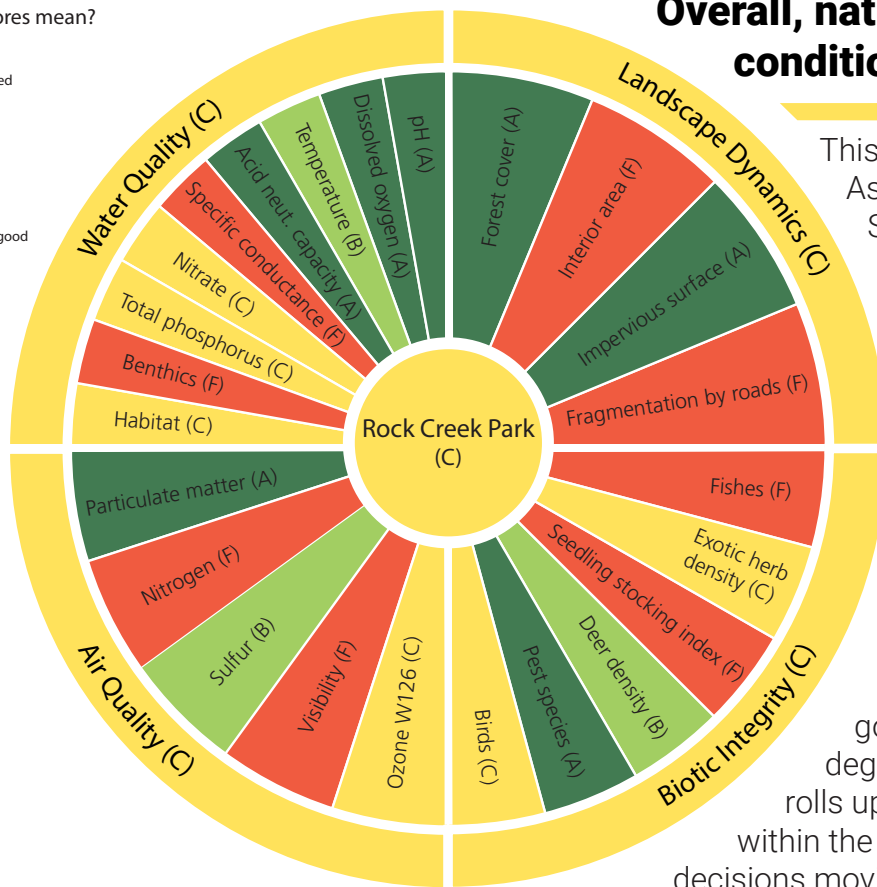


What is the status of Rock Creek Park natural resources?

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 moderate.

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 stoplight 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.



Water Quality

Water quality is moderately good. Several indicators score as very good or good. Stream habitat is moderately good. Benthic communities are very degraded. "Good" stream habitat is important for these communities. Management to improve stream habitat should be considered.



Landscape Dynamics

Overall, landscape dynamics are in moderate condition. Impervious surface scores well. The forest cover score is very good. Interior forest area is the core forest habitat and it is very degraded. Management to improve the core forest condition should be considered.



Air Quality

Although difficult to manage, air quality is important to monitor. Visibility is very degraded, and nitrogen deposition is occurring at levels harmful to plants. Particulate matter and sulfur indicators are in very good and good condition. Ozone is in moderately good condition.



Biotic integrity

Biotic Integrity is in moderate condition. Seedling stocking index is very degraded. Excessive deer browsing lowers seedling numbers. Although deer density receives a "good" score, continued management of deer is needed to improve forest conditions.

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.


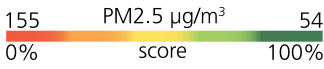











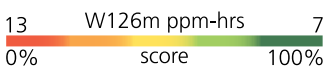




Monitoring helps park managers understand and assess resource condition. Photos clockwise from left: Barred owl, house finch, wood duck, white-breasted nuthatch.

Clockwise from top left, photos by: Lorie Shaull, Ryan Mandelbaum, Will Parson, Ryan Mandelbaum

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%	43.00	100%	 Very good
 Nitrogen (kg/ha/yr)	3  1 0% score 100%	3.50	0%	 Very degraded
 Sulfur (kg/ha/yr)	3  1 0% score 100%	1.50	75%	 Good
 Visibility (Haze index)	8  2 0% score 100%	13.30	2%	 Very degraded
 Ozone (W126m ppm-hrs)	13  7 0% score 100%	9.60	57%	 Moderate
Air Quality overall condition			47%	 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.












The Q Street bridge in winter.

Photo by Joe Flood

Landscape Dynamics monitoring and thresholds

Landscape Dynamics reference condition table

Metric	Reference condition	Park average	Overall score (%)	Condition
 Fragmentation by roads (km/km ²)	2 km/km ² score 0% to 1 score 100%	3.80	0%	 Very degraded
 Impervious surface (% area)	20 % area score 0% to 10 score 100%	4.77	100%	 Very good
 Interior forest area (% interior)	0 % interior score 0% to 100 score 100%	5.04	5%	 Very degraded
 Forest cover (% cover)	0 % cover score 0% to 59 score 100%	65.02	100%	 Very good
Landscape Dynamics overall condition			51%	 Moderate



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.

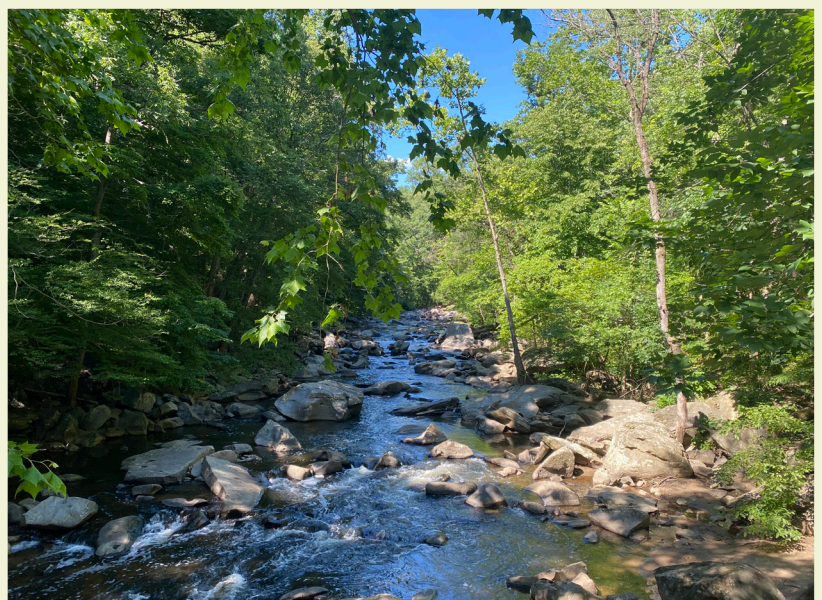


Interior forest area forms the core of a habitat, and increased interior area improves forest condition.













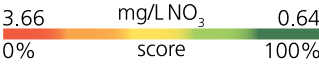

















Forest cover provides habitat, wildlife corridors, and ecological value important to park natural resources and overall landscape condition.


Stream ecosystems are impacted by the surrounding landscape.
Photo by NPS




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%	64.55	49%	 Moderate
 Benthics (BIBI Score)	1  5 0% score 100%	1.67	17%	 Very degraded
 Total phosphorus (mg/L PO ₄)	0.09  0.01 0% score 100%	0.07	41%	 Moderate
 Nitrate (mg/L NO ₃)	3.66  0.64 0% score 100%	2.40	44%	 Moderate
 Dissolved oxygen (mg/L)	3  6 0% score 100%	7.80	96%	 Very good
 Temperature (degrees C)	30.8  19 0% score 100%	22.40	72%	 Good
 Specific conductance (µS/cm)	230  171 0% score 100%	799.21	1%	 Very degraded
 pH (pH value)	5  6.8–8.5 9 0% 100% 0%	7.96	92%	 Very good
 Acid neutralizing capacity (µeq/L)	20  200 0% score 100%	1,720	100%	 Very good
Water Quality overall condition			57%	 Moderate


 **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.






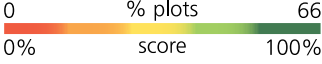








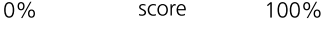


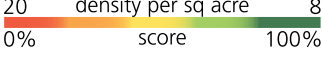
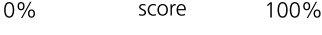


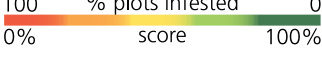


 **Specific conductance** is related to salinity and measures water's ability to conduct electricity

 **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%  100%	1.64	16%	 Very degraded
 Seedling stocking index (% adequately stocked plots)	0  66 0%  100%	0.00	0%	 Very degraded
 Exotic herb density (% plots with exotics)	100  8.33 0%  100%	60.50	43%	 Moderate
 Birds (BCI score)	20  77 0%  100%	47.50	41%	 Moderate
 Deer density (density per sq acre)	20  8 0%  100%	8.68	70%	 Good
 Pest species (% plots infested)	100  0 0%  100%	94.70	95%	 Very good

Biotic Integrity overall condition 44%  Moderate



Fish 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.

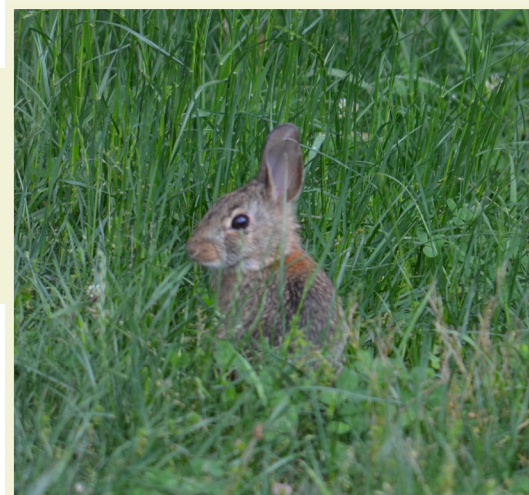


Deer density can severely impact forest growth and regeneration through browsing. At high densities, deer damage the overall condition of a park.



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

Rock Creek Park is inhabited by a variety of plants and animals. 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.

This transect illustrates the diverse habitats on either side of Beach Drive in Rock Creek Park. Natural resources are assessed across these habitats and displayed on the score wheel on page 1.

