Updating the Riparian Forest Buffer Outcome

March 2025 Forestry Workgroup

FOREST BUFFER OUTCOME

OUTCOME DISPOSITION ADVICE TO MANAGEMENT BOARD:

UPDATE

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.

RECENT PROGRESS
INCREASE

OUTLOOK
OFF COURSE

GOAL: Vital Habitats
LEAD: Water Quality Goal Team- Forestry Workgroup

Assessment

- Outcome is foundational to meeting multiple Bay Program goals, including water quality goals under the TMDL
- Inclusion of forest buffers in the Agreement has driven increased investments and programmatic focus towards the practice, while enabling greater regional coordination

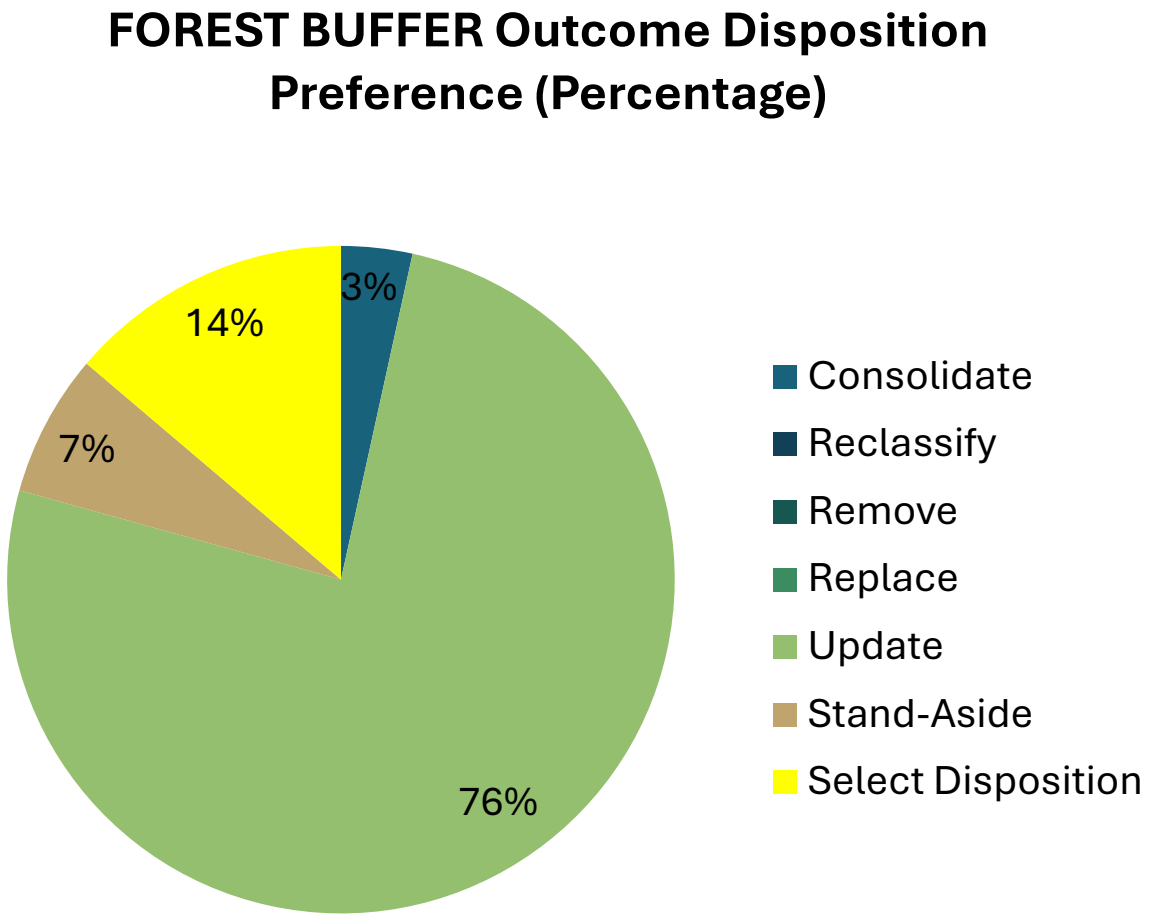
Recommendations

- Maintain both a riparian forest cover target and an annual planting target in the updated outcome
- Update to re-establish reasonable targets and timelines that are grounded in science
- Update to reflect increased focus on conservation and maintenance

Presented by: Katie Brownson

Feedback from the Management Board

- Generally broad support for the FWG recommendations
- Consider consolidating Riparian Forest Buffers and Tree Canopy into a single Forest Outcome
- Support shifting away from miles/year to acres/year
- Support emphasis on maintenance and permanent protection
- Push for more attainable/realistic metrics



Considerations for general outcome language updates

FOREST BUFFER 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.

- Any proposed updates to opening sentence?
  - Make the benefits to people more explicit?
  - Can/should the outcome be made more relatable and easy to understand?
- Add maintenance to outcome language? “Maintain and conserve existing buffers…”?

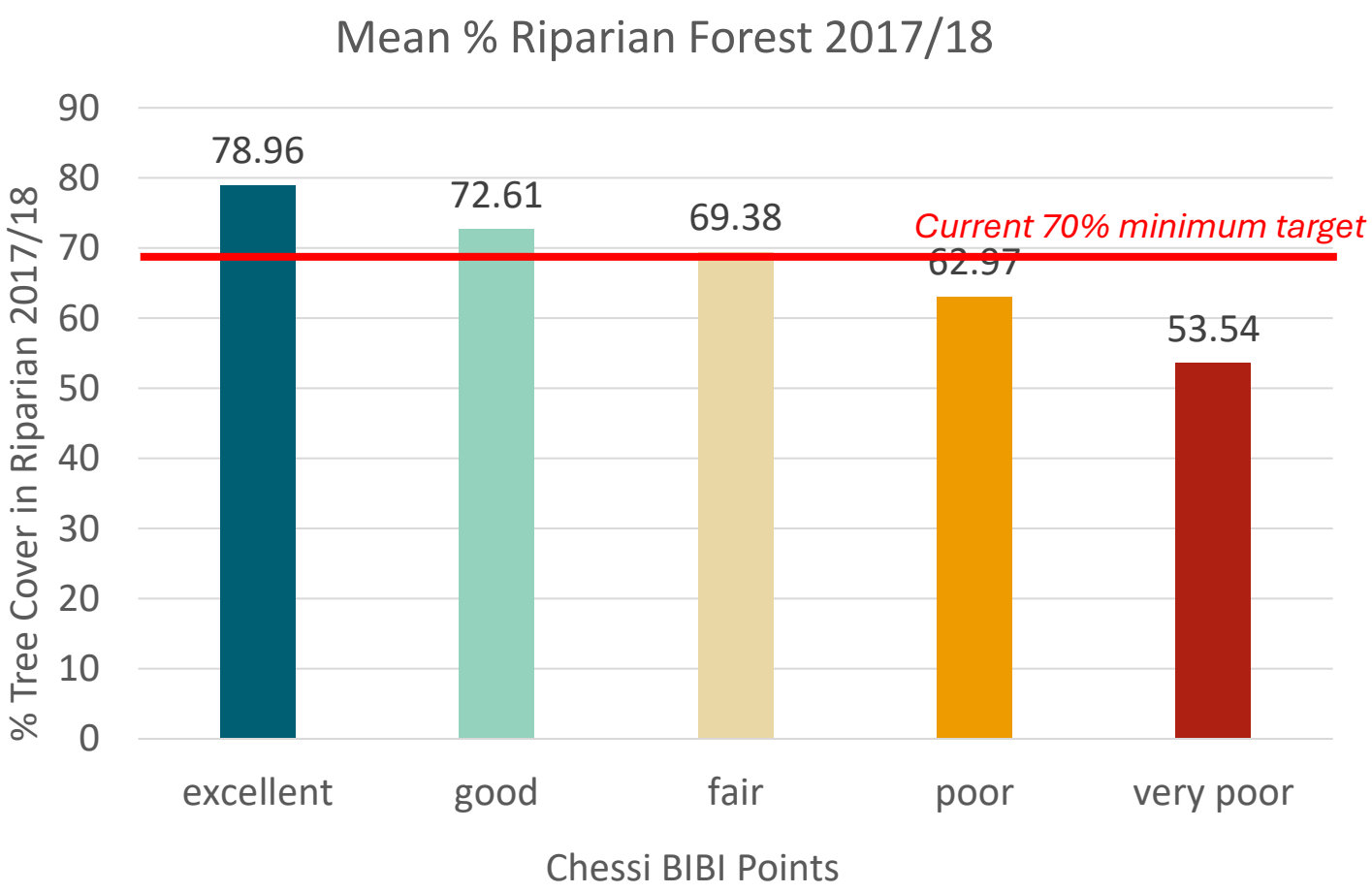
Numeric target updates: Riparian Forest Cover

Draft 2024 edition LULC data

Jurisdiction	Riparian Land Area	Forest Cover Acres, 2013/2014	Forest Cover %, 2013/2014	Forest Cover Acres, 2021/2022	Forest Cover %, 2021/2022	Net Change in Acres	Net Change in %
DE	55,140	31,328.2	56.82%	30,991.5	56.21%	-336.8	-0.61%
DC	1,737	1,008.4	58.05%	1,010.6	58.18%	2.2	0.13%
MD	689,035	425,793.7	61.80%	423,965.4	61.53%	-1,828.3	-0.27%
NY	331,622	213,976.2	64.52%	210,985.0	63.62%	-2,991.3	-0.90%
PA	1,422,902	1,005,420.3	70.66%	998,003.9	70.14%	-7,416.4	-0.52%
VA	1,879,844	1,411,746.3	75.10%	1,384,393.7	73.64%	-27,352.6	-1.46%
WV	269,915	206,051.9	76.34%	204,033.5	75.59%	-2,018.3	-0.75%
Total Watershed	4,650,195	3,295,325.0	70.86%	3,253,383.6	**69.96%**	**-41,941.4**	-0.90%

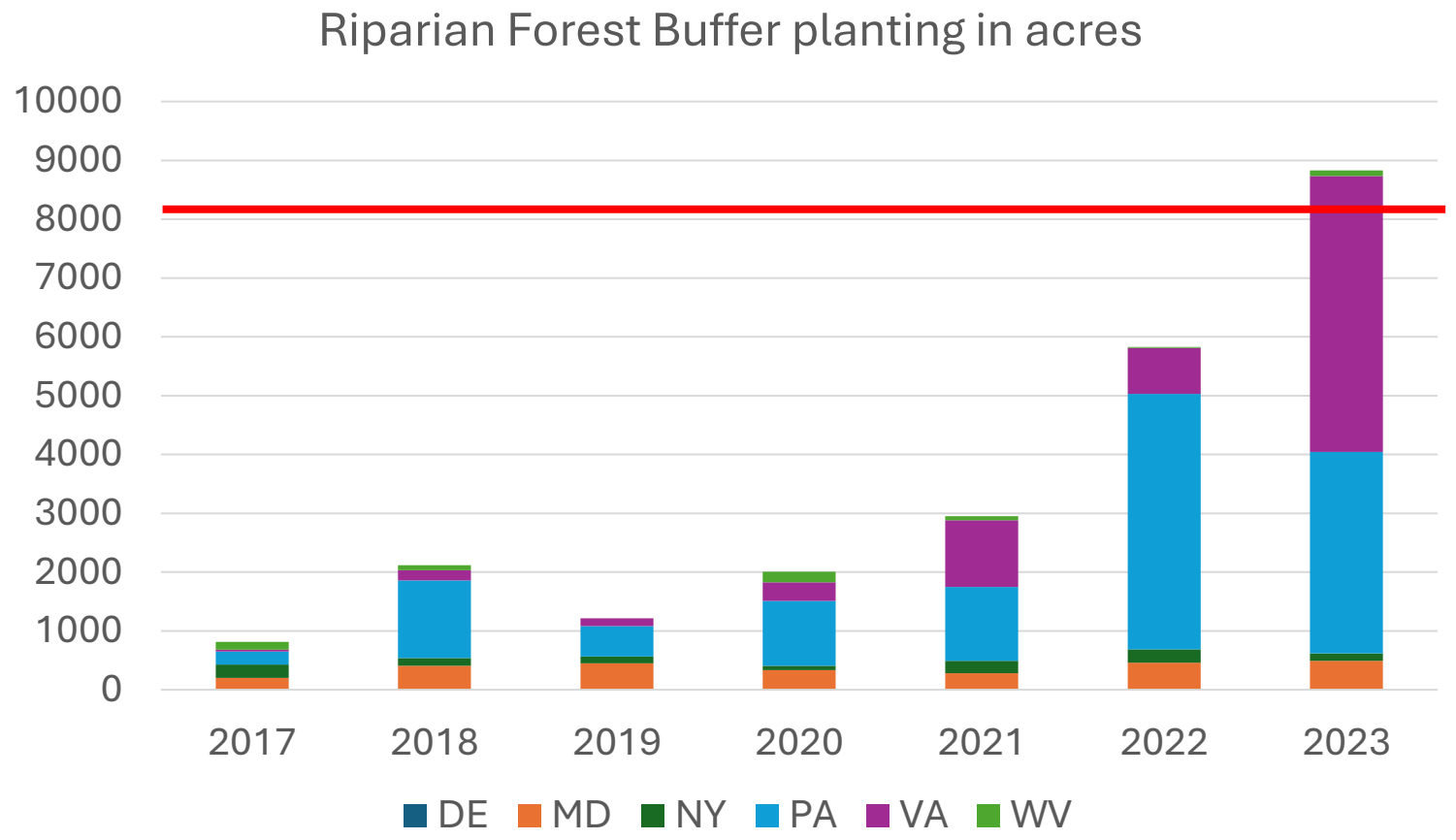
Numeric target updates: Riparian Forest Cover

- Move away from setting a “minimum” target?
- Would 75% be an appropriate long-term target to support achieving improved stream health?
- 234,263 additional acres of riparian forest needed to reach 75%
- 75% by 2050? 72% by 2035?



Numeric target updates: Annual planting

- 900 miles/year= 10,909 acres/year (assuming 100 ft buffer widths)
- 8,830 acres planted in 2023
- 5,775 acres planted on average 2021-2023
- To achieve 75% by 2050 (assuming no loss) from 2022 LULC baseline, would need 8,367 acres/year



Numeric target updates: Annual planting

- Interest in setting state-level goals in addition to watershed-wide goals?
  - These could be outputs that get defined later
- Set a 10-year goal and a 2050 stretch goal?
- Potential goal for 2035:
  - Plant XX acres/year
  - 72% of riparian areas forested would require 7,289 acres/year

Discussion