

Virginia Forest Conservation

Forestry Work Group
November 2013

- **Chesapeake Bay Act- Legislative authority to protect riparian corridors.**
 - 100 ft wide buffers
 - Vegetative cover
 - Limited construction/only by permit
 - Mitigation for disturbance

State and Local Government work together to protect riparian corridors

Army Corps of Engineers, NOAA, Coastal Zone Management

Indirect protection/conservation for riparian forest buffers in Virginia

- Protection is provided for all tidal areas of the state including streams, rivers, wetlands. Disturbance of soil, banks, shorelines of tidal waterways is regulated by Dept. of Environmental Quality through CZM. Funding and authority comes from ACOE and NOAA.

NPDES permits act as incentive for local governments to protect and conserve riparian zones and buffers. Riparian buffers are a source of credit towards permits for counties wanting to discharge.

Federal Government involvement in state programs for forest buffer protection.

Virginia Dept of Forestry Commitment to Forest Conservation Programs

- DOF Conservation Division has 4 staff committed to the protection and conservation of forested land.
- Tool Box to achieve forest conservation commitments to Bay Program and citizens of Virginia:
 - Easements
 - Cost Share Programs
 - Forest Legacy Program
 - Tomorrow Woods Program

Forest Conservation in Virginia

Easements

- TNC reviews and guides restoration of streams, rivers, wetlands and riparian buffers. If Trust Fund dollars are used, a conservation easement on project area is required.
- Virginia Outdoors Foundation is Commonwealth's land conservation agency.
- DOF can/does hold easements on forested land (Grants and FLP).
- NGOs protect many forested acres in VA

Funding Sources for restoration/conservation

- State funds for land conservation = \$1mill/yr
- Land with easement receives 40% of value in tax credit can rate over 10 yrs or sell credit.
- Forested and ag land use taxed at lower rate
- Estate taxes lower on property with easement
- Purchase of TDR or PDR are brokered by local government.

Landowner incentives for easements

VDOF works with federal and other state agencies to establish cost share project for forest establishment and improvements.

NRCS, FSA and DCR cost share influencing forest conservation:

- **EQIP** – pays for forest management plans, site prep for establishment, critical area stabilization, fencing livestock out of riparian corridors, brush management, prescribed burns.
- **Chesapeake Bay Watershed Initiative** – same as EQIP offerings but no funds for management plans.
- **Conservation Stewardship Program** – hardwood regeneration, non-chemical control of brush, weeds and invasive species and creating conditions for agro-forestry.
- **CRP & CREP** – Fencing livestock from waterway, Alternative water systems, Planting trees along waterway and Open land tree planting.

Cost Share Programs

- Federal Program for acquisition of easements and the purchase of forest lands for permanent protection.
- VDOF received \$10 mill since 2001 from FLP.
- Virginia funding by FLP equal to national average
- Criteria are: minimum 50+ acres, 75% wooded, must have sustainable mgt. plan.

Forest Legacy Program

- Focus area is southeast Virginia
- Purpose is to conserve, enhance and establish forest land.
- Criteria are the same as FLP
- Incentive: cash opportunity with maximum of \$20,000.
- Land must be conserved into the future.
- Funding available for tree planting, livestock fence out, water conservation

Tomorrow Woods Program

- Dec. 2007- Dec. 2012 =184,640 acres forest land permanently protected.
- 61,533 of 184,640 are priority forest acres
- Annual conservation of 36,928 only 12,186 acres priority forest land vs 2007 commitment of 25,000 acres priority forest land conserved annually.

Success to Date

VDOF will work with cooperators to reverse the trend of forest land conversion - Open lands initiative

Promote more interest in Forest Legacy Program

Use incentive programs to conserve more forest land - (Tomorrow's Woods)

Partner with land trusts to educate landowners about conservation easements and opportunities to protect their land into the future (Did workshop with NVCT for 60 landowners 2013).

Future Expectations