Forestry Workgroup Meeting

April 3, 2024

Meeting Materials

Katie Browson, USFS
Sophie Waterman, CRC
Lorenzo Cinalli, USFS
Rick Turcotte, USFS
Frank Rodgers, Cacapon Inst.
Patty Nylander, VA DOF
Teddi Stark, PA BOF
Robbie Coville, PA BOF
Lydia Brinkley, Upper Susquehanna Coalition
Cassie Davis, NY DEC
Patti Webb, DNREC
Dan Coy, MD DNR
Bay Hanson, USFS
Alanna Crowley, MD DNR
Susan Minnemeyer, Nature Plus
Rob Schnabel, CBF
Sarah Brzezinski, EPA
Gary Shenk, USGS

Call for new at-large members – *Sophie Waterman, CRC*

Sophie reviewed at-large membership for the group. At-large members in group A are up for re-election.

The members in group A:

- Lydia Brinkley, Upper Susquehanna Coalition
- Craig Highfield, Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay
- Judy Okay, J&J Okay

If current at large members would like to be re-nominated or if a FWG participant would like to be nominated for the first time, please email Lorenzo (lorenzo.cinalli@usda.gov) and Sophie (swaterman@chesapeakebay.net) by April 26th. At the May meeting, we will ask those nominated to introduce themselves. Jurisdictional voting members will have the opportunity to vote in the month of May. At our June meeting, we will announce the confirmed members.

Strategy Review System (SRS): Riparian Forest Buffers – *Katie Brownson, USFS*

Katie reviewed SRS and the steps within this new cycle of SRS. Katie noted that the cohorts were remixed to be better aligned with topics. Katie also noted that we can go to the Management Board (MB) once a year if we so desire. Because we recently went through a full update, this year, we can provide a brief update or pass altogether.

FWG leadership team is leaning towards a brief update as it is good to show up to the MB and highlight our progress and needs. During this update, we could provide our updated data on the forest buffer indicator. Another topic would be to reiterate our request to ensure better tracking and accountability for the State Forest Buffer Action Strategies that were developed in 2022. The other request at our last SRS review was to support investments in effective standalone and flexible buffer programs and to

improve grant funding provisions to better support building capacity, staff contractors, and outreach. Katie also brought up sharing highlights from states' progress towards their individual Riparian Forest Buffer Action strategies.

Katie opened the floor to comments.

Discussion:

Matt Keefer (in chat): Katie, do we have that net loss data by state?
Would be helpful. And to keep that loss data separate from planting accomplishments. Thank you!

Lorenzo Cinalli (In chat):
Hi Matt - yes we do have state level loss data. That info will be in the updated Forest Buffer Indicator documents when it gets published. That data is separate from planting data.

Lydia: We should reiterate our asks to the MB. Should jurisdictions provide examples of how addressing capacity and staffing needs would help accelerate progress?

Katie: Yes, it would be worth hitting the highlights and reminding the MB of successes and challenges. Examples from the states would be very helpful on how investments in building capacity, staff contractors, and outreach can impact implementation.

Rob: Will net loss data be shared prior to MB meeting? And in terms of asks are we able to share concerns and suggestions given the amount of forest loss?

Katie: Yes, we anticipate the net loss data will be official and published online before the meeting. We can definitely focus more on highlighting this data and allow time for discussion on opportunities to reverse this trend.

Katie: The next steps for this SRS update include:

- Focusing more on the net loss and allowing discussion
- Add some more context to our "asks" to the MB from the last SRS meeting
- Share progress and challenges for states.

Action: Katie will follow up with state folks to determine what examples they have to share with the MB.

Phase 7 Model Development – Gary Shenk

Gary provided an overview of the Bay Program's Phase 7 Model Development (CAST) and outlined opportunities for the Forestry Workgroup to provide input during this process. Following Gary's presentation, the Workgroup discussed priorities for informing Phase 7.

Gary started with a background on Bay Program Watershed Models. Current CAST (Phase 6) is one of the Bay Program models that is used to model what is happening on the landscape. It takes [average load + inputs (Fertilizer, Manure, Atmospheric Deposition, Fixation, Wastewater)* sensitivity * land management * Watershed Delivery] to spit out a load by land river segment and land use. Gary talked about how CAL CAST (the calibration version of CAST) will inform the Phase 7 CAST and how Phase 7 CAST will be constrained by the temporal downscaling model. It falls onto the Water Quality GIT and the Modeling Workgroup, with input from experts, to ensure the rates used in Phase 7 of CAST are correct.

Gary talked about the TMDL and how our models work within the TMDL framework. Data ideals were also presented. For the sake of the model at the Bay Program, consistency is more important than accuracy. Spatial and temporal trends are more important than absolute values. Phase 6 and Phase 7 methods were also discussed.

Gary then talked about Phase 7 updates and where the workgroup fits in. The FWG has the opportunity to re-examine:

- Land use types
- Relative loading rates
- Sensitivities – types and number – advise the Modeling Workgroup
- Inputs
- BMPs

Discussion

Lorenzo: How long does it take for the modeling team to review suggested changes? And if we have changes, when should they be submitted?

Gary: Everything in the model by 2025. Start having conversations, and signal potential changes to help get into the model.

Rob: Is there any talk of water quantity issues being raised in models? BMPs for water quantity issues/hydrology?

Gary: In the context of the TMDL, no, that is not something we are tracking. We do not have a process-based model. We have to think about quantity in terms of co-benefits as they do not fit in with TMDL management.

Rob: Are water quantity issues being raised?

Gary: Yes, but more so at the state and river basin scale.

Susan: What difference will the high-resolution land use data make within the models? What improvements do you think we will see within the model based on the high-resolution land use data?

Gary: The land use data hasn't made a very big impact in terms of the accuracy of the modeling, but it does help with management, tracking, and buy-in. If people do not trust the land use in the model, they won't trust the model.

Judy: Classifying forests and wetlands as the same is concerning. What kind of information would you need from the FWG to separate them?

Gary: It goes back to the TMDL and how they impact nutrients and sediment. They are closely related. Information on co-benefits can be enumerated within the model, but they don't count towards TMDL.

Katie: The GIT funding project on stream corridor restoration tried to understand the water quality loading implications of losing forests to stream restoration. The fact that forests and wetlands are treated the same in terms of loads means that clearing riparian forests for stream restoration essentially has no impact on water quality, which likely isn't accurate.

Katie: Can things like temperature be included in the model output and report?

Gary: We have a dynamic model that simulates temperature, but we do not focus on temperature. We can include it in the model but not the model output for the TMDL. This would need to be identified as a priority by the partnership and would require dedicated capacity and efforts to be able to support providing information on water temperature.

Judy: Wetlands and forests are different, and this is supported by the literature.

Susan: The post-2025 work involves climate adaptation and mitigation; we should ensure we have better data to support the model.

Rob: If we could credit water quantity/retention, we could see an increase in upland practices.

Gary: Understand the need for an accounting system and accountability outside the TMDL.

CREP Permanent Easement Program – Katrina Tucker, MD DNR

Katrina presented on Maryland's CREP Permanent Buffer Easement Program, which has recently been made available statewide. Katrina provided background on the program, its purpose, funding, and statewide expansion. Katrina also provided some context on how the program gets administered (through local sponsors). The Easement Valuation System (EVS) is used to determine how much money a person can get if they put their buffer in a perpetual easement. The EVS considers the county where the land is located, the size of the buffers, and the amount of land going into the easement.

Discussion:

Judy: Is there any public access component? And are you paying for the maintenance of the buffers?

Katrina: Public access is not required. A one-time payment is supposed to help maintain the buffer, and the landowner is responsible for its maintenance.

Rob: We need a Bay-wide program similar to this program to help protect our streamside forests.

Katrina: CREP is paying landowners to take lands out of production to ensure that highly erodible soils stay in place.

Patti: Do trees have to be in active CREP to be eligible to go into an easement?

Katrina: They have to have an existing CREP contract.

Patti: Trees can only be reenrolled once (roughly 30 years). How are you handling those trees?

Katrina: The easement is what the landowner is bound by. Once the agreement is expired, they can no longer re-enroll.

Patti: Who monitors the trees?

Katrina: The sponsors are responsible for checking the buffers every three years. We are moving towards drones and satellites.

Round Robin on State Forest Conservation Programs

Virginia

The VA Department of Forestry administers an Easement Program that started in 2004. Currently, there are 121 easements within the Chesapeake Bay. The VA program focuses on working forests and farmland. For any easement, VA requires the establishment of a new buffer or the maintenance of any existing forest buffer as part of that easement.

VA also has some enhanced riparian buffer areas where our minimum requirement is a 50-foot width from the stream on either side. People can opt to have an enhanced riparian buffer that goes out as much as 300 feet.

For this year VA has already recorded four new easements. They have about 14 more in development, and by year-end, we should have over a hundred 100,000 acres conserved within the VA easement program. About 171 miles of water courses are currently protected in the Bay in perpetuity within the VA easement program.

The Riparian Buffer Tax Credit Program, which was started in the early 2000s, provides a dollar-for-dollar tax credit if a landowner who harvests timber leaves a forested buffer in place as a part of that timber harvest practice. They can receive a dollar-for-dollar tax credit based on the value of the timber. The buffer has a minimum of 35 feet wide and a maximum of 300 feet. They have to maintain that buffer for a period of 15 years. If they destroy it or do anything, they can be subject to a penalty, so it can be a really great incentive.

West Virginia

Three dozen groups have been planting with Cacapon Institute this spring. Cacapon is learning where CREP buffers are located to help landowners maintain them. Safe Water Conservation Collaborative is looking to plant 20 acres by the end of the year. Five more additional acres will be planted with the Lost River of Cacapon Land Trust and Trout Unlimited. For conservation, Cacapon and Lost Rivers Land Trust get a property into easement first, and then Cacapon can help with riparian buffer plantings. They currently have 17 landowners who have signed up, just looking for funding.

New York

As a part of the Forest and Climate Change directive, the NY Community Forest Conservation Grant Program for municipalities has been created: https://dec.ny.gov/nature/forests-trees/climate-change/community-forest-conservation-grant-program. There is a public access element for this program.

Upper Susquehanna Coalition (USC) has a program to cover conservation easements and fee simple transaction fees, which is usually enough to get the landowner to say yes. Many folks want to donate to easements, but because of the demand, there is a backlog and the transaction feeds can be $30K. USC can help with funding. The land is prioritized by things like natural filter potential (wetlands or riparian areas).

State conservation programs can sometimes be matched with funding provided by USC. Land trust partners utilize this form of funding. Specifically, the programs related to source water protection and farmland protection are useful as they outright pay landowners.

Pennsylvania

PA has Community Conservation Partnership Grants under the Community and Watershed Forestry subcategory. Partners can pursue easements with funds from those grants. They can be used for both planting and conserving buffers. Land Trust partners utilize that funding and WeConservePA serves as the lead for much of that work.

A pilot project on buffer trails is on the radar as a potential project in the Lancaster area.

Mayland

Besides the CREP program presented earlier, MD has a backyard buffer program.