

Chesapeake Riparian Forest Buffer 2022 Leadership Workshop: Summary and Next Steps

On April 27th, the Chesapeake Bay Program convened the 2022 Chesapeake Riparian Forest Buffer Leadership Workshop at the request of the Management Board's Outcome Attainability Team. Chesapeake Bay partners need to rapidly accelerate riparian forest buffer (RFB) implementation due to the low rate of implementation and the large goals set for RFBs in the jurisdictional and Conowingo WIPs and the 2014 Watershed Agreement. To this end, the objectives of the workshop were to 1) discuss state RFB Action Strategies for increasing the rate of forest buffer restoration and 2) develop recommendations for specific roles for the Partnership in advancing buffer goals.

Each state was asked to present their draft RFB Action Strategy at the workshop. Based on feedback and information shared at the workshop, the states now have the opportunity to refine their Action Strategies. **States should be working to have their Action Strategies finalized by June 27th** (60 days following the workshop). Each state should have their PSC representative review and approve their action plan prior to finalization so the Strategies can be presented and endorsed by the PSC representative at the July 19th PSC meeting. Appropriate Chesapeake Bay Program staff are available to review draft Action Strategies upon request. To do this, draft Strategies should be sent to Sophie Waterman (swaterman@chesapeakebay.net) by May 27th. *Further guidance on questions that should be considered in the RFB Action Strategies can be found [here](#).*

Workshop Highlights:

Approximately 95 people attended the April 27th workshop, including PSC and MB representatives and their delegates. PA DCNR Secretary Cindy Dunn convened the workshop and set the stage for the day. The first section of the workshop included a series of short introductory presentations, which provided background information on previous RFB efforts, actions for RFBs proposed through the Strategy Review System process, and information on the current state of the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) in the Watershed.

Following the introductory presentations, each state presented their Action Strategies to the group. There was time for discussion following each presentation as well as time for sharing reflections from all Action Strategy presentations through a Mentimeter exercise. Some common themes from the Mentimeter reflections included:

- Recognition of the value of learning from one another about what is working and opportunities for overcoming barriers, including creative partnerships and funding sources for buffers.
- Recognition that there are some similar challenges being faced in many states, including how to ensure adequate maintenance, inadequate staffing capacity to meet technical assistance need, and effectively utilizing complex USDA programs.
- Identification of a need for more interstate coordination to address common challenges.
- States that primarily or exclusively rely on CREP to fund RFB implementation would benefit from other, more flexible, RFB funding and programs. There were many good examples shared of state and NGO programs designed to complement CREP and facilitate additional buffer

implementation. Particularly effective buffer programs share some common characteristics, including:

- Efficient one-stop shop for technical and financial assistance
- No out-of-pocket costs for landowners
- Available to non-agricultural landowners
- Maintenance included
- Quick and easy to enroll and get buffers planted (continual operations)

Each state also met in breakout groups to discuss opportunities for strengthening their plans, to develop a path forward for finalizing their plans, and to help identify potential roles the Partnership could play in supporting implementation of state RFB Action Strategies. Although there is room for much more discussion on roles for the Partnership, a few ideas that were proposed over the course of the day included:

- Exploring the potential to tie Action Strategy implementation to Milestone reporting to be monitored by CBP.
- Facilitating cross-boundary collaboration to address common challenges.
- Considering the development of coordinated recommendations to improve CREP agreements and identify other opportunities through the new Farm Bill (potentially through a separate meeting with USDA partners).
- Identifying federal funding streams that could be dedicated specifically to RFB implementation.

Summary of Pre-Workshop Activities:

To help state leaders prepare for the April 27th workshop, CBP and the Forestry Workgroup organized two pre-workshop webinars and a pre-workshop synthesis effort. The webinars were designed to share relevant and timely information with state leads and provide an opportunity to discuss ways this information could be incorporated into state Action Strategies. The first webinar (March 16th) focused on technical assistance, outreach and social science for RFBs and the second webinar (March 30th) focused on policy, funding and financing for RFBs. Links to the recordings of both webinars are available below.

For the pre-workshop synthesis effort, CBP contracted with ERG to synthesize information from each watershed jurisdiction on current buffer programs and obstacles to improving or expanding buffer programs. ERG held virtual consultation meetings with key policy/program personnel and state FWG representatives in March. Findings from this synthesis effort were provided back to the jurisdictions in advance of the April workshop to support Action Strategy development. State-level summaries from the synthesis effort are available via the April 27th Workshop resources link below.

To Learn More:

- [April 27th Workshop recording and resources](#) (including introductory presentations, state Action Strategy presentations, state RFB summaries from discussions with ERG)
- [Technical Assistance, Outreach and Social Science for RFBs: webinar recording and resources](#)
- [Policy and Funding/Financing for RFBs: webinar recording and resources](#)