Riparian Forest Buffer Outcome

Management Strategy

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Introduction

Of the many best management practices that improve the quality of waters and habitats in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, the single best BMP may be the restoration of riparian forest buffers. Riparian forest buffers provide critical barriers between polluting landscapes and receiving waterways using relatively little land. Forest buffers reduce the adverse effect of excessive nitrogen, phosphorus, and suspended sediment inputs. Per acre, they likely provide more benefits and are more cost-effective than any other BMP, especially when considering the added high value habitat at the critical juncture of land and water.

Forest buffers have been part of the fabric of Bay restoration since 1994 when the Executive Council (EC) first called upon the Chesapeake Bay Program (CBP) to develop a policy *to "enhance riparian stewardship and efforts to conserve and restore riparian forest buffers (Directive 94-1)."* Since then, there have been many goals and plans put into place. These have met with varying degrees of success. The current effort, the Riparian Forest Buffer Initiative of 2014-2015, is the biggest, most concerted effort by state and federal agencies to increase riparian forest buffers in the watershed.

I. Goal, Outcome and Baseline

This management strategy identifies approaches for achieving the following goal and outcome:

_____ **Goal**: Restore, enhance and protect a network of land and water habitats to support fish and wildlife, and to afford other public benefits, including water quality, recreational uses and scenic value across the watershed.

_____ **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.

Baseline and Current Condition: See Figure 1. Average annual mileage for the past 4 years was 220 miles. In a 10 year period, from 2001-2010, average annual mileage was 650 miles.

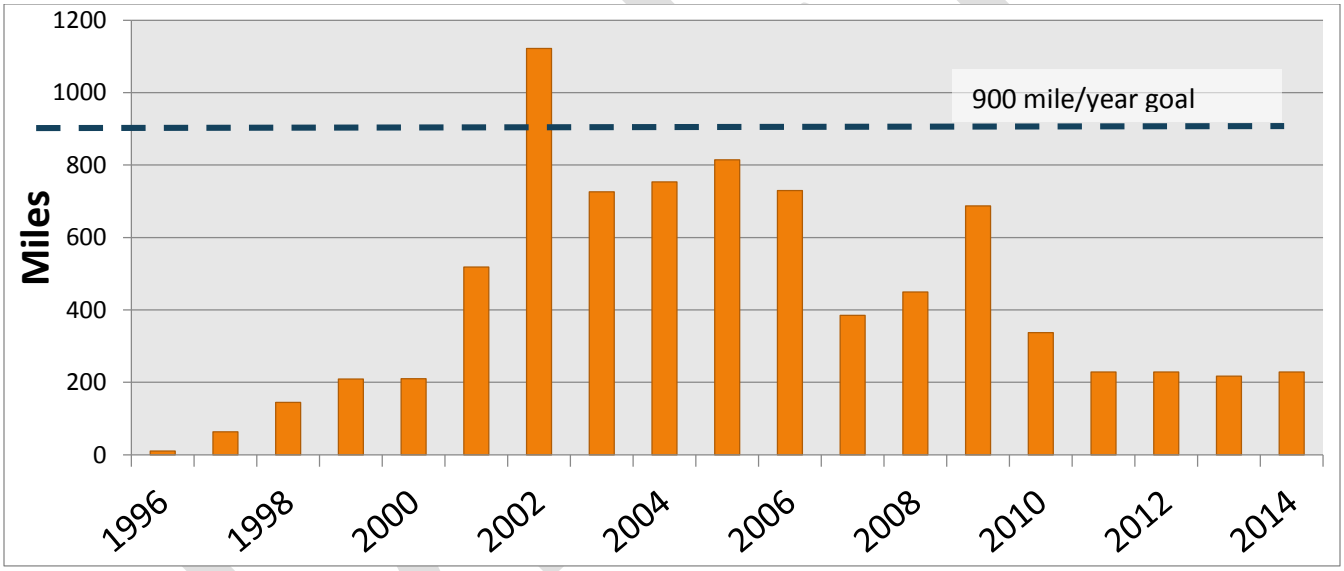

Figure 1. Miles of new riparian forest buffer reported by states to the Forestry Workgroup, CBP.

II. Participating Partners

The following partners have participated in the development of this strategy. Most participation has occurred as part of a State Task Force.

Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement Signatories

- Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
- State of Delaware
- State of West Virginia
- Commonwealth of Virginia
- State of New York
- State of Maryland

Other Key Participants:

Federal: FSA, NRCS, USFS, USGS, USFWS, DoD, EPA, NPS, USACE, Smithsonian Institute
Chesapeake Bay Commission
Non-Governmental:
Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Trout Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy, Cacapon Institute, Casey Trees, Parks and People (Baltimore and Washington DC), Delaware Center for Horticulture, Baltimore Greenspace, TreeBaltimore, Pennsylvania Conservation Districts, Stroud Water Research Center, Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited, Potomac Conservancy, VA Farm Bureau, VA Grain Producers, VA Agribusiness Council, VA Cattlemen's Association, VA Dairymen's Association, Maryland Farm Bureau Federation,

Local Participation:

Local Government Advisory Council, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Anne Arundel County, Arlington VA, Prince Georges County, Cumberland MD, Fairfax County, Annapolis MD, Baltimore County

III. Factors Influencing

The following are natural and human factors that influence the Partnership's ability to attain this outcome. Because the restoration of riparian forest buffers is an agricultural practice, many of the factors influencing this outcome are common to agriculture. These are not readily within our control, and will not be ranked as part of this Management Strategy:

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 or relate to management/leadership. All of these factors have been identified to be of the highest order of priority from the various groups that have been assembled as part of the Initiative (specifically, the Steering Committee, State Task Forces, and the Innovators' Roundtable). However, as part of a layered ranking exercise, the approximate order of importance was determined to be:

a. No strong signal from federal/state/local leadership that RFB enrollment is a high priority and other practices— one's that are less beneficial—successfully compete for riparian area space
b. Insufficient technical assistance
c. Lack of interagency coordination and staff training at all levels of government
d. Lackluster incentives, and incentives that are not strategic and do not wisely leverage resources
e. Federal funds go unused, sometimes for lack of a 20% match
f. Federal programs lack the flexibility states and landowners need
g. Many RFB acres enrolled in a 15-year contract are expiring instead of re-enrolling
h. Lack of education provided to landowners and technical assistance providers
i. Unsatisfactory survival of buffer plantings and maintenance issues

j. Complicated cost-share program application and implementation process accompanied by obfuscating communications
k. Lack of targeting riparian forest buffers to where they would do the most good
l. Lack of focus on permanent protection of riparian forest buffers; they are often lost when agricultural lands are converted to development.

IV. Current Efforts and Gaps

CBP partners have been working on the RFB outcome for over 20 years and the partnership has amassed a lot of knowledge about what works and what doesn't work. An important new effort to learn from the past and make program improvements 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 with each state and also at the regional level. This was an important step since the CBP Forestry Workgroup had provided sole leadership at the regional level for RFB, an agricultural practice.

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 1. 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.

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

Actions, Tools and Support to Empower Local Government and Others

The Local Government Advisory Council has been engaged in the process of developing this Management Strategy. More feedback on it will be solicited at their March meeting.

Targeting tools from federal and state government are available to local partners. These tools and high-resolution land cover imagery can help partners see how much opportunity exists in their area and where RFB program delivery should be targeted.

Other programs, tools, and support have been identified in the State Task Force reports and partially reflected in the Summary of them provided below.

V. Management Approaches

The Partnership will work together to carry out the following management approaches to achieve the Riparian Forest Buffer goal. These approaches seek to address the factors affecting our ability to meet the goal and the gaps previously identified as Strategic Elements (see Table 1).

Strategy Elements	Description	Management Approaches
Leadership	Landowners need clear messages on the best way to manage riparian areas	• 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)	• 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.	• 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	• 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	• 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.	• 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	• 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	• States look to expand easement options, especially using ag preservation programs
Non-ag lands	Suburban areas need programs to protect and establish buffers	• Work with local governments • Protect existing buffers when ag lands are converted • Expand on backyard buffer program • Apply for grants

Table 1. Strategic elements and management approaches to address them.

Management approaches in Table 1 were summarized from strategies identified in the Innovators' Roundtable (Appendix B) and through the draft State Task Force reports (Appendix C). Of these, the four critical umbrella approaches 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; *support verification*
  - 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

More specific recommendations from the State Task Force Reports to date can be found in Appendix

Approaches Targeted to Local Participation

- Many of the same approaches are also important at the local level, such as local leadership clearly expressing that RFB is a priority practice for the state to meet their water quality goals. Local governments should be involved with SWCD, RC&Ds, county offices of NRCS and FSA, and others working with landowners to ensure that the actions identified in this Strategy are taking root and having an effect
- Protect RFBs in local land use regulation- because local government has authority over conversion of ag land to another land use, encourage/empower local governments to protect RFBs on ag lands
- New programs for RFB on non-agricultural land need to be developed
- Local governments are also landowners and should make it a priority to restore riparian areas to forests wherever possible on public land.

Cross-Outcome Collaboration and Multiple Benefits

- As previously mentioned, riparian forest buffers provide multiple benefits; their restoration supports many of the outcomes of the new Agreement, most notably: water quality, brook trout, and land protection. Management approaches that specifically benefit these other outcomes are:

- Add staff (water quality)
- Expand use of RFB teams- turnkey operations that help with everything from enrollment to maintenance-- TU example (water quality)
- Conduct more training for TA providers (water quality)
- Increase incentives for TA providers (water quality)
- Create GIS maps showing where buffers are most needed (brook trout)
- Expand RFB easement options through state and local policies/programs (look specifically at ag preservation programs) (land conservation)

VI. Monitoring Progress

Current monitoring programs

Monitoring that looks at RFB restoration occurs on 100% of plantings that part of a cost-share program. Other forms of monitoring are looking at annual progress reported from 3 sources:

a) Contracted acres from FSA
   i) FSA data can also be reported monthly and at the county level
b) Number of acres reported by states to CB Model
c) Miles reported from Forestry Workgroup

New or proposed monitoring approaches

- Data derived from high-resolution satellite imagery are becoming more common and help monitor gain, loss, and survival of riparian forest buffers. Tools like the Land Image Analyst are available to facilitate interpretation of this imagery, but are not yet widely used.
- Reports from partners on progress on actions in Management Strategy
- Feedback on webinars and training that are proposed as part of the outreach strategy

VII. Assessing Progress

The Biennial Workplan will be our main tool for focusing collaboration across federal, state, local, and nongovernmental partners on the Riparian Forest Buffer Outcome. In addition to looking at program changes made at the regional level, we will track our progress in meeting the state actions set out in the State Task Force reports. Assessment of progress will be aligned with the cycle of state reporting for 2 Year Milestones for the TMDL, because riparian forest buffer data is critical to meeting these milestones. Examining the alignment of the three sources of RFB data listed above, will also indicate progress. As the first Biennial Workplan is nearing the end of its time window, another assessment process will be triggered to look at progress, challenges, and lessons learned from the first Workplan.

The Chesapeake Bay Program has extended the timeline for completing Biennial Workplans for the Management Strategy to Dec. 2015 so that states can integrate and align these Strategy actions with their next set of 2 Year Milestones for the TMDL. This will also allow for the inclusion of all significant actions from the Final RFB State Task Force Reports, to be completed March 20, 2015. CBP will work with partners on compiling a subset of priority actions for the Biennial Workplan later in the year after

this Management Strategy has been finalized in June 2015. We will solicit input from interested parties at that time.

VIII. Adaptively Manage

The Partnership will use the following approaches to ensure adaptive management:

- Tracking progress toward the annual 900 mile goal, as well as identifying trends and priority areas.
- Riparian Forest Buffer Initiative provides a means to engage additional partners in providing feedback on progress and actions in the Management Strategy.
- 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.
- 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.
- Monthly Forestry Workgroup meetings provide a regular venue for evaluating and adjusting particular strategies that support the annual 900 mile goal.
- 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 Workplan

A workplan to accompany this management strategy will be completed six months after this document is finalized. It will identify specific partner commitments for implementing the strategy and include the following information:

- Each key action
- Timeline for the action
- Expected outcome
- Partners responsible for each action
- Estimated resources

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.

Appendix C.
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.
         i) USDA FSA is currently updating the marginal pastureland rental rates. Each state will provide feedback on the revised rates and ensure that they reflect local conditions.
         ii) New York Department of Environmental Conservation is preparing to offer a new "practice enhancement payment" of $100/acre for the first 50 feet on either side of the stream. States are also asking the USDA FSA raise the riparian forest buffer incentive to 200% of the soil rental rate.
         iii) Delaware FSA is proposing to add a $200/acre bonus payment for up to 180 feet of new riparian forest buffers ($100/acre for reenrolling buffers).
         iv) Virginia is proposing to increase both state and federal incentives for riparian forest buffers enrolled in CREP. The Virginia Department of Conservation is proposing to increase its cost-share reimbursement to 50%. Combined with the USDA FSA cost-share, this will provide producers 100% cost-share for all eligible expenses with establishing a riparian forest buffer. The state is also requesting the USDA FSA raise the forest buffer incentive to 150% of the soil rental rate on both cropland and marginal pasture land.
      b) Adjust cost-share caps for riparian forest buffers and associated practices.
         i) States are requesting that USDA FSA headquarters provide flexibility for waiving cost-share caps. Requests less than $5,000 can be dealt with at local FSA offices. Requests between $5,000 and $20,000 can be handled by the State FSA office and requests greater than $20,000 by USDA FSA headquarters.
   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.
         i) Virginia and other states are seeking guidance from USDA how to implement this approach.

B. Improve Technical Assistance
   1. Improve staffing to provide better technical assistance for riparian forest buffers and related practices.
      a) Add staffing at local level to support riparian forest buffer enrollments and reenrollments.
         i) Each state is proposing to USDA that staff be added to address the strategies presented in their reports.
      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. Every state is developing mechanisms to place a priority on riparian forest buffers. Virginia is proposing to develop a coordinated strategy to communicate effectively the priority of this practice to field staff across multiple agencies.

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.).
    i) Pennsylvania is proposing to develop a set of regional CREP specialists that can be relied up on for regional assistance.
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.

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.)
    a) Each state is developing training programs. For example, Pennsylvania is conducting USDA FSA and NRCS staff trainings to increase their knowledge of riparian forest buffers, supporting practices and other related conservation programs.
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
        (1) New York is establishing a buffer team in partnership with the Upper Susquehanna Coalition that will conduct outreach with producers.
    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.
      i) Maryland and West Virginia are proposing to extend the establishment to 4-years.
   c) Consider new approaches and research of deer fencing, increased herbicide applications, specialized crews for establishment/maintenance.
      i) Maryland is proposing that maintenance funding ($10/acre, see below) be provided to the state and the state will pool the funding to coordinate maintenance crews.
      ii) West Virginia is seeking funding from USDA FSA to establish two riparian forest buffer circuit rider teams comprised of an FSA program technician, NRCS soil conservationist, and a service forester to conduct outreach and project implementation.

2) Maintenance and Compliance
   a) Seek higher maintenance rates
      i) Maryland, New York and West Virginia are proposing to increase the maintenance incentive payment from $5/acre to $10/acre or up to $150/acre over a 15-year contract.
   b) Streamline the weed control approval process (number of field visits)
   c) Increase annual (in-field) status reviews/monitoring
      i) Pennsylvania is proposing to conduct annual site visits for the first five years after planting to assess survival, discuss maintenance needs and provide other technical assistance.
   d) 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.
      i) Maryland is seeking to allow grass filter strips that have naturally regenerated in to woody buffers into a wildlife habitat buffer.

3) Re-enrollment
   a) Prioritize technical assistance resources to expiring CP22s
      i) Pennsylvania is developing a campaign to provide information to landowners about reenrollment requirements and assess tree survival at least two-years prior to the end of a contract.
      ii) West Virginia is seeking to allow reenrolling acres to receive a maintenance payment

E. Program/Policy/Leadership Actions
   1. Expand the acreage cap of CREP
      a) West Virginia is requesting that their cap be expanded from 9,160 acres to 12,000 acres to accommodate adding the last part of the Chesapeake Bay watershed into CREP, Monroe County.
      b) Virginia is requesting an increase of 25,000 acres to 30,000 acres.

2. Allow for flexibility to pay partial Practice Incentive Payments (PIPs).
    a) All states are seeking this flexibility as it will allow USDA FSA to pay producers portions of their PIP as they install independent components of a riparian forest buffer practice (e.g. fencing).
3. Ensure inclusion of non-CP22 riparian forest buffers in WIP calculations.
    a) West Virginia and other states are seeking to develop a process for allowing other practices that meet the standards of a riparian forest buffer to be counted as such (e.g. wildlife habitat buffers).
4. Provide flexibility on marginal pastureland eligibility determinations.
5. 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.
    a) All states are seeking this flexibility from USDA Headquarters, but it is particularly important to New York and West Virginia.
6. 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.
    a) Maryland is seeking to use the CREP wildlife habitat buffer eligible along drainage ditches provided that the 15 feet closest to the ditch is maintained in grass.
7. Provide better accounting of current RFB activity including NRCS and State programs.
8. Farm Service Agency and NRCS goals should reflect state WIP targets.
9. Lack of coordination with other federal, state, and private conservation funding programs on how investments can be leveraged.

F. <u>Conservation</u>
1. Revive easement programs at state level.
2. Work with local governments to protect existing buffers when ag lands are converted.
3. Utilize state/local/private easement to provide long-term resource protection.

G. <u>Increase Use of Tools to Prioritize RFB Efforts</u>
1. Virginia FSA and partners are proposing to expand the use of GIS with common land unit, soils, slope, erodibility and other data sets to target landowner outreach.
2. Re-enrollments (outreach)
3. Geographic
    a) for water quality
    b) for habitat
    c) lots of new tools/data to use
4. Demographic
    a) use market research (see above)
    b) pastures and larger farms with streams