



Backgrounder

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Riparian Forest Buffers

Background

At the 2015 Executive Council (EC) meeting, the [final reports and recommendations of the 6 State Riparian Forest Buffer Task Forces](#) were endorsed. The EC also committed to several actions that would help the Chesapeake Bay Program (CBP) partnership prioritize the practice of restoring forest buffers and to secure resources to increase their miles in Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Current Status

Progress toward the Bay riparian forest buffer goals decreased in 2015 with only 64 miles restored. However each state has made strides toward an improved program over the last year. There remains a need to focus on strategic leadership-- improving existing and effective cost-share programs, while emphasizing acceleration of restoration, conservation and enhanced service to landowners.

The national Conservation Reserve Program is very near the legislative cap of 24 million acres—a cap that was lowered with the 2014 Farm Bill. This may or may not have an effect on how the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is delivered in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. CREP has been the most successful program to restore riparian forest buffers and partners have invested significant resources around its stability. The State Task Force reports identified previous interruptions in CREP as having a negative effect on enrollments.

Each of following bulleted actions were agreed upon at the 2015 EC meeting. After each specific action is a brief update of progress made on it over the last year.

- The State Task Force Reports will be conveyed to USDA and be part of the *2014 Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement* Riparian Forest Buffer Management Strategy Work Plan where resources and responsibility to achieve those actions will be identified;

State Task Force reports were conveyed to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), but the successful implementation of the Task Force reports depends on enduring state leadership. That said, USDA has a number of actions in the 2-year Riparian Forest Buffer Work Plan that stem directly from the reports. Leadership responsibility on specific actions were identified by various agencies within USDA.

- Multi-year strategies for aligning and securing needed resources to reach riparian forest buffer goals will be developed and will include an analysis of staffing and financial needs;

State, federal and private partners contributed to the [2-year Work Plan](#) which is the overarching strategy for 2016-2017 to attain our riparian forest buffer goals. Staffing and funding are

important aspects within the work plan, however a specific analysis of staffing and financial needs to reach our long-term forest buffer goals has not happened.

- We will support implementation of USDA conservation programs that develop, restore or maintain effective riparian forest buffers in the Chesapeake Bay watershed;

USDA conservation programs that develop, restore and or maintain riparian buffers in the watershed are being supported. CREP, a federal-state partnership program, is also being improved as some states have updated their Agreements to implement CREP and have augmented payments available to landowners under CREP to improve and maintain their forest buffer.

- A robust outreach initiative will be implemented to promote riparian forest buffers within the agricultural community; and

In 2015 and 2016, USDA, led by the Farm Services Agency and the Forest Service, completed a suite of nine elements targeted to improve outreach on restoring riparian forest buffers. The nine elements included, multiple trainings and workshops, posters and displays, focus on re-enrollment, demographics and targeting pilots, fact sheets and analysis of on-line information. A survey of landowners currently enrolled was developed by USDA to learn more about their experiences with CREP.

- Technical assistance will be enhanced to ensure that buffers are planned, implemented and maintained successfully;

In 2016, the Farm Service Agency and the Forest Service were able to provide funding for the states to hire nine riparian foresters through state forestry agencies. These foresters' role is to help more landowners establish riparian forest buffers on their land. The foresters received training to make them more effective and expanded training for all technical assistance providers is planned.

The baseline funding provided to the landowner through CREP doubled in the last year. Maintenance of these forest buffers can be a burden on the landowner so creative programs to ease this burden are taking root.