

Chesapeake Riparian Forest Buffer Initiative

Common Barriers to Establishing Successful Riparian Forest Buffers

Programmatic Barriers

- Inconsistent availability of the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program 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 Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program in application rankings. This limits the ability to leverage funding and provide a substantial incentive for riparian forest buffers.
- State Farm Service Agency and Natural Resources Conservation Service goals do not include state Watershed Implementation Targets. The lack of common goals creates a disconnect between state and federal priorities.
- Lack of coordination with other federal, state, and private conservation funding programs on how investments can be leveraged.
- State Farm Service Agency and Natural Resources Conservation Service 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.