assessed based on the minimum needed native tree seedlings to maintain a self-sustaining forest when deer densities are high.

 **Exotic herb density**, when high, harms ecological communities by crowding out native species and reducing native biodiversity.

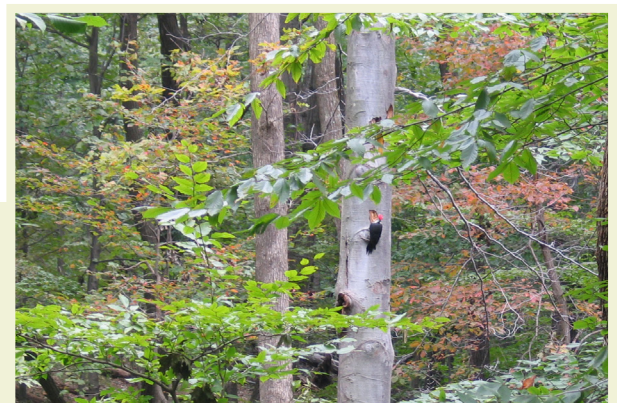
 **Birds** are assessed with the Bird Community Index, which uses several characteristics to assess bird communities as ecological indicators.

 **Deer density** can severely impact forest growth and regeneration through browsing. At high densities, deer damage the overall condition of a park.

 **Pest species** infest and damage trees; therefore, any observed presence of certain pest species, such as emerald ash borer, is unacceptable for this indicator.

Pileated woodpecker in CATO

Photo by NPS



Looking to the future

The Resource Assessment for Management Strategies provides a snapshot of natural resource conditions in individual parks, and places parks in a landscape context, allowing the assessment of conditions across the NCR. Understanding the value and relevance of park resources at a landscape level facilitates ecosystem-level management, benefiting the parks and neighboring lands. This allows for consideration of resources in a broader context when planning management actions by identifying resources that need improvement and highlighting gaps in data.

The RAMS interface is part of an ongoing NPS NCR-UMCES collaboration to assess and identify conservation needs for significant natural and cultural resources within the NCR parks.

Integrated and adaptive management in parks requires cultural and natural resource condition assessments. Preliminary efforts to incorporate cultural resources into RAMS yielded a list of indicators identified in collaboration with the regional cultural resource program managers. These indicators require refinement before final conditions are reported.

Photo by NPS



Above photo by John Zuke



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