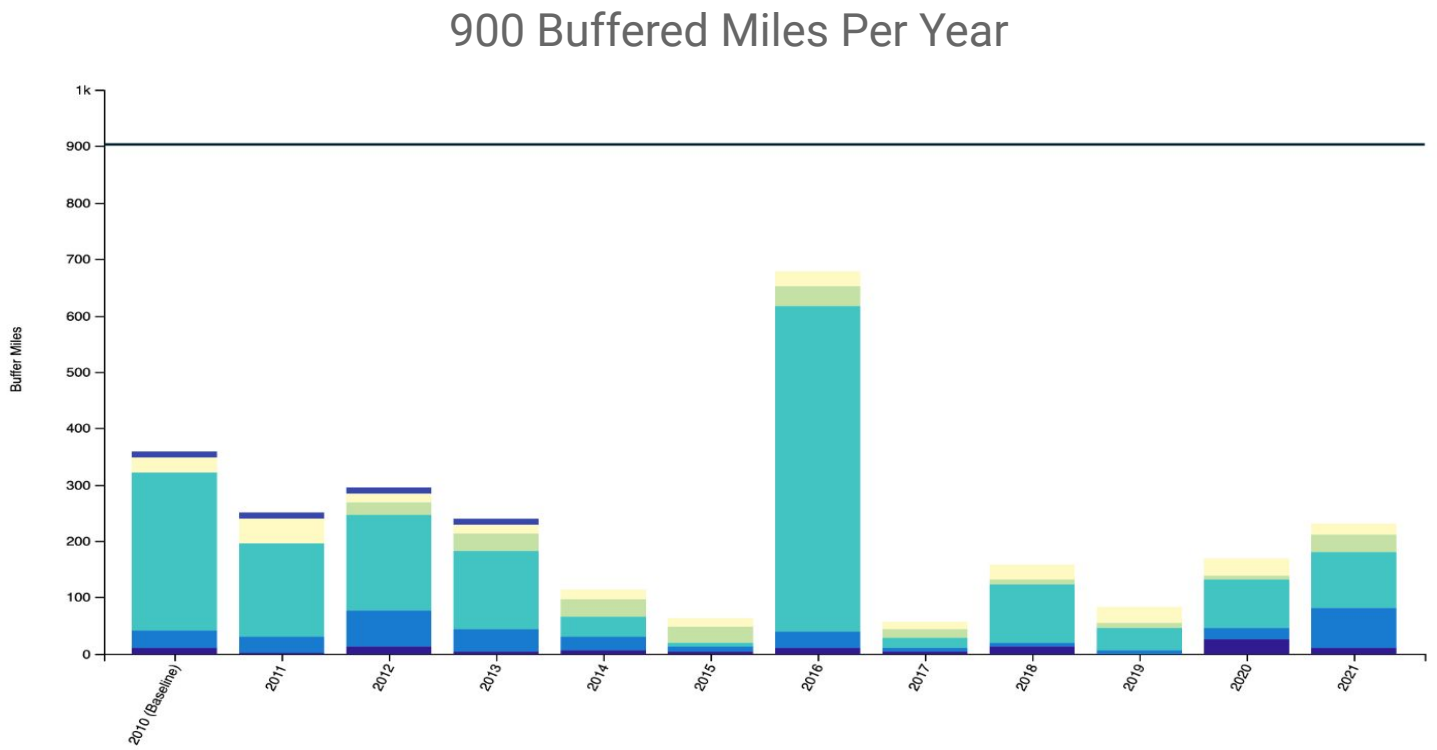
Accelerating Progress on Riparian Forest Buffer Goals:

Financial and Human Capacity Factors

Background

- C-Stream Program
- Junior at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
- Studying Finance and Sustainability

RFB Goal in the CB Agreement



Various outcomes helped by RFB

Sustainable Fisheries

Vital Habitats

Water Quality

Climate Resilience

Original Question and Project

Tasked with evaluating financial and human capacity needed for accelerating RFB planting

Information Collection

- Snowball method used for interview
- Partners of the forestry workgroup surveyed and interviewed
- Questions relating staffing, funding sources and programs

Partners Surveyed: (DCNR) , (USC), (Alliance Riparian Rangers), (MD DNR), (NRCS), (Cacapon Institute), (DOF), (JRA), (Alliance for the Bay), (Alliance Sustainable Dairy Initiative),(Alliance Upper James River), (Carroll Co MD DNR), (Frederick Co MD Project CreekReleaf)

Results

20-35 Acres

Per full time staff person per year mainly providing coordination and project planning

- Planting and Maintenance typically being contracted out or volunteers being utilized
- The different partnerships and programs have effects on this range
- Areas differ in contractor availability
- Yearly fluctuations in types of projects (larger or smaller) planted

Staffing needed to close gap

311-397 FTE

Considerations

- This amount staff would require a large increase in contractor capacity and internal capacities

- Current staff estimated around 147-85 FTE (Based on 2021 Buffer #s)

Case studies

In my report I will be looking at a couple programs that informed some of my challenges and opportunities

Here are just two of the programs whose innovative approaches might provide some takeaways

James River Buffer Program

- Turnkey program mainly for those who don't meet CREP requirements in the James River Basin
- VEE has been an amazing funding sources allowing them to expand capacity
- Allowed for landowners to implement buffers with maintenance at no cost or effort to them
- Their stewardship program helps with maintenance on CREP buffers and utilizes interns for survival checks

Sustainable Dairy PA

- Private sector involvement
- Connected large corporations with mean to meet their Water Quality goals (Turkey Hill) or reduction of emissions in their supply chain (Hersey)
- Work done with the MD VA dairy cooperative allowed them to connect to hard to reach communities

Challenges

- Not enough funding from grantees for maintenance and staff
- Contractor availability is limited in some places
- Challenges with tracking and reporting
- Many buffer programs under larger organizations can not expand much more until the larger organization expands
- Engineers are extremely hard to hire in most places

Opportunities

- Turnkey model has been very successful limited need to do outreach; high demand
- Funding is at record level for trees
- When community building is a priority especially in more urban environments, the focus can be community first and trees come along with it
- Funding Sources such as VEE, NWFW, and Chesapeake Bay Trust Fund are great sources of funding that have
- Farmers are more interested in other AG BMPs when buffers are required to get funding for the rest, the farmers have no problem
- Working with large corporations who have environmental goals to meet is definitely a possibility

Recommendations

- Utilize contractor when possible for efficiency
- Need development of more funding sources that can pool money for trees, similar to VEE, Chesapeake Bay Trust, and NFWF
- Allow for more flexible funding sources that help with staffing and maintenance
- Allow for creation or expansion of turnkey programs in other nonprofits and NGO’s
- More projects with private sector involvement i.e., Sustainable Dairy Initiative

Next Steps/Further Research Paths

- Effectiveness of buffers on easement despite lower demand, is it more productive?
- Contractor capacity and market, what will the lag be if demand increases?
- Opportunities to involve large corporations
- Explore current labor market and staff working on buffers
- Potential demand with large increase in capacity

Feedback

Any input or comments for consideration in the final report