

Riparian Forest Buffer Management Strategy

I. Executive Summary

~To be completed by CBP Communications Team in early March---will emphasize some take-aways in the *Buffering the Bay* report (e.g., the federal programs that are currently underutilized) and the Riparian Forest Buffer Initiative.~

II. Outcomes and Baselines

Riparian Forest Buffer (RFB) Outcome— Continually increase the capacity of forest buffers to provide water quality and habitat benefits throughout the watershed. Restore 900 miles per year of riparian forest buffer and conserve existing buffers until at least 70 percent of riparian areas throughout the watershed are forested.

The 900 mile outcome is substantially less than the 2011 State targets from Watershed Implementation Plans (WIP) which equals approximately 1,190 miles/year. Table 1 shows breakout of riparian forest buffer targets in each state's Phase 2 WIP input deck.

2010 Federal Commitment from the Strategy for Protecting and Restoring the Chesapeake Bay Watershed (Executive Order 13508):

Riparian Forest Buffer Outcome—"Restore riparian forest buffers to 63%¹ of the total riparian miles by 2025. Watershed-wide, this equates to 900 miles of restoration every year."

	Total Acres Needed 2012-2025	Average acres/year Needed	Miles/year Needed (at 100' width)
Delaware	4790	370	31
Maryland	1190	90	8
New York	6180	475	40
Pennsylvania	89630	6895	575
Virginia	80820	6215	518
West Virginia	3250	250	21
Total	185,860	14,295	1,193

Table 1. Watershed Implementation Plan targets for Phase 2, reported in acres (the final column is a conversion to miles for reference).

¹ The reason the Executive Order Outcome reflects a different long term goal than the Bay Agreement Outcome (63% vs 70%) is that the EO Outcome had a sunset date of 2025. Having 70% of the watershed's riparian areas in forest has always been the long-term goal—but buffer experts estimated that only 63% of the watershed would have forest buffer by 2025 at the rate of 900 miles per year. ¹

What federal agencies agreed to do to reach this Outcome:

- Accelerate application of CREP²
- Restore forest buffers in priority watersheds
- Explore funding incentives for installation of priority riparian forest buffers
- Enhance technical capacity for riparian forest restoration.

III. Progress

As reported in the *Buffering the Bay* report, EO Progress Report, and Bay Barometer, as well as other documents, the progress toward the RFB outcome has slowed considerably from the highpoint in 2002.

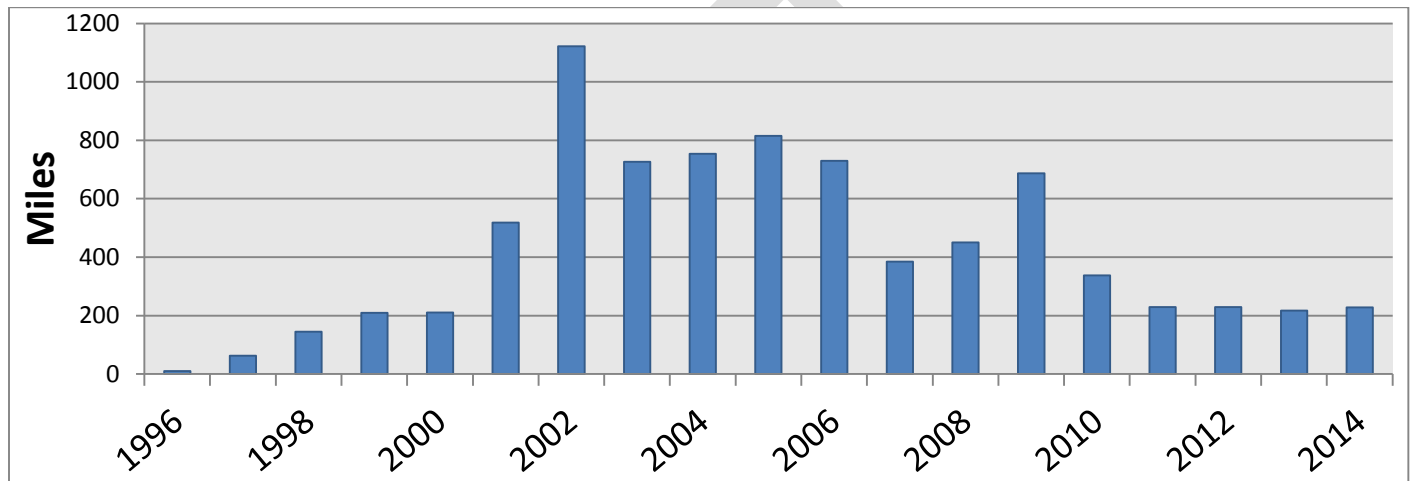


Figure 1. Miles of new riparian forest buffer reported by states to the Forestry Workgroup, CBP.

Despite the slowdown of progress, Bay partners have continued to promote this practice; providing landowner outreach, technical assistance, and contract administration. People have asked, what was different in 2002 to have restored so many more forest buffers? Financial incentives were somewhat higher, CREP was still new and taking off in many parts of the watersheds, and there was an “all hands” approach to buffers that involved agriculture and forestry departments, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Extension offices, and non-profit organizations. Now, the Clean Water Act mandates that amount of energy and focus is needed again.

- ² The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is a state-federal program that exists in each Bay state. The vast majority of riparian forest buffers are restored through CREP program because it is the most beneficial to the landowner (more than \$600,000,000 of federal funding to landowners in Chesapeake watershed). For more information on CREP and the RFB Outcome, see [Buffering the Bay](#), page 3.

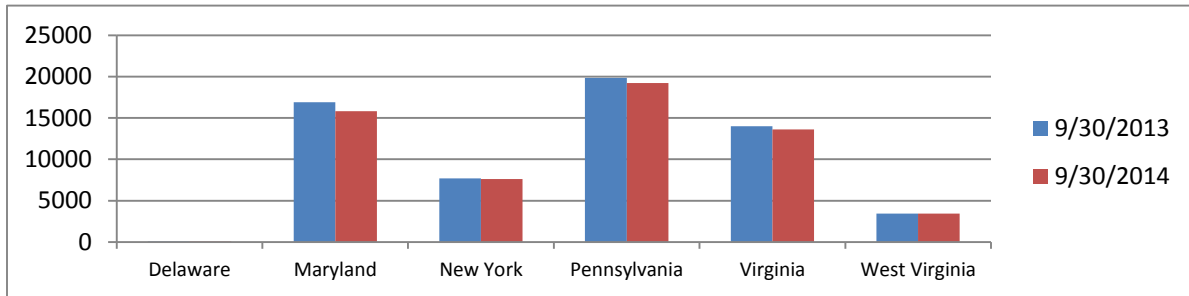


Figure 2. Cumulative acres in Chesapeake Bay portion of 6 states in riparian forest buffer contract as reported by FSA for CP22 during 2013 and 2014. Slight downturn in cumulative acres indicates that new forest buffer enrollment is not keeping up with the number of expiring contracts that are not re-enrolled. Some of the expiring acres may stay in forest buffer, but it is not known how many or why the landowner did not re-enroll those acres.

IV. Participating Jurisdictions and Agencies

Federal: FSA, NRCS, USFS, USGS, USFWS, DoD, EPA, NPS, USACE

Chesapeake Bay Commission

State Gov't:

Delaware: FS, DNREC

Maryland: MDA, DNR, MDE

New York: DEC,

Pennsylvania: DEP, DCNR,

Virginia: DOF, DCR

West Virginia: DOF, DEP

Local Gov't:

Anne Arundel Co, Cumberland, Arlington, Prince Georges, Cumberland, Fairfax County, Annapolis, Baltimore County

Non-Governmental:

ACB, CBF, TU, TNC, Cacapon, Casey Trees, Parks and People (Baltimore and Washington DC), DE Center for Horticulture, Baltimore Greenspace, TreeBaltimore

Coordination with other Chesapeake Bay Goals and Strategies

The RFB outcome overlaps with and complements a number of other Chesapeake Bay Program outcomes and workgroups and will be integrated as much as possible with these related efforts. We have started to engage and will continue to coordinate our RFB strategy efforts with the following Chesapeake Bay program workgroups, and any others who express interest in working with us:

- Water Quality Goal Implementation Team
 - Agriculture Workgroup
 - Urban Stormwater Workgroup
 - Land Use Workgroup
- Local Government Advisory Committee and Local Leadership Workgroup
- Stream Restoration Strategy
- Healthy Watersheds Strategy

- Brook Trout Strategy
- Wetlands Strategy
- Climate Adaptation and Mitigation Strategies

V. Influential Factors

The restoration of riparian forest buffers is an agricultural practice. Many of the factors influencing this outcome are common to agriculture:

- a. Fluctuation in commodity crop values
- b. Inter-generational transfer of agricultural lands (a.k.a. aging landowners)
- c. Loss of agricultural lands
- d. Failure of Congress to authorize a new Farm Bill which caused CRP to close in 2013 and 2014.

Other factors are more technical in nature:

- e. Insufficient technical assistance
- f. Lack of education provided to landowners and technical assistance providers
- g. Unsatisfactory survival of buffer plantings
- h. Competing vegetation
- i. Lackluster incentives
- j. Complicated cost-share program application and implementation process accompanied by obfuscating communications.

Still other influencing factors relate to management and leadership:

- k. Inconsistent emphasis on this practice- at the federal, state and local level
- l. Federal funds go unused, sometimes for lack of a 20% match
- m. Federal programs lack flexibility
- n. Less beneficial practices compete for riparian area space

Management/leadership and technical issues (e-n) are factors somewhat within our control and will be addressed here.

VI. Current Efforts and Gaps

Since CBP partners have been working on the RFB outcome for over 20 years, the partnership has amassed a lot of knowledge about what works and what doesn't work. A big new effort to amass knowledge is the **Riparian Forest Buffer Initiative**. With this Initiative comes an unprecedented commitment to this practice from two key players— USDA's FSA and NRCS—who have been strongly engaged in each state and also at the regional level. This was an important step since the CBP Forestry Workgroup had provided sole leadership on RFB, an agricultural practice, for 20 years.

The Chesapeake Riparian Forest Buffer Initiative

The need for the Initiative was outlined in a report released by the Forestry Workgroup in February 2014 called [Buffering the Bay](#). It was envisioned, in part, as a means of developing this Management Strategy. USDA, EPA and the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay are leading the Initiative. The 2014-2015 timeline for the Initiative is:

- March—Steering Committee forms
- May—Innovators' Roundtable
- June—Leadership Summit in DC
- September—State Task Forces form
- November—Task Force Draft reports
- February—Task Force Final reports
- June—Final Initiative Event/Next Steps

As part of the Initiative, a recent listing of gaps/barriers was compiled (see Appendix A). Gaps were also discussed as part of each State's Task Force process. These gaps have led to a list of Strategic Elements that has remained more-or-less consistent since the RFB Innovators' Roundtable in May 2014 when they were first outlined. These strategic elements, in order of importance, are in Table 2. Broad-based management approaches address each Element. These approaches will be the basis for the 2016-2017 Biennial Work Plan to accompany this Management Strategy.

VII. Management Approach

Management approaches in Table 2 have been summarized from Strategies identified in the Innovators' Roundtable (Appendix B) and through the RFB Initiative (Task Force strategies below). Of these, the four most critical are reiterated here:

- **Renewed leadership for “all hands” approach**
 - Engage federal, state and local leaders with each other, with USDA, and with progress on the RFB Initiative
 - Each state appoints a high-level coordinator to work across agencies on this outcome
 - Make non-federal match available as new opportunities present for federal funding
- **Improve existing programs to make the RFB practice more appealing to landowners**
 - Increase and improve Technical Assistance (TA)
 - Develop programs to assist landowner with maintenance
 - Amend State CREP Agreements – increase flexibility and incentives
 - Conduct strategic, coordinated, and cost-effective RFB outreach across the watershed
- **Make new program linkages and use financial leverage to conserve and restore more RFB**
 - Look broadly to align related projects/funding (e.g., state preservation programs, stream restoration, etc.)
 - Use federal funding as leverage to get more RFB
 - Integrate RFB as part of state stormwater programs
- **Apply science and technology to improve the RFB practice**
 - Use geographic prioritization tools and analyze for effectiveness
 - for brook trout (e.g., Appalachian LCC tool)
 - for water quality (various)
 - Use demographic tools (outreach) and analyze for effectiveness
 - Improve tracking of total RFB using high-resolution imagery

Strategy Elements	Description	Summary of Suggested Approaches
Leadership	Landowners need clear messages on the best way to manage riparian areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work across federal/state agencies • Use state funding to strategically leverage federal funding • Apply for CREP Amendments • Partners stay engaged as changes are made
Programmatic Barriers	Federal programs that pay for RFB are underutilized (Additional \$5 million offered by FSA to address barriers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase landowner incentives • Streamline application process • Communicate about practice/CRP more clearly in writing and orally
Technical assistance (TA)	Need more TA: If landowner is properly informed and incentivized, many more will enroll.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add staff • Expand use of RFB Teams- turnkey operations that help with everything from enrollment to maintenance (TU example) • Conduct more training for TA providers • Increase incentives for TA providers
New Enrollment	Outreach to landowners needs to be improved/increased	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand outreach resources and means of communicating them (webinars, annual RFB Forum, web presence, posters, etc.)
Establishment/Maintenance	Poor survival of plantings discourages new enrollment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand establishment period to 4-5 years • Increase incentives to conduct maintenance • Provide tech transfer opportunities on proper planting, maintenance • Ensure good growing stock
Re-enrollment	Existing contract holders need to be re-enrolled or rolled over to permanent easements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reach out to existing contract holders • Establish programs to make existing contracts eligible for re-enrollment where necessary
Targeting	Targeting tools not often used and can be applied to greater benefit to water quality and brook trout habitat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create GIS maps of where buffers are most needed • Analyze existing tools to determine their usefulness
Easement programs	Riparian forest buffer easement programs are not active in most states	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • States look to expand easement options, especially using ag preservation programs
Non-ag lands	Suburban areas need programs to establish buffers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with local governments • Expand on backyard buffer program • Apply for grants

Table 2. Strategic elements and management approaches to address them.

Summary of Recommended Actions from Draft Task Force Reports

A. Increase Financial Assistance

1. Increase payments/incentives for riparian forest buffer, e.g.:
 - a) Update/increase marginal pastureland and cropland rental rates
 - b) Remove payment caps for: water development, water facilities, stream crossing, and adjacent upland pastures.
 - c) Develop awards program
 - d) Provide Special Incentive Payments if certain environmental targets are achieved – Oregon CREP Model
2. Link EQIP/CSP eligibility (additional ranking points) to having RFBs
 - a) EQIP could do more to leverage the implementation of riparian forest buffers through CREP in application rankings. This limits the ability to leverage funding and provide a substantial incentive for riparian forest buffers.
 - b) Improve CSP structure to support forest buffers
3. Utilize State/local/private easement to provide long-term resource protection

B. Improve Technical Assistance

1. Improve staffing to provide better technical assistance for riparian forest buffers and related practices
 - a) NRCS often has limited funds made available through the Farm Service Agency, but there is not a way for the FSA to directly contract with technical assistance providers
 - b) Local level leadership should prioritize TA for riparian forest buffers ---counties that prioritize riparian forest buffers have more success than those that do not
 - c) State Farm Service Agency and NRCS offices lack outcome-based performance measures to assess success (e.g., miles and acres of riparian forest buffer established)
 - d) Develop “team” of experts--- could be circuit riders shared among counties—train knowledgeable of opportunities and program requirements. Provide materials (posters, pamphlets, question and answers, etc.)
 - e) More training for technical service providers, land trusts, and other partners on the importance of riparian forest buffers, assessment of the costs/benefits forest buffers for landowners, and marketing strategies.
2. Customer service
 - a) Application process needs to be streamlined especially for offices where partners are not co-located. Agencies that are working together with a streamlined process have more success than those that do not.
 - b) Landowners do not always have a point-of-contact that they can rely on for guidance for the life of the contract
 - c) Conduct annual status reviews
 - d) Involve landowner during all stages of the planning process
 - e) Certify all practice performance
 - f) Develop network of providers to deliver full services to producers -(construct fence, water facilities, stream crossing, site prep, tree planting, and maintenance
 - g) Work and share more information with the contractors

C. Improve Outreach

1. Simplify program communication to “plain English”
2. Develop and maintain a database of potential clients -use the data base to prioritize outreach efforts – use GIS data
3. Provide additional resources (materials, databases) to the State to target outreach efforts
4. Train staff on outreach marketing opportunities and program requirements. Provide staff outreach materials (posters, pamphlets, question and answers, fact sheets and guides etc)
5. Develop marketing platform
 - a) Develop a vibrant web presence – with updated program information and “one-stop shop” website
 - b) Have USDA/ERS mine data on existing enrollment to better understand the demographics of CRP participation and their operations
 - c) Develop demographic media materials (dairy vs. grain producer, older vs. new farmer, tenant vs. absentee landowner, etc.)
 - d) Conduct focus groups and do other analysis to better understand how to market the program
 - e) Develop a State outreach committee comprised of major program participants
 - f) Identify and conduct RFB farm tours
 - g) Include Agroforestry message into the marketing
 - h) Explore the use of Public Service Announcements
 - i) Develop RFB signage that denotes RFBs to the general public
6. Improve outreach through partners/programs
 - a) Use one-on-one outreach efforts – through the use of staff with good backgrounds of buffers and good marketing skills
 - b) Seek to increase role of partners in outreach, particularly groups that have a huge mailing list such as Farm Bureau
 - c) Work with State Agencies to cross-sell RFB enrollments when discussing Ag certainty.
 - d) Explore outreach possibilities with partners with successful RCPP
 - e) Deliver consistent message to producers, from multiple sources
7. Develop a 1-800-CREP hotline

D. Improve Establishment, Maintenance, Compliance, Re-enrollment

1. Establishment
 - a) Successful establishment of a riparian forest buffer requires prescriptive steps to be taken. Fields of leaning or downed tree-tubes and other signs of failure discourage landowners from enrolling in programs.
 - b) Current resources provided for establishment are inadequate and need to begin before planting and occur for at least a 4-5 year period.
 - c) Consider new approaches and research of deer fencing, increased herbicide applications, specialized crews for establishment/maintenance.

1. Maintenance
 - a) Provide extensive review of contract maintenance requirements and review maintenance requirements throughout the contract
 - b) Seek higher maintenance rates (see financial assistance)
 - c) Streamline the weed control approval process (number of field visits)
2. Compliance
 - a) Increase annual (in-field) status reviews/monitoring
 - b) Seek flexibility to re-enroll/upgrade non-compliant CP21s (grass filter strips– that have trees) to be enrolled as a CP22. Provide one-time amnesty.
 - c) Seek additional flexibility in maintenance requirements for CP21 to allow some natural regeneration (need to talk with wildlife community)
3. Re-enrollment
 - a) Prioritize technical assistance resources to expiring CP22s
 - b) Many CREP contracts are set to expire in the next few years and lack the outreach and technical assistance and changing crop prices could lead to a decline in the area of riparian forest buffers.
 - c) Grass buffer contracts that have naturally regenerated to forest are unable to reenroll into a forest buffer contract.
- E. Program/Policy/Leadership Actions
 1. Expand the acreage cap of the CREP
 2. Allow for flexibility to pay partial Practice Incentive Payments (PIPs)
 3. Allow for flexibility to raise payment caps for livestock crossing, water development, fencing, etc. (see above)
 4. Expand the establishment period for RFBs from 2 years to 3-4 years.
 5. Provide flexibility on marginal pastureland eligibility determinations.
 6. Flexibility to allow simultaneous enrollment in RFB in CREP and stream bank stabilization in EQIP or to award more ranking points for EQIP offers that have RFBs.
 7. Contract out Maryland FSA could contract out with certified TSP to do the work.
 8. Modify the design for CP22 standard to permit a grass strip adjacent to the drainage ditch in order to permit periodic maintenance activities of the drainage district.
 9. Provide better accounting of current RFB activity including NRCS and State programs.
 10. Farm Service Agency and NRCS goals should reflect state WIP targets.
 11. Lack of coordination with other federal, state, and private conservation funding programs on how investments can be leveraged.
- F. Conservation
 - i) Revive easement programs at state level;
 - ii) Utilize state/local/private easement to provide long-term resource protection
- G. Increase Use of Tools to Prioritize RFB Efforts
 1. Re-enrollments (outreach)

- 2. Geographic
 - a) for water quality
 - b) for habitat
 - c) lots of new tools/data to use
- 3. Demographic
 - a) use market research (see above)
 - b) pastures and larger farms with streams

VIII. Monitoring and Assessing Progress

- 1) Several sources of data continue to be available to monitor progress on this goal. These are assessed either monthly or annually.
 - a) Contracted acres from FSA
 - i) FSA data can be reported monthly and at the county level
 - b) Number of acres reported by states to CB Model
 - c) Miles reported from Forestry Workgroup
- 2) Data derived from high-resolution satellite imagery are becoming more common and help monitor progress, net gain, and survival of newly-established riparian buffers.
 - i) Reports from partners on progress on actions in Management Strategy.
 - ii) Feedback on webinars and training

VIII. Adaptively Manage -- The Forestry Workgroup will use the following approaches to ensure adaptive management:

- a. Tracking progress toward the annual 900 mile goal, as well as identifying trends and priority areas.
- b. Riparian Forest Buffer Initiative provides a means to engage additional partners in providing feedback on progress and actions in the Management Strategy.
- c. Chesapeake partners involved in related goals, i.e., conservation, brook trout, wetlands, healthy watersheds and others, provide an important source of mutual feedback on what works well and what doesn't.
- d. Throughout the year, the Partnership's communications tools, including websites, webinars, and special announcements, will inform progress toward the RFB goal and highlight needs or opportunities for Partnership members to engage.
- e. Monthly Forestry Workgroup meetings provide a regular venue for evaluating and adjusting particular strategies that support the annual 900 mile goal.
- f. Annual reporting by the Partnership and its members of best practices, success stories and other qualitative and quantitative successes is another means to recognize the impacts of existing programs, reflect on and adapt existing and new strategies, and grow the capacity and stewardship required to increase the amount of riparian forest buffers in the watershed.

IX. Biennial Work Plan

[to be developed by Fall 2015]

Appendix A.

Chesapeake Riparian Forest Buffer Initiative

Innovator's Roundtable

May 21, 2014

Common Barriers to Establishing Successful Riparian Forest Buffers

Programmatic Barriers

- Inconsistent availability of the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) hinders landowner outreach. These interruptions increase skepticism among landowners and program staff about CREP's viability. It is also difficult to talk about program benefits with landowners when the program is not currently open.
- Inconsistent leadership at the local level that recognizes that riparian forest buffers are a priority practice. Counties that prioritize riparian forest buffers have more success than those that do not.
- Environmental Quality Incentives Program does not leverage the implementation of riparian forest buffers through the CREP in application rankings. This limits the ability to leverage funding and provide a substantial incentive for riparian forest buffers.
- State FSA and NRCS goals do not include state Watershed Implementation Targets. The lack of common goals disconnects state and federal priorities.
- Lack of coordination with other federal, state, and private conservation funding programs on how investments can be leveraged.
- State FSA and NRCS offices lack outcome-based performance measures to assess success (e.g. miles and acres of riparian forest buffer established).

Landowner Outreach and Customer Service

- Program communication is too complicated and hinders landowner enrollment.
- Lack of training for technical service providers, land trusts, and other partners on the importance of riparian forest buffers, assessment of the costs and benefits of implementing forest buffers for landowners, and marketing strategies.
- Application process needs to be streamlined especially for offices where partners are not co-located. Agencies that are working together with a streamlined process have more success than those that do not.
- Landowners do not always have a point-of-contact that they can rely on for guidance for the life of the contract

Establishment

- Successful establishment of a riparian forest buffer requires long-term maintenance. Fields of leaning or downed tree-tubes and other signs of failure discourage landowners from enrolling in programs.
- Incentives for establishment are inadequate and need to begin before planting and occur for at least five years.

- Given limited incentives, landowners are often stuck with maintenance issues (e.g. invasive species, tree shelters, loss due to flooding, etc.) after the first couple of years after planting.

Technical Assistance

- A lack of technical assistance for riparian forest buffers and related practices can create a bottleneck for implementation.
- There are limited funds made available for technical assistance

Conservation

- Riparian forest buffer easement programs are not active in most Chesapeake states.

Contract Reenrollment

- Many Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program contracts are set to expire in the next few years and a lack of outreach and technical assistance and changing crop prices could lead to a decline in the area of riparian forest buffers.
- Grass buffer contracts that have naturally regenerated to forest are unable to reenroll into a forest buffer contract.

Appendix B.
Chesapeake Riparian Forest Buffer Initiative--Strategies
Innovators' Roundtable
May 21, 2014

Key Strategies for Establishing Successful Riparian Forest Buffers

Programmatic Strategies

- USDA should anticipate potential gaps in CREP funding as best as possible in order to make adjustments that keep the program open continuously for enrollment.
- State Conservationists should assign a ranking bonus to conservation practices that include a contracted CREP riparian forest buffer. Bonus should not apply to grass buffers, fencing, or other practices that do not include forest.
- State cost-share programs should not provide cost-share for grass buffers.
- USDA and state cost-share programs should pair livestock exclusion and fencing with riparian forest buffers.
- FSA State Executive Directors and State Conservationists should include state WIP goals in their performance plans.
- FSA State Executive Directors and State Conservationists should include outcome-based performance measures in performance plans (e.g. acres of riparian forest buffers with canopy closure) instead of relying on number of contracts.
- All riparian forest buffer partners should consistently measure success with mileage and acres of established forest buffers.
- Federal tax deduction for RFBs
- State more creative on CREP 20% match (e.g., use easements)
- Pre-rankings screen for 35 foot forest buffer/scoring threshold that by-passes ranking batching—straight to contract

Landowner Outreach and Customer Service

- USDA and other CREP partners should set a goal to provide a site-steward for every contract, so that landowners have access to consistent guidance. A landowner should never feel like they have been left to figure issues out on their own after the practice has been implemented.
- USDA and state partners should have a goal of processing CREP riparian forest buffer applications in one-day.
- USDA should work with outside communications consultants to simplify messages and language targeted to landowners
- Provide landowner incentives for canopy closure
- USDA and states should set aside funding that would be available to replant forest buffers following flood events.
- USDA and states should establish and prioritize trainings for federal and state agency staff, technical service providers, land trusts, conservation groups, and other partners on the importance of riparian forest buffers, methods to assess the costs and benefits of

implementing forest buffers for landowners including benefits to herd and farm health, economic and environmental benefits of implementing wider forest buffers, and marketing and salesmanship.

- USDA Economic Research Service should work with state universities and other partners to evaluate how riparian forest buffers improve soil health and overall condition of their farms and how these conditions translate into the economic value of their farms. Studies should evaluate if healthy farms are worth more than unhealthy farms.

Establishment

- Federal, state and private partners should establish a network of approved establishment and maintenance partners that can be accessed as needed by the FSA, NRCS, State Agencies, foundations, and others to provide maintenance on CREP riparian forest buffers for invasive species, shelters, fences, etc.
- USDA should revise riparian forest buffer establishment standards and financial assistance to allow for a year of site preparation and at least five years of maintenance to ensure establishment.

Technical Assistance

- Technical assistance money provided to the NRCS from the FSA should be tied to outcome-based deliverables like acres of established riparian forest buffers.
- USDA should develop a mechanism that would allow the FSA to contract with non-governmental organizations and state partners to provide technical assistance to landowners.
- A Chesapeake Riparian Forest Buffer Leadership group should meet regularly with private foundations like the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Chesapeake Bay Funders Network, and businesses to evaluate ways for private funding to fill gaps in Farm Bill funding.

Conservation

- USDA should partner with state and private conservation easement programs to ensure that successful, riparian forest buffer easement programs are in place in each state.

Contract Reenrollment

- USDA and the states should establish a CREP contract reenrollment program to prioritize technical assistance and outreach.
- USDA should allow grass buffers that have naturally regenerated to forest to reenroll as riparian forest buffers.