PSC Briefing October 12, 2018

Chesapeake Bay Program
Science. Restoration. Partnership.

# Riparian Forest Buffers

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*Forest Buffer Action Team*

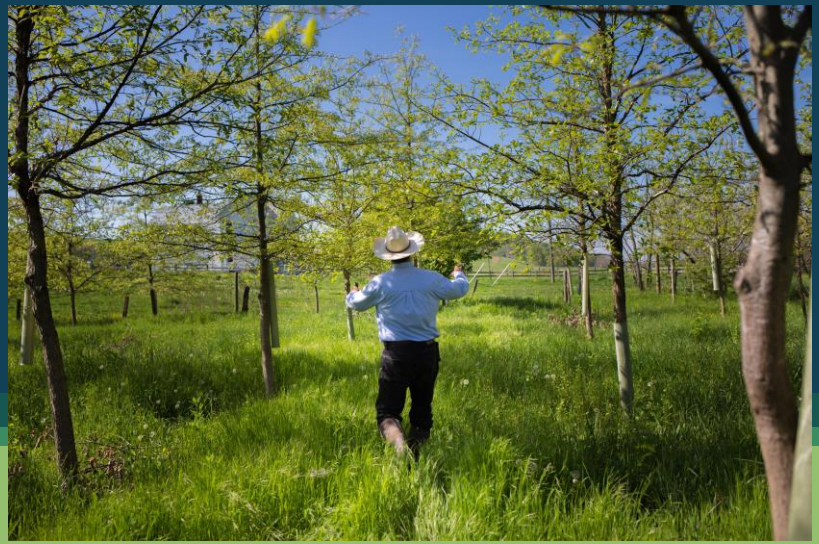
*Through the* Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement*, the Chesapeake Bay Program has committed to…*

## Vital Habitats Goal

Riparian Forest Buffer Outcome*: 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.

*Multiple Environmental and Economic Benefits…*

**wildlife, wetland, and aquatic habitat, air and water quality.**
**They are regenerative, climate resilient, long-lasting, cost-effective, agricultural funding, $$benefits to farmer, etc.**

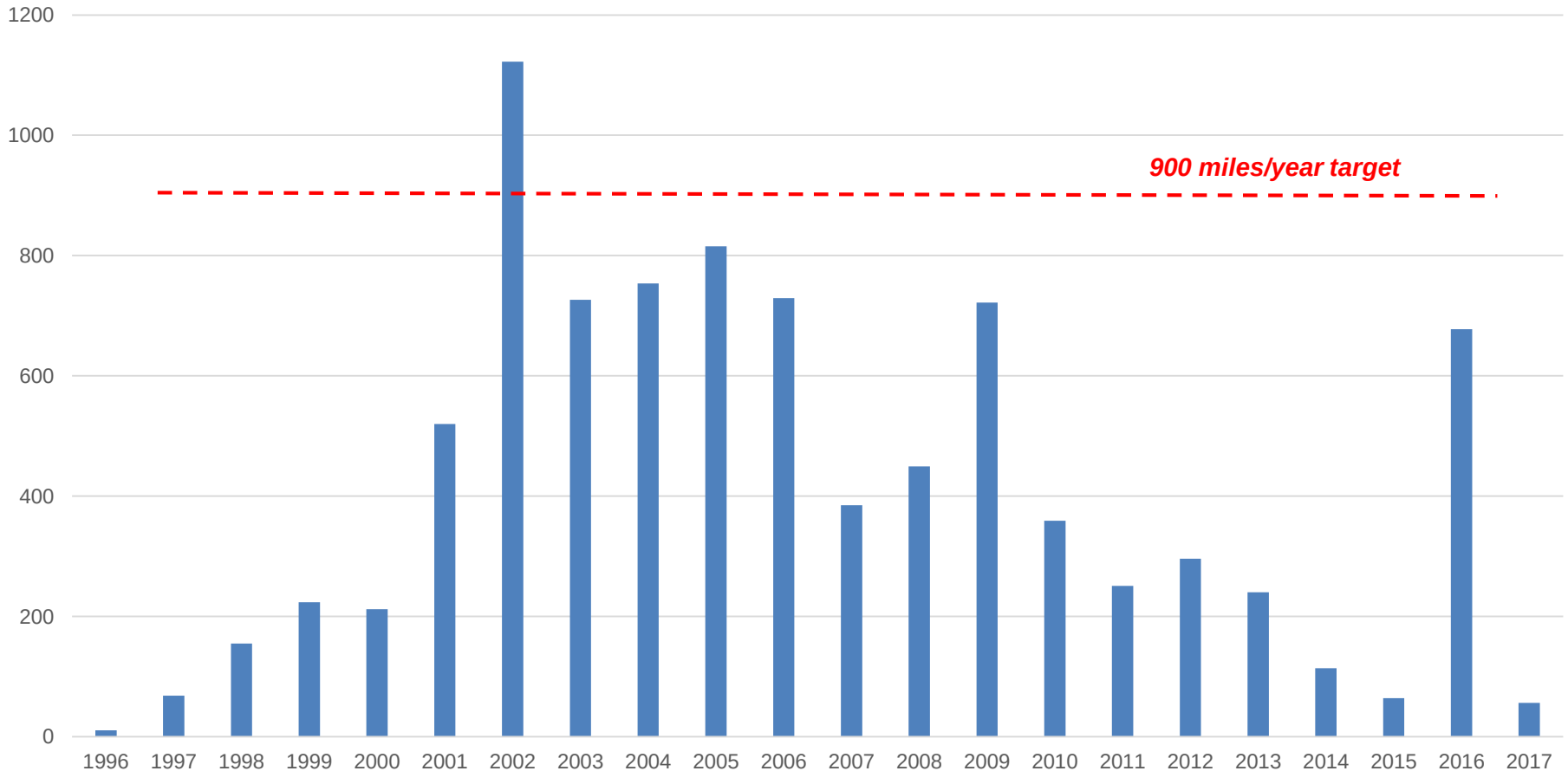


# FORESTED RIPARIAN BUFFERS ARE NECESSARY FOR ECOSYSTEM FUNCTIONING AND MEETING THE BAY TMDL.

Before

After

# Miles of Riparian Forest Buffers Reported 1996-2017

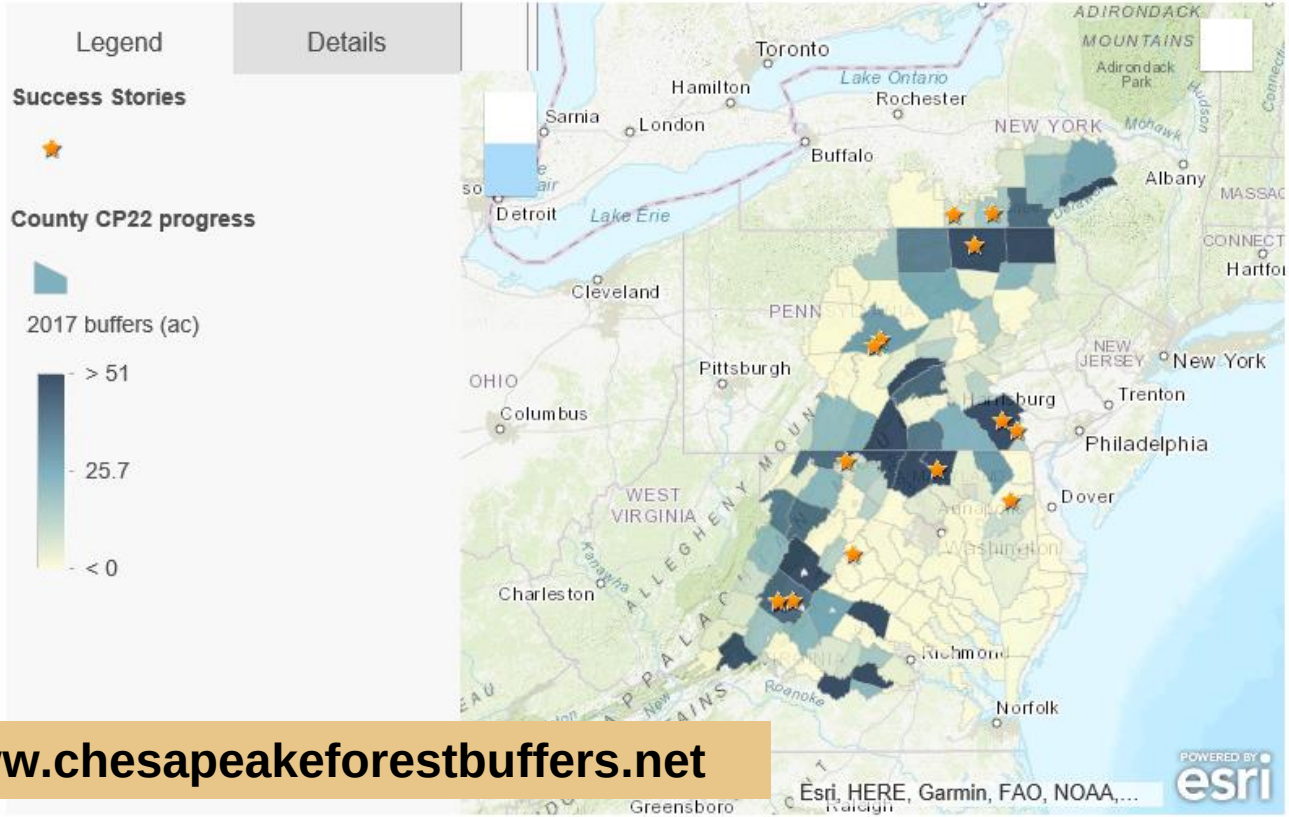


# Need for Riparian Forest Buffers to meet TMDL…

- Phase II WIPs called for ~**400,000** new *acres* by 2025.
- 2009-2017 ➡ ~100,000 acres (25%)
- Phase III WIPs: ?
- Need for wider buffers

# Riparian Forest Buffer Progress in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed

Find out 2017's new acres of forest buffers in your county to date and learn about forest buffer initiative success stories from across the watershed.




**www.chesapeakeforestbuffers.net**

## What We Want

**Focus on improved implementation**

**Elevate buffer needs through Policy/Leadership**

**Align timing of verification and re-enrollment**

# What has worked:

- PA leadership example
- Teamwork in dark blue counties
- The landowner is asked and educated
- There is additional $ incentive
- Taking these steps have shown near perfect enrollment success
- There is outside assistance to maintain the buffer

# What hasn't worked

- Lack of sustained leadership support
- Keeping RFB programs open and fully operational in each state
- High staff turnover, low numbers of TSPs
- Need for buffer maintenance program at state level
- Competing programs for critical riparian area
- No effort in many localities and TSPs
- Slow pace-- need to greatly accelerate efforts
- Non-Ag lands (not being addressed)

**Buffers remain at record lows--increasing acreage is very doable but lacks strong, high-level leadership and focused implementation.**

# Key Takeaways…

*Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is key tool but availability is inconsistent. **Additional programs are needed**.

* **Clearer direction from state leadership** could help prioritize RFB.

*In 2015-2016, each state produced a **RFB Task Force report** with specific, needed actions. These are still relevant.

# To Improve Implementation…

- Create fully-functioning local teams where needed
- Integrate RFB upfront in farm plans
  --Address flow issues in fields
- Increase Technical Asst using Consv Districts and trusted farm consultants (e.g., TU, Red Barn, CBF, ACB) … salute to *Boots on the Ground*
- Make It Easy-- provide comprehensive services for landowners (sign-up, maintenance, etc.)
- Notch up conservation of RFBs

# Elevate Buffer Needs Through Policy/Leadership


- Increase leadership/coordination at state level
  - State programs/policy should reflect WIP Phase III needs
- Find stable funding/plan to keep RFB trained staff
- Develop programs on non-Ag lands using e.g., state, 319, or private conservation financing.
- Revisit State Task Force Reports
- Create Baywide communication/outreach plan

# Perspective:
## High Resolution Data

There are ~1.4 million acres of riparian area in crop, pasture or turf in the watershed.

Approximately 68% of riparian area is in natural land cover.

https://chesbay.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=b52315eda326468b

ConnectHR: Login | USFS Ches Bay P... | RFB Lessons Lear... | Riparian Fore...

# Riparian Forest Buffers Thingamabob

Chesapeake Bay Program

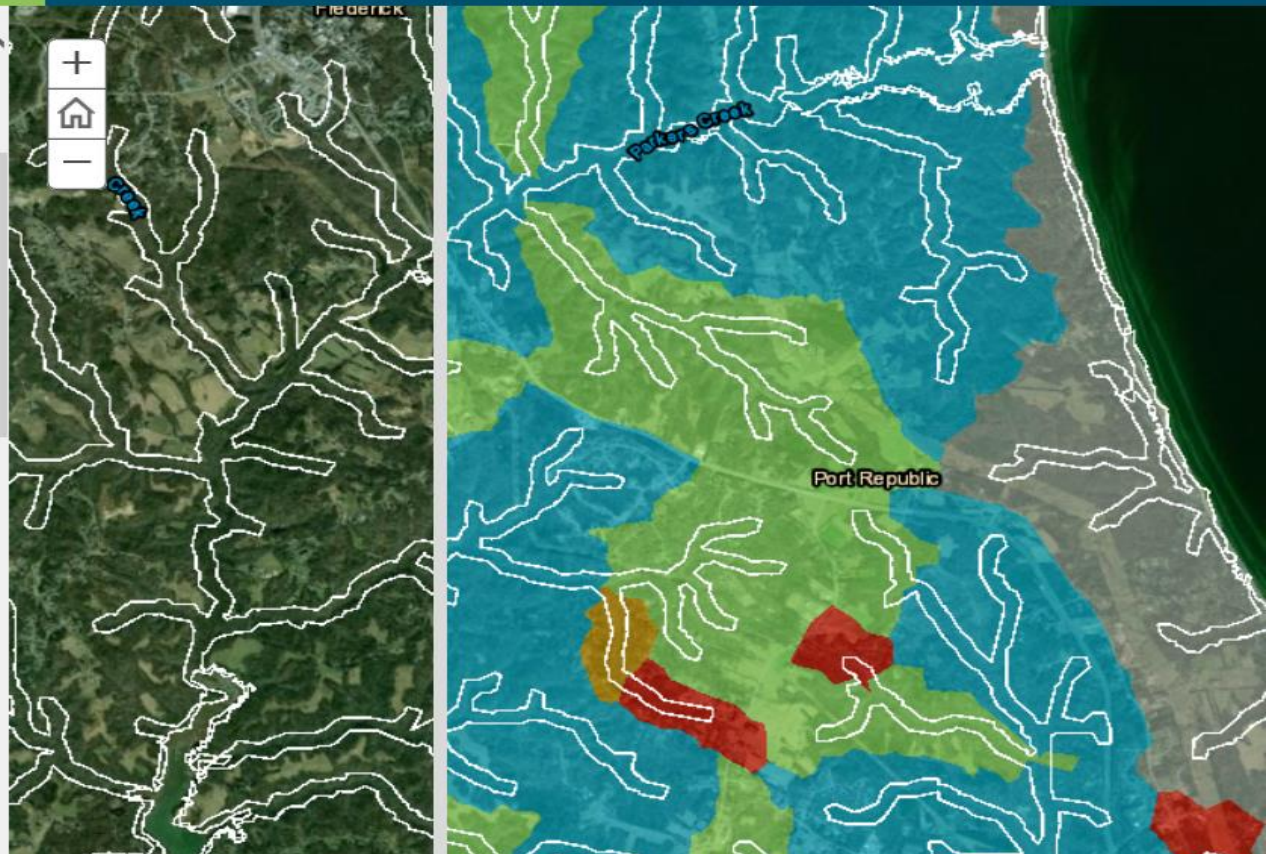
Overview | Status | Progress | Opportunities

## Cross-GIT - Restoration Composite

## Sustainable Fisheries - National Fish Habitat Plan Risk of Habitat Degradation

The National Fish Habitat Partnership compiled freshwater datasets available at the national scale to develop habitat vulnerability scores across the United States. Datasets included anthropogenic disturbances and accounted for natural variation at different spatial scales. Chesapeake Bay watershed scores depict the current risk of habitat degradation and do not represent regional or local data sets for specific watersheds or geographies. The most limiting disturbances for Chesapeake Bay habitats were found to be agriculture, urbanization, mining and nutrients.

National Fish Habitat Action Plan - Risk of Fish Habitat Degradation



# RFB Action Team Emphasis Areas

- Be responsive to EC Ag Directive
- Work with Communication Team on Baywide Strategy
- Do Lean Process for RFB in PA
- Expand and develop maintenance programs
- Develop non-Ag options
- Trainings on Decision Support Dashboard
- Work toward widespread RCPP supporting RFB
- Track Progress on RFB Workplan
- Revisit Task Force Reports

# PSC Discussion questions:

1) What role does the PSC envision for themselves in accelerating RFB restoration?

2) What deliverable from the Action Team would be most useful?