

Maryland Riparian Forest Buffer Initiative State Task Force Final Report



Contents

1. Executive Summary	2
2. Current Baseline and Goals	7
3. Agencies and Groups Participating in the Strategy	8
4. Current Programs and Gaps	10
5. Factors Influencing Ability to Meet Goal	13
6. Recommendations and Management Approach	16
7. Work plan.....	22
Appendix A: Listening Session Participants.....	26
Appendix B: Maryland CREP Accomplishments.....	28
Appendix C: USDA Request for Financial Assistance and Policy Flexibility.....	30

1. Executive Summary

The USDA partnership agreements and USDA cost share assistance has allowed Chesapeake Bay partners to restore over 4,000 miles of riparian buffers between 2002 and 2007, averaging 830 miles per year. The current goal is to have 70 percent of the riparian acres forested by 2036. Buffers have been, and will continue to be, among the most important components of the Chesapeake Bay Recovery Program.

As part of Maryland's Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP), the state has proposed to plant 1,546 new acres of riparian forest buffers (RFBs) by 2025 or 155 acres per year. In 2012-2014, Maryland met or exceeded its annual WIP goals for riparian forest buffers. Yet challenges remain to continuing success, striving for accelerated adoption and meeting the large number CREP contract reenrollments over the next several years.

To meet these challenges, the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service and Farm Service Agency hosted a series of producer meetings in the fall of 2014. These meetings offered producer and other partners the opportunity to offer ideas for improving RFB programs including financial incentives, outreach and technical assistance. Following these meetings, state partners participated in a series of task force meetings to transform the ideas gathered at the producer meetings into the series of recommended strategies presented here.

Maryland's Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is the primary tool for protecting existing RFBs and increasing enrollment in new riparian forest buffers. NRCS programs, such as The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), also provide some increases in enrollment, long-term protection and ancillary benefits through in field practices. Maryland Department of Agriculture provides important cost share and signing incentive payments for RFBs enrolled in CREP through the Maryland Agricultural Water Quality Cost Share Program as well as technical assistance, and Maryland Department of Natural Resources provides technical and financial assistance to implement and conserve RFBs, including easements.

As the first CREP program in the country, Maryland has a long and proud history of state, federal and local partnering on conservation. Maryland has a broad, diverse base of agency and non-governmental organization partners and seeks to help revitalize RFB enrollments, in part, through a robust, coordinated, multi-partner outreach campaign that draws producer and landowner attention to this program and to improvements that will be made as a result of this task force process. In addition, reenrollment is a particularly significant concern in Maryland given the length and success of the Maryland CREP. In the next 5 years, over 1,100 CREP riparian forest buffer (CP22) contracts on over 12,600 acres will expire. Reenrollment is a key priority to maintaining current water quality and wildlife habitat gains.

One of the important lessons learned in the Maryland experience is the challenge of preventing grass buffers from transitioning to forest buffers. For interested participants, Maryland partners are recommending a process to allow the conversion of some grass filter strips to RFBs and retain compliance with CREP. In addition, Maryland is proposing to continue and investigate opportunities to increase funding for RFB easements.

Many of Maryland's CREP RFBs on the Western shore of the Chesapeake Bay occur on marginal pastureland and are associated with livestock or dairy production. Many of the operations are relatively small and the land is owned and operated by part-time producers. Producers often view the program as an opportunity to increase the value and usefulness of their operations by developing exclusion fencing of the stream, water tanks and stream crossings while enhancing the environmental benefits. The value of these capital enhancements can often far exceed the value of annual rental payments and is the principle economic factor that causes producers to enroll. The enhanced property value associated with the capital improvements and the benefits associated with improved grazing distribution and improved herd health must offset the income loss and operation and maintenance costs associated with participating in the program in order for a producer to enroll. Producers' interest in participation is also impacted by outreach activities, producers' preconceived thoughts on the positive and negative impacts of enrollment, the ability to provide timely and professional service to the producer, and federal policies like the adjusted gross income limits.

On the Eastern Shore of the Chesapeake Bay, most of the RFB enrollment occurs on cropland. This is a high priority area for Maryland as seven Eastern Shore Counties (Dorchester, Caroline, Kent, Queen Anne, Somerset, Wicomico, and Worcester) are estimated to have less than 70% of their stream miles buffered or partially buffered. Grain production (corn/soybeans/wheat) is the primary use of the cropland, and includes some large to very large farm operations. Many farm operations typically lease a significant amount of their land, and most of these leases are relative short in duration (< 3 years in length). Landowners who enroll in the CREP program generally provide little or no compensation to the producer when the land is enrolled in a RFB. This competition between environmental uses of riparian areas versus producers' desires to retain crop production has created some conflicts. In 2013, when corn prices were over \$6.00/bushel, a producer could see his/her income drop by over \$600/acre or more for every acre of leased land that enrolled into CREP.

Establishment of RFBs on cropland on the Eastern Shore of the Chesapeake Bay is one of the cost-effective means to reduce nutrient loadings. The relative high loading of nitrogen in the crop fields and the hydrology along with the relative low capital cost (e.g. rent, cost-share, and incentive payments) as compared to buffers on marginal pastureland make this a cost-effective conservation practice.

Furthermore, while riparian forest buffers are the focus of this report, we note that the WIP goal for forested riparian buffers is only one of 41 Maryland agricultural milestone actions to accelerate Bay restoration and meet the TMDL, WIP Phase II goals.

Key Findings

1. A stronger commitment of Federal, State and local leadership is needed to support the program efforts and to provide adequate resources in Maryland and throughout the Chesapeake Bay watershed as a whole. Since RFBs are one of the most cost-effective means to achieve nitrogen reductions, the failure to provide adequate resources could lead to higher societal costs. Maryland will investigate ways to continue to make RFBs a priority including establishing implementation targets in high pollutant-loading regions of the state.
2. A heightened outreach campaign is needed to attract producer and landowner attention and boost enrollment. Maryland seeks to develop a coordinated, multi-partner forested riparian buffer outreach strategy that addresses the appropriate targeted audiences (landowners, farmers, absentee landowners), particularly in high priority areas; includes messaging on stewardship and environmental benefits of RFBs, incentives, and RFB maintenance; employs leveraging and cross-selling opportunities (such as through new RCPPs and Maryland's new agriculture certainty program); and addresses both opportunities to reenroll expiring CRP, as well as enrollment of new acres.

Concerns of aging farmers and landowners must also be addressed, including information on estate issues and hardship situations. The program complexities and significant perceived risks associated with the program require extensive one-on-one discussions with producers. Maryland will coordinate with other Bay states and work on sharing (where feasible) various media products (video, pamphlets, etc.) and would welcome assistance from the proposed joint FSA/FS outreach proposal.

The agencies, consistent with privacy requirements, should develop and maintain a database on the ownership, land use, previous contacts, etc. for potential participants in the watershed. Maryland needs to address issues of how outreach personnel are empowered to explain program requirements and coordination of their efforts with FSA offices. Issues were identified in 2012-2014 when part-time outreach staff were supported by grant funds to promote CREP. If these issues are addressed, Maryland will explore the use of outreach staff such as retired agricultural personnel who are familiar with the conservation programs and the local farm community to sell the program one-on-one as well as leveraging other programs.

3. Staffing levels need to be evaluated to ensure there are adequate staffing levels to meet this challenge. Current staffing levels (FSA/NRCS/State Foresters) may present a challenge to meet increased workload. For example, USDA FSA staffing has dropped by over 20% since 2002. Maryland will assess its workload conditions to meet this workload.

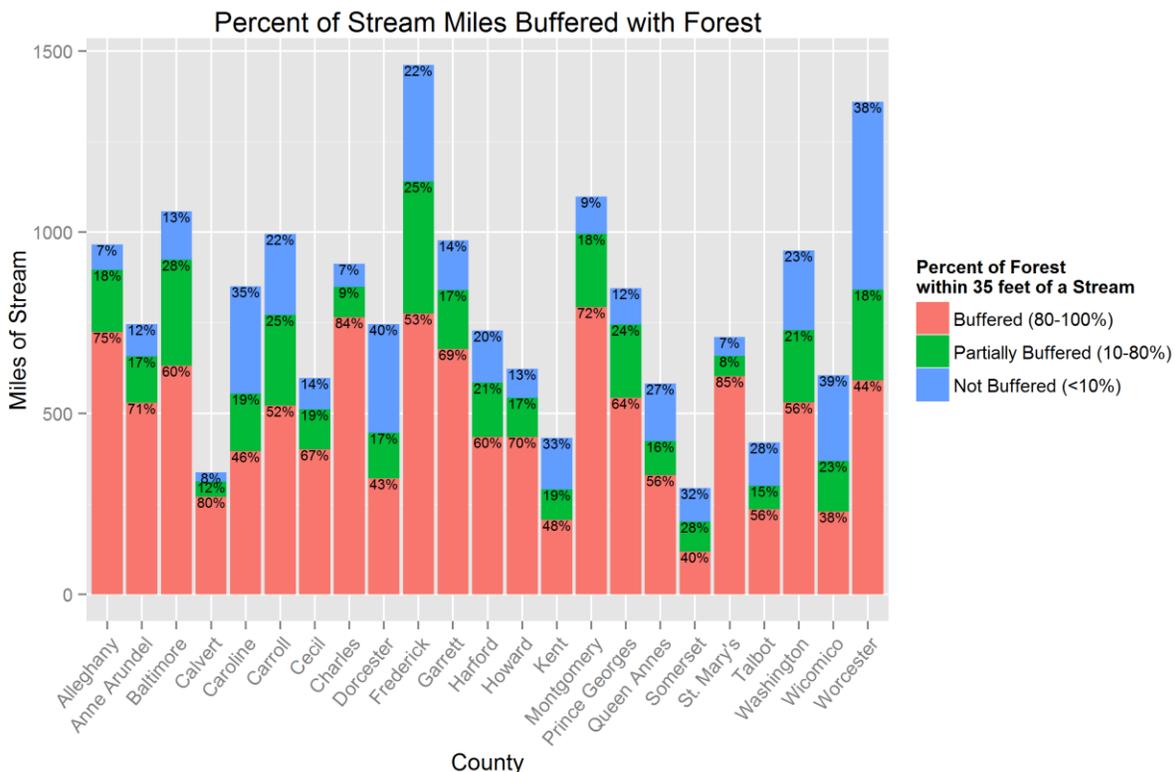
4. Sufficient training is needed to provide producers and landowners the assistance they need to enroll, establish and maintain RFBs. Program complexity requires a well-trained staff. This will require additional training to help employees understand issues related to livestock, grazing management, economics, weed control and forestry. Staff training for FSA, NRCS, FS, MDNR, MDA and Conservation Districts is essential and the employees need to have a better understanding of the important role each plays in developing a contract. Maryland will work with USDA Forest Service Chesapeake Bay Field Office to seek funding for staff development and training.
5. Greater flexibility is needed to provide partial practice incentive payments (PIPs) after cost is incurred and to provide greater flexibility to waive federal cost share caps at the county and state level to reflect the true cost of components. The high capital costs of implementing fencing and stream crossing practices and delays associated with PIP processing due to current procedures cause significant cash-flow issues for producers. These issues disproportionately impact small and medium sized operations. State FSA officials should be provided the flexibility to issue PIP payments at the time the cost is incurred rather than after the entire practice is completed. There is also a need to provide greater flexibility at the County and State FSA level to waive and/or adjust the payment cap issues associated with fencing, water development, pipeline, stream crossing and other components.
6. Increase incentives to enhance economic competitiveness with cropland rental rates. It is a high priority for Maryland to achieve greater enrollments and reenrollments of buffers in high priority areas for water quality, such as the seven Eastern Shore Counties as well as Frederick, Harford, Carroll and Washington Counties. Ensuring that incentives on cropland are economically competitive is essential. Accordingly, Maryland intends to conduct an economic opportunity cost analysis and will confer with FSA about possible adjustments to CREP incentives based on this analysis. We note that it will be important to factor in commodity volatility. The opportunity forgone by some producers in 2013 was over \$600/acre as compared to an approximate CREP annual payment rate of \$240-\$330/acre. While the current market prices for many commodities are much lower, the perception of higher market rates persists. A concern will be to ensure that RFB incentives are attractive without undercutting important enrollments in other CREP practices, like wetland restoration.
7. Annual maintenance payments should be raised from \$5/acre to \$10 /acre (or up to \$150/acre over the life of the contract) in accordance with Maryland's February 27, 2015 funding request to FSA. Maintenance issues associated with flooding, noxious weed infestation, low tree survival, and deer browse, etc. are significant deterrents to enrollment. High maintenance cost, lack of labor and/or equipment, and lack of familiarity with technical standards are all issues that may adversely impact enrollment and/or re-enrollment.

In Maryland's February 27, 2015 funding request to FSA (Attachment C), it seeks to: 1) increase the annual maintenance incentive to \$10/acre/year or up to \$150/acre over the life of the CRP contract; and 2) pool maintenance payments in a fund managed by the State to pay subcontractor maintenance crews that would be deployed an average of 1.5 times during the life of the CRP contract, starting in year 3 or 4 (and thereafter as needed based on site conditions or towards the end of the contract term to prepare for re-enrollment). For existing contracts, the difference between the amount of maintenance as stated in the current contract and the increased \$10/acre annual maintenance payment will be pooled and provided to the State to address maintenance needs of existing riparian forest buffers by subcontracting crews.

8. Extend establishment period from 2 years to 4 years. As requested in its February 27th funding request to FSA, Maryland seeks to increase establishment success by extending establishment to 4 years. This is needed to ensure long-term success of the riparian forest buffer planting and will result in providing cost share for more of these activities that need to happen in the first 4 years and currently are covered as maintenance.
9. Provide additional CREP permanent easements
Maryland has established perpetual easements on more than one of every ten acres enrolled in CREP, totaling approximately 7,732 acres to date. MDNR recently obligated an additional \$1.25 million annually for the next 5 years to purchase CREP easements, leveraging these funds, along with partner in-kind contributions, in an approved RCPP grant. Current landowner demand for conversion of contracts to perpetual easements far outweighs existing state funding by 10-1 or more. It is a high priority to implement the RCPP and to continue to seek additional funding to meet this demand.

2. Current Baseline and Goals

Riparian buffers are a cost-effective means to reduce nutrient (nitrogen/phosphorus loading) into the Chesapeake Bay and are an integral element of Maryland Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP). Eleven of Maryland's 23 counties already have at least 85% of stream miles buffered or partially buffered. However, seven counties (Dorchester, Caroline, Kent, Queen Anne, Somerset, Wicomico, and Worcester) have less than 70% of their stream miles buffered or partially buffered. Other high priority counties include Harford, Fredrick, Carroll and Washington Counties. Our State WIP goal is to increase the amount of riparian forest buffers by 1,546 acres by 2025 acres from the 2009 baseline level. Maryland will develop target implementation rates for these priority regions by December 1, 2015. RFBs provide significant nitrogen cost reductions and provide other ancillary benefits to water quality (flood protection, wildlife and other environmental benefits.) RFBs are long-term, not annual, practices.



Data Source: Maryland DNR Forest Service. 2014.

Currently, there are about 66,740 acres enrolled in the MD CREP program. The MD CREP provides cost-share payments, annual rental payments (10-15 years) and other financial and technical assistance incentives to those who enroll land into riparian forest buffers (CP22). During the next 5 years, over 12,600 acres of existing riparian forest buffer (CP22) CREP contracts will expire, particularly in the latter years, and will be a high priority to reenroll. Enrollment trends have been slowing in the program over the past 5 years for various reasons.

3. Agencies and Groups Participating in the Strategy

We have had diverse and numerous participation in our riparian forest buffer initiative and state task force with many agencies, groups and individuals participating. The USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) and the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) co-chair the task force. NRCS convened three listening sessions located in Western Maryland, Southern Maryland and Maryland's Eastern Shore. FSA and NRCS also hosted a technical session with their key program staff to discuss programmatic strategies and held a state partner meeting. A complete list of participants is available in Appendix A.

Numerous federal and state agencies, as well as non-governmental organizations, are actively involved in promoting riparian forest buffers in Maryland, and their specific roles, responsibilities, and resources in RFB implementation are described below:

USDA Farm Service Agency: FSA is the lead agency for administration of the voluntary Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). The Maryland CREP was the first CREP in the U.S. and is the leading program in Maryland for implementation of riparian forest buffers (RFBs). The FSA County office system with its local, farmer elected committee is specially designed and has responsibilities to oversee and administer various programs, including conservation, disaster, price support, farm credit, and other services for the public sector. FSA staffing is limited due to recent budget cuts and constraints.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service: NRCS is the lead technical agency for assistance with CRP and CREP and is a partner in the Maryland CREP. NRCS is also the lead agency for programs, such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) and Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), which include riparian forest buffers and/or practices that enhance RFB performance.

US Forest Service: USFS is another agency of the USDA and administers the nation's 155 national forests and 20 national grasslands. Major divisions of the agency include the National Forest System, State and Private Forestry, and the Research and Development branch. Although not an official CREP partner, USFS has actively participated in various activities associated with improving the Chesapeake Bay as well as supporting other Federal and State agencies through their various conservation and natural resource programs and activities including providing financial resources to support riparian forest buffer technical.

US Fish & Wildlife Service: US FWS works to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife and plants, including their habitats. They also partner with private landowners in their mission to preserve and protect natural habitats and wildlife resources. US FWS is a CREP partner and provides technical assistance to private landowners.

Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA): MDA, along with Maryland Department of Natural Resources, is a co-signatory of the MD CREP. MDA provides up to 87.5% cost share and technical assistance in every county in support of installation of best management practices to address soil conservation and water quality goals including implementation of the State's WIP agricultural goals to achieve nutrient reduction. MDA also provides a \$100 per acre signing bonus for new and re-enrolled acres.

Maryland Department of Natural Resources (MDNR): As a co-signatory of the MD CREP agreement, MDNR is responsible for seeking participants, purchasing perpetual easements for CRP lands, developing conservation and forest stewardship plans according to state and national directives and policies, identifying and targeting acres, providing and supporting technical assistance, coordinating CREP with land and natural resource initiatives including Rural Legacy and Agricultural Land Preservation Programs, and providing funding to the State's required contribution to overall program costs. MDNR spent over \$325,000 in FY2014 on CREP implementation, excluding easements.

The Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts: are the umbrella organization advocating for soil conservation districts. SCDs are the main delivery mechanism for federal, state and local programs. They provide producers technical assistance, information and outreach and assist with paperwork for financial assistance

Chesapeake Bay Foundation: In addition to advocating for strong legislation that supports riparian forest buffers and other priority best management practices, CBF Maryland has a restoration team that provides technical assistance and outreach to farmers.

Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay: The Alliance is playing a role in helping to facilitate the Riparian Forest Buffer state task force process, including facilitating the three public meetings. The Alliance is also implementing riparian forest buffer projects across the state.

4. Current Programs and Gaps

The Maryland CREP was launched in 1997. Maryland was the first state in the nation to establish a Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). The Maryland CREP targets the entire state, and has been amended multiple times. The Maryland CREP was last amended in 2009 at which time the bonus on soil rental rate for RFBs was raised to 200%.

The Maryland CREP goal is to reach 100,000 acres of enrollment in the program, including 77,000 acres for stream buffers and related practices; 16,000 acres of highly erodible lands; 5,000 acres in wetland protection and enhancement practices; and 2,000 acres for habitat for declining species. As of February 1, 2015, MD producers had enrolled 15,519 acres in CP22, Riparian Buffers.

As the first state in the Nation with a CREP, Maryland was, in 2007, the first state to begin dealing with re-enrollment issues and expiring contracts. During the next 5 years, over 12,600 acres of existing CP22 enrollments will expire and become eligible for reenrollment. Obtaining strong re-enrollment is a high priority for Maryland.

Maryland has excelled at obtaining enrollment, exceeding all Bay states except Pennsylvania (Appendix B: Highlighted Successes). Maryland CREP enrollment is higher than any other East Coast state CREP except Pennsylvania (which has three programs). From 1999 through 2003, the MD CREP enrollment grew at a fast rate. Factors that influenced the growth were: (1) the program was new and had strong political support (the Vice President, USDA Secretary of Agriculture, the Governor and most of the Congressional Delegation announced the start of the project); (2) it was highly visible (TV, radio, paper, etc.); (3) there was strong interagency and NGO support; (4) commodity prices were low; (5) the program provided new rental rates that were substantially higher than any other previous USDA effort; and (6) a cadre of very dedicated interagency staff saw CREP as a unique opportunity to implement significant change.

Over time, enrollment declined due to a variety of factors, including higher economic returns associated with rising commodity prices especially during 2011-2013, agency staffing cuts, NGOs that backed out of their financial commitments, and an aging farming population who are reluctant to sign long term contracts and concerned about retirement and estate issues. In addition, maintenance and establishment of buffers is a key issue as is the issue of grassed buffers that have naturally succeeded into woody vegetation. Maryland addresses maintenance, establishment, re-enrollment, outreach and economic competitiveness in its February 27, 2015 funding proposal to FSA as well as this final report.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) – NRCS administers EQIP. Eligible program participants receive financial and technical assistance to implement conservation practices (inclusive of riparian buffers), or activities such as conservation planning, that address natural resource concerns on their land. Payments are made to participants after conservation practices and activities identified in an EQIP plan of operations are implemented. Contracts can

last up to ten years in duration. EQIP has been used in Maryland to create some riparian forest buffers and, more commonly, for exclusionary livestock fencing from riparian areas.

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) – Helps agricultural producers maintain and improve their existing conservation systems and adopt additional conservation activities and adopt additional conservation activities to address priority resource concerns. Participants earn CSP payments for conservation performance – the higher the performance, the higher the payment. CSP enhancements include extending riparian forest buffers (ANM05).

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) – provides financial and technical assistance to help conserve agricultural lands and wetlands and their related benefits. Newly created by the 2014 farm bill, ACEP consolidates three former programs: the Wetlands Reserve Program, the Grassland Reserve Program and the Farm and Ranchland Protection Program. Riparian forest buffers could potentially be protected under the agricultural land easements, as part of the working farm, or under a wetland easement, as associated buffer. Under the 2014 farm bill, there are increased opportunities for CREP participants to transition enrollments under expiring CRP contracts to NRCS ACEP easement programs; further discussion is needed to provide guidance on how interested landowners could transition some RFBs from CREP to NRCS easement programs.

Newly funded Regional Conservation Partnership Program Projects (RCPP) through EQIP, CSP and/or ACEP. NRCS recently approved MDNR's \$800,000/year RCPP proposal. MDNR obligated an additional \$1.25 million/year for the next 5 years to purchase CREP easements, leveraging these funds, along with partner in-kind contributions, to purchase at least 2,600 additional acres of agricultural land easements and perpetual protection of established conservation practices (CREP) on eligible lands within targeted Rural Legacy Areas to achieve NRCS and partner resource priorities. The RCPP project will target farms within identified Rural Legacy Areas to: 1) provide financial assistance to eligible partners purchasing agricultural land easements that protect the agricultural use and conservation values of eligible lands (cropland, grassland, pastureland, and nonindustrial private forest land), and 2) provide financial assistance to eligible partners for purchasing perpetual CREP easements on eligible lands (lands currently under CREP contracts), including riparian forest buffers.

The Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay and National Fish and Wildlife Foundation also received funding through the RCPP. Both projects focus on livestock and dairy farms in Central Maryland and require producers to install riparian forest buffers and stream fencing to be eligible for funding.

The Nature Conservancy and partners will also be working in Maryland to improve water quality through the implementation of advanced nutrient management practices; restoring, enhancing, and protecting 3,000 acres of natural filters (wetlands and buffers); and expanding wildlife habitat by enhancing, restoring, and protecting 3,000 acres of high quality wetlands and buffers.

Maryland Agricultural Water Quality Cost Share (MACS) Program – provides farmers with cost share assistance, up to 87.5% of the cost to install conservation measures. There are more than 30 eligible best management practices (BMPs) that qualify for cost share assistance, including RFBs. MACS comprises the majority of non-federal cash match to the Maryland CREP. MACS also provides a \$100/acre signing incentive bonus on all new and re-enrolled acres and technical assistance staff delivered through soil conservation districts.

Maryland Department of Natural Resources

MDNR is currently targeting easement purchases on agricultural lands that have current CREP contracts.

Chesapeake and Atlantic Coastal Bays Trust Fund: The state has directed over \$30M in FY 15 to nonpoint source reduction projects including riparian forest buffers to improve Bay water quality. An additional \$4.1M in FY 15 will provide technical assistance for further nonpoint source implementation.

Maryland Forest Service: The Forest Service provides technical and financial assistance to landowners to including CREP planting plans and financial assistance through the Mel Noland Woodland Incentives Fund.

5. Factors Influencing Ability to Meet Goal

CREP challenges/constraints on enrollment: Enrollment trends have been slowing in the program over the past five years for various reasons, including economic competitiveness issues, reduced USDA staffing and resources, reduced marketing and outreach, reduced opportunities and other reasons.

In Western Maryland, most of the RFB enrollments are on marginal pastureland. Economic competitiveness of the program for livestock/dairy producers is vitally important. In addition, having to wait extended periods of time for practice incentive payments (PIPs) can have a negative effect on enrollment, especially given the significant upfront investments participants need to make in items like fencing, water development and stream crossing. Providing greater flexibility for partial-PIPs as components are installed would help. In addition, federal cost share caps on many components are too low and do not reflect prices participants are actually paying. Increasing federal cost share caps will increase economic competitiveness and attractiveness of RFB enrollment.

In Southern Maryland and on Maryland's Eastern Shore of the Chesapeake Bay, most of the RFB enrollment occurs on cropland. Grain production (i.e., corn, soybeans and wheat) is the primary use of the cropland. These farm operations typically lease a majority of their land and most of these leases are relative short in duration (< 3 years in length). Landowners who enroll in the CREP program generally provide little or no compensation to the producer when the land is enrolled in a RFB. This competition between environmental uses of riparian areas versus producers' desires to retain crop production has created some conflicts. In addition, the recent run up in commodity prices has significantly reduced the economic competitiveness of Maryland CREP RFB enrollments. An aging farming population often causes greater reluctance to enter into long-term commitments. Also, some producers have expressed concerns that RFBs present problems for cropland by shading adjacent crops thereby reducing yields and by attracting deer. In addition, the 2014 Farm Bill reduction in Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) precludes some landowners from participating in USDA conservation programs.

Like all Chesapeake Bay states, a further challenge in the recent past has been the prolonged shut-downs of CRP/CREP due to Congressional delays in reauthorizing the Farm Bill. A high priority for our outreach strategy is to inform landowners/farmers that this period of uncertainty is over as Congress has reauthorized the Farm Bill and to galvanize excitement around the proposed CREP amendment changes (such as proposed increased incentives). As the first CREP program in the country, reenrollment is a high priority in Maryland. The opportunity exists to re-enroll over 1,100 contracts during the next 5 years. A coordinated approach tailored to meet the specific needs of these contract holders should be developed. Unique issues related to inter-planting, invasive plant control and weed issues need to be addressed. As discussed in the February 27, 2015 funding request to FSA, it is important to provide options for grass buffers that have naturally succeeded into woody vegetation to re-enroll into an appropriate practice, such as CP4-D. Technical Service Providers (TSP) should also

be familiar with issues related to eligibility associated with easements, succession of contracts, estate and hardship issues/flexibility and tax issues. In addition, at least another 60 to 70 new contracts will be required to meet the State's WIP goals.

Finally, the \$50,000 payment cap limitation can be an issue for some in Maryland because costs for RFBs and associated items, such as exclusionary stream fencing, alternative water sources, stream crossings, etc. can total significantly in excess of \$50,000 and cause participants to receive PIP payments below the 40% of costs they would otherwise receive (although MACS cost share is available to them).

Staffing cuts & impact on TA/program delivery: Since 2002 staffing for both FSA, NRCS, and State Forestry Agencies have been adversely impacted by budgetary constraints. Many FSA counties have been closed or consolidated and county office staffing has dropped from about 88 employees statewide to about 61 employees currently. County office employees that provide direct assistance to landowners went from 64 to 51. In addition, new Farm bill programs have further increased workload. NRCS also faces similar challenges with decreasing staffing despite increasing demands for services. The Maryland Forest Service has 40 foresters available for landowner technical assistance and outreach for RFBs. The increased workload associated with the necessary increase in RFB enrollment along with re-enrollment of expiring CRP contracts for RFBs during the next five years will provide a significant challenge to a greatly reduced staff for all of the agencies.

Staffing levels need to be increased. Workload models suggest that a TSP can likely develop and service about 30-50 CREP contracts per year. Based on the numbers of contracts that will expire and the number of expected new contracts it will take about 24 to 30 staff years to provide technical assistance over the next 5 years. Dependent on location of the contracts it would take a minimum of about 5 to 6 full time dedicated staff to service the contracts each year. Factoring in additional outreach efforts, staff development and training, distance of the sites from the service office a reasonable staffing level would be 7 to 8 staff years.

Technical assistance is the key element for outreach, customer service, practice success and accountability. At the current staffing levels, program enrollment, conservation planning activities, ongoing maintenance, compliance of contracts and practices, and the potential to achieve WIP goals are all challenged.

Outreach: Riparian forest buffer establishment is a practice that typically requires working one-on-one with a farmer/landowner as this is a more complex practice than, for example, grass filter strips. We have seen strong examples in our state of how dramatically the work of a highly motivated, highly credible, local outreach provider can make in boosting RFB enrollments. Maryland is currently challenged by insufficient resources for outreach and we believe a coordinated RFB outreach strategy is needed to maximize and leverage existing resources and impact, enlist new resources, and inform farmers/landowners of new incentives and opportunities we hope to achieve (such as expanding the CREP target area, raising total authorized enrollment and providing stronger financial incentives). During 2013, FSA was

challenged to have funding for any outreach activities (including postage for notification letters of expiring contracts).

Program Challenges: Over the past several years, Maryland has investigated multiple strategies from improving program delivery. For a variety of reasons, the following recommendations to improve enrollment/re-enrollment have stalled, but remain important to the state and show its continuing commitment to improving CREP:

1. Natural Succession Practice (Requested of USDA FSA in 2012): Establish a new “natural succession practice” or allow a CP21 buffer to transition to CP4D when certified by NRCS that the buffer is continuing to meet its intended objectives.
2. Annual Review of SSR (2010): Maryland recommends that annual review of soil rental rates be built into the program contract.
3. Shorter Contract Length (2010): Consider allowing shorter contracts especially for grass buffers and conservation cover practices to reduce long-term commitments in the face of uncertain future of local development pressures.
4. Five Year Contract Extensions (2010): Allow 5 year contract extensions instead of contract re-enrollment with all contract elements, payment rates, acreage, etc. remaining the same.

6. Recommendations and Management Approach

Leadership, coordination and administration of programs

Maryland continues to develop a coordinated, riparian forest buffer (RFB) strategy to boost riparian forest buffer (RFB) enrollment/reenrollment through: 1) seeking policy/guidance adjustments (and possibly a CREP amendment) to address barriers to enrollment; 2) sending a strong leadership message from the highest levels of the relevant local, state and federal agencies that RFB enrollment/reenrollment is a high priority and promoting interagency cooperation; 3) developing and seeking funding for a coordinated, multi-partner RFB outreach strategy that addresses the appropriate targeted audiences (landowners, farmers, absentee landowners); includes messaging on stewardship and environmental benefits of RFBs, incentives, and RFB maintenance; employs leveraging and cross-selling between programs; addresses both opportunities to re-enroll expiring CRP as well as enroll new acres; and 4) identifies staffing needs for outreach and technical assistance and seeks funding to fill them.

A key part of this strategy is to identify opportunities for better interagency cooperation and to provide the farmer/landowner with a smoother, quicker, more pleasant enrollment experience. This also is an important opportunity to send a more consistent message across the board, letting farmers/landowners know the importance of RFBs and about enrollment opportunities in CREP contracts and easements, EQIP and MACs. With the reopening of CREP for enrollment under the new Farm Bill and the approval of RCPP proposals, there are new opportunities to get farmers/landowners' attention and to partner together.

Policy or guidance adjustments

There are a number of policy adjustments that Maryland would like to seek through CREP Amendment or through USDA policy revisions or waivers. Maryland recognizes that some of these policy adjustments are likely priorities for other Chesapeake Bay states as well. Potential policy adjustments include:

- Provide guidance to states and local USDA offices that riparian forest buffers are a priority practice and should be given appropriate attention for technical assistance;
- Flexibility to provide partial Practice Incentive Payments (PIPs) as components are completed;
- Maryland recommends that annual review of soil rental rates be built into the program contract;
- Provide greater flexibility to waive federal cost share caps (e.g., fencing, stream fencing, cattle crossing, higher quality tree tubes) at the county and state level;
- Expand establishment period for RFBs from 2 years to 4 years as requested in the February 27, 2015 request to FSA;
- Increase number of times can spray herbicides during establishment from 2 times to 4 times or more if needed and with county committee approval;

- Encourage county level to use flexibility to allow interested participants to convert contracts for practices, such as grass filter strips, to riparian forest buffers mid-contract;
- Provide flexibility to reenroll grass filter strips that have naturally succeeded into woody vegetation to reenroll in CP4D as requested in February 27, 2015 request to FSA. If the proposed compliance screen shows deficiencies, Maryland acknowledges that levying penalties is appropriate and requests that they not exceed one-year of rental payments;
- RFB eligibility requires that the practice be needed and feasible to address a conservation resource issue (erosion, water quality, wildlife, etc). In some cases on marginal pastureland, RFBs have been deemed eligible only if livestock are being grazed in the pasture. Marginal pastureland eligibility should be construed flexibly (some of this may be resolved by messaging flexibility to foresters, NRCS, FSA and districts at the county level);
- Provide flexibility in CP21 grass filter strip maintenance requirements to allow some natural regeneration of trees provided that the wildlife community supports the policy change;
- Flexibility in NRCS policy to allow providing extra points in EQIP ranking and thresholds for those who enroll in CREP riparian forest buffers;
- Maryland FSA could use existing authorities to contract with certified TSPs to provide technical assistance;
- Explore possibilities to receive AGI (adjusted gross income) waivers for RFB enrollments; and
- Eliminate Staggered Contracts: provide an option to allow producers to revise all the contracts at the time the first contract expires so they become one contract and share the same date of expiration or allow up to a 5 year extension on early expiring contracts so they can be blended into one.
- Formalize an environmental benefits hierarchy for BMPs in the CREP Amendment. This will ease the conversion of contracts to other practices that are providing more environmental benefits (e.g. grass buffer to forest buffer).

Maryland will explore potential adjustments in bonuses, such as an incentive for high priority RFBs/corridors¹ or a contiguous stream miles RFB bonus. The contiguous stream miles bonus provides higher incentives as more miles of a stream/river are protected. This model is used in the Oregon CREP project to protect salmon habitat. This bonus provides incentives for neighbors to work with adjoining landowners to install RFB so that they and the environment can mutually benefit.

¹ These ideas need further discussion to flesh out and determine whether to provide and if so, who pays for them. High priority RFBs/corridors bonus might present marketing/fairness issues for FSA.

Landowner Outreach and Customer Service Strategy

In 2009, The Maryland CREP partners amended the CREP agreement to increase incentives, but there were some prolonged shut-downs of CRP due to delays in Congress in reauthorizing the Farm Bill when it expired in 2012. Potential participants are not necessarily aware that CREP has re-opened for business, the current mix of incentives, and stewardship/scientific significance messages.

Therefore, Maryland seeks to develop a coordinated, multi-partner forested riparian buffer outreach strategy that addresses the appropriate targeted audiences (landowners, farmers, absentee landowners), includes messaging on stewardship and environmental benefits of RFBs, incentives, RFB maintenance, employs leveraging and cross-selling opportunities, and addresses both opportunities to reenroll expiring CRP as well as enrollment of new acres.

Outreach can be focused in the regions with the most need and opportunity for riparian forest buffers. These regions include the seven Eastern Shore Counties along with Frederick, Harford, Carroll, and Washington counties.

A wide variety of agencies and organizations, including Maryland Department of Natural Resources, The Nature Conservancy, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, have received funding through the RCPP. Each proposal will provide opportunities to provide outreach to producers and increase opportunities to promote installation and/or long-term protection of forested riparian buffers within the suite of conservation practices on the farm. See Section 4 for more information on the projects.

Maryland Department of Agriculture's launch of Maryland's recently approved agricultural certainty program offers further potential opportunities for cross-selling and encouraging increased forested riparian buffer participation. Maryland nutrient management regulations require nutrient application setback up to 35' and include exclusion requirements for setbacks. Maryland has marketed CREP as an opportunity to receive compensation while complying with regulations.

Establishment, Maintenance, Compliance and Re-enrollment

Riparian forest buffer standards should be more responsive to site conditions including design, site preparation, and post-planting care. Maryland is investigating how new or revised practice standards can encourage some economic uses of forest buffers (consistent with water quality and wildlife benefits), be compatible with drainage ditch maintenance and function, lower shading on crops, better address shoreline erosion, and control crop damage from deer.

Maryland has pioneered the use of zoned buffer criteria to meet dual water quality and wildlife objectives of the CREP. These criteria are provided for under the job sheet Zoned Herbaceous Buffer for CP21. The buffer consists of a zone of switchgrass adjacent to a more wildlife-friendly zone of native grasses and forbs. The juxtaposition of these two zones results in a combination of wildlife cover, foraging, and nesting habitat

Especially on the Eastern Shore, Maryland will evaluate opportunities where drainage ditches/subsurface drain tile or other pipes bisect the RFB to improve water quality benefits of RFB. In its February 27 funding request to FSA, Maryland proposed including CP39 constructed wetlands to treat row crop drainage water as a CREP practice. This is vitally important practice that will boost buffer practice water quality performance by treating water that otherwise would bypass buffers and flow untreated directly into drainage ditches and streams.

Maintenance issues are a high priority in Maryland's February 27, 2015 request to FSA. Low incentives for maintenance, increasing challenges of invasive plants and pests, and landowner difficulties in providing long-term maintenance can undermine RFB maintenance and limit the effectiveness of riparian forest buffers. Poor functioning and unsightly forest buffers can also limit the appeal of this practice to potential participants. Landowner frustration with poorly understood or communicated maintenance obligations, low incentives, and hassle of conducting maintenance can diminish landowner willingness to reenroll RFBs and/or their eligibility to reenroll RFBs.

In Maryland's February 27th funding request to FSA, Maryland seeks to: 1) increase the annual maintenance incentive to \$10/acre/year or up to \$150/acre over the life of the CRP contract; and 2) pool maintenance payments in a fund managed by the State to pay subcontractor maintenance crews that would be deployed an average of 1.5 times during the life of the CRP contract, starting in year 3 or 4 (and thereafter as needed based on site conditions or towards the end of the contract term to prepare for re-enrollment). For existing contracts, the difference between the amounts of maintenance as stated in the current contract and the increased \$10/acre annual maintenance payment will be pooled and provided to the State to address maintenance needs of existing riparian forest buffers by subcontracting crews. Maryland also requested the ability to mow between trees on a regular basis (once a month during the growing season) for 4-5 years post-planting to reduce competition from volunteer vegetation.

Maryland is also investigating new strategies for cost-effectively managing invasive species and pests including deer fencing, and additional, regular spot-spraying treatments.

To help producers avoid compliance issues, FSA and NRCS plan to conduct more compliance checks and in-field status reviews. A priority will also be to assist interested CREP participants with grass filter strip enrollments to convert to RFB enrollment with county committee permission and, grant funding to assist with any inter-planting needs.

As the first CREP in the U.S., the Maryland CREP has many CREP contracts that are due to expire in the next few years. The next five years will see over 12,600 acres in CP22 acres come up for reenrollment. It is a high priority to retain these riparian forest buffers. Reenrollment requires: 1) timely outreach to landowners with expiring contracts for CP22 RFBs and site visits to assess

whether there are compliance issues to be addressed²; and 2) increased flexibility (see above) to enroll grass filter strips that have grown into trees. Some expiring CREP RFBs are protected by permanent or other long-term easements. Further discussion is needed regarding easements and what, if anything, further is needed to ensure these RFBs are successfully maintained and protected into the future.

As discussed above, in its February 27 request to FSA, Maryland requested flexibility to allow grass filter strips that have naturally succeeded into woody vegetation to re-enroll under CP4D. If the compliance screen, shows deficiencies Maryland requests that any penalty not exceed one-year of rental payments.

Furthermore, in counties that have a high number of streams already buffered with trees, CREP, EQIP and other programs can be used to ensure the existing buffers are “functional.”

Technical Assistance Delivery

Maryland recognizes that increasing RFB enrollment and reenrollments requires not only increased outreach, but also providing adequate technical assistance in a timely way. Insufficient technical assistance and bottlenecks in enrollment are issues in some parts of the state. Staffing levels should be increased to meet these needs. Maryland is seeking to do a needs assessment to identify when and where there are needs for additional technical assistance, and to seek additional funding to fill these increased technical assistance needs and to provide additional training (such as training outreach and TA providers to more fully discuss maintenance responsibilities when people sign up for RFBs). In addition, Maryland has proposed to better meet maintenance needs through creating a state-administered funding pool to hire subcontractors to conduct maintenance.

Maryland FSA is investigating possibly expanding the use of cooperative agreements and data sharing agreements to enhance technical assistance including contract implementation. These agreements can be made with NGOs and other state agencies to provide technical assistance and process contracts.

Increased staffing can reduce wait times for customer service, provide more one-on-one time between TSP and the landowner (allowing them to more fully explain the practice and issues, like maintenance), and provide more capacity for contract follow up (reducing the risk that small maintenance issues grow into big contract compliance issues).

Maryland will also provide more staff training so that all staff have a good understanding of the program, practice requirements, etc of the program. FSA/NRCS/SWCD/Forestry Staff should do

² An issue of further discussion is whether state program dollars or NGO grant funding will be prioritized to provide some cost/share (not eligible for MACS) and/or technical assistance to CP22 CREP participants with out of compliance RFBs to bring them into compliance so they may be reenrolled in CREP or enhanced and protected under ACEP or other programs.

the majority of the training together to develop better understanding of the program and to enhance staff relations. Training aids could be developed that would include:

- Common Question and Answers
- Examples on Economics of buffers
- Before and after pictures of stream restoration
- Success stories
- Phone apps – items could include – payment rates.
- Latest, cost-effective maintenance techniques

Increased Financial Incentives

At the public meetings, some raised concerns that the levels of incentives were too low in certain parts of Maryland. On the Eastern Shore, FSA's soil rental rates (SRRs) can be off by as much as 100%. In Southern Maryland, there is a general lack of financial incentive sharing between landowners and farmers who are renting. Cost share caps are too low for many components, including stream fencing, water diversion, stream crossings, etc.

Maryland will conduct a review and analysis of the financial incentives and opportunity costs forgone by participating in CRP. Depending upon the results, Maryland may request higher incentives from FSA. Some of the options that may be considered include but are not limited to:

- Increase the \$5/acre annual maintenance payment to \$10/acre as requested by Maryland in its February 27th request to FSA
- Consider providing higher incentives in targeted areas for water quality and habitat/high priority corridors
- Consider providing an incentive for contiguous buffer bonus (neighbors)
- Adjust soil rental rates annually
- Consider nitrogen reduction bonus incentive payment
- Remove cost share caps or adjust upwards/or greater flexibility to waive federal cost share caps at the local and state level
- Investigate how other information sources can augment NASS soil rental rate data including public land auctions and state land leases.

Other Recommendations

Maryland has begun working with federal, state, and NGO partners to evaluate how coordinate investments in riparian forest buffers that enhance the CREP state match and fill program delivery gaps (e.g. maintenance and cost-share to ensure compliance before reenrollment.)

State task force members should provide regular updates to agencies and foundations on progress towards meeting goals and needed financial assistance.

7. Work plan

Leadership, coordination and administration of programs

Next steps include:

1. FSA, NRCS and MDNR are working together on strategy to offer CRP participants with expiring contracts the opportunity to enroll in ACEP easements (e.g., if farmland preservation, include protection for RFB. If wetland easement, include associated forested riparian buffers);
2. FSA, NRCS, MDA, MDNR need to take steps to send top down message that RFBs are a high priority;
3. Find lessons learned from counties with strong RFB enrollment and fast turnaround of CREP contracts and provide mentoring to other counties;
4. Provide guidance at county level to ensure understanding of more flexible scope of Marginal Pastureland and provide mentoring from lessons learned from successful counties.

Need for policy or guidance adjustments

Maryland is working over the next few months to develop detailed policy recommendations and to determine whether to seek a minor CREP amendment.

Next steps include:

1. Work with other Chesapeake Bay states to seek flexibility from FSA HQ to provide partial PIPs as components are completed;
2. NRCS and FSA work with Maryland CREP partners to document CP22 practice components (including fencing, alternate water source, stream crossings, etc) that exceed current caps and propose higher caps to FSA or adopt 3-tiered waiver process;
3. Maryland already requested expansion of establishment period for CP22 RFBs from 2 years to 4 years (Feb 27th request to FSA);
4. Seek flexibility in NRCS guidance to allow providing extra points in EQIP ranking for CREP riparian forest buffer enrollments;
5. Seek enhanced flexibility in marginal pastureland definition and determination of conservation need;
6. Seek AGI waivers;
7. Seek to eliminate staggered contracts, such as by providing option to allow producers to revise all the contracts at the time the first CRP contract expires so they become one contract and share the same date of expiration;
8. As discussed above, Maryland included in its Feb 27th funding request to FSA, a request to include CP4D buffer as eligible to use adjacent to drainage ditches, inclusion of CP39 constructed wetlands as a CREP practice, and reenrollment of grass buffers that have succeeded into woody vegetation as CP4D buffers; and
9. If Maryland decides to pursue CREP amendment, draft request with justification based on options paper (see #1 above) and write draft amendment language.

Landowner Outreach and Customer Service Strategy

Maryland is working over the next few months to develop a forested riparian buffer outreach plan. Partners include: NRCS, FSA, MDNR, MDA, agriculture organizations (such as Maryland Farm Bureau Federation), and NGOs (such as Chesapeake Bay Foundation, The Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, and The Nature Conservancy).

Next steps include:

1. Follow up conversations to further develop outreach strategy;
2. FSA/USDA Economic Research Service data mine existing CREP enrollment to better understand demographics of CREP participants & their operations;
3. Inventory who is conducting outreach currently in each county & identify constraints (e.g., staffing, training, resource (e.g., outreach materials) needs);
4. Seek funding for research needs (including survey of existing RFB participants & potential participants);
5. Seek funding to meet increased outreach needs to implement strategy (including more direct, one-on-one landowner outreach by trusted local providers, farm tours, landowner to landowner meetings);
6. Seek to increase role of partners in outreach, particularly the agriculture community: Maryland Farm Bureau Federation (FBF) has a huge mailing list of agriculture landowners and farmers, newsletters to members, and member meetings (such as annual meeting in Ocean City in January and winter meetings at county level);
7. NRCS explore outreach possibilities with partners with successful RCPP proposals;
8. Work with MDA to cross-sell RFB enrollments when discussing new agriculture certainty program;
9. Seek to target outreach efforts most heavily in regions with the most need and opportunity for riparian forest buffers. These regions will include the seven Eastern Shore counties along with Frederick, Harford, Carroll and Washington Counties;
10. Continue to market CREP as an opportunity to receive compensation while complying with regulations re nutrient application setback;
11. Develop outreach materials for specific audiences – e.g., brochure for dairy/pasture operations explaining CREP RFBs & stream fencing etc cost share and production benefits (e.g., herd health);
12. Develop or obtain outreach materials using scientific data to show RFB water quality benefits;
13. Outreach materials the focus on stewardship, total incentive package and maintenance responsibilities;
14. Using GIS, USGS stream data, land ownership and other data sources a list of possible RFB candidates. Link other data sets (FSA farm data etc) to develop a data base with the demographic of possible RFB candidates. By using data on historic participation and off of focus data you could target the RFB candidates most likely to enroll (see also #9 above);
15. Develop a State outreach committee comprised of the major program participants, NGOs and agriculture groups (including on staff PR/media professionals);

16. Utilize any grant funding or resources from request to USDA FSA for RFB outreach materials for Chesapeake Bay states.
17. Seek funding for RFB – one stop website – this web site could provide examples of successes, Question and Answers, video, information on economics, environmental benefits, etc.?
18. Explore the use of Public Service Announcements – this could be effective on radio stations that have farm reports (crop prices, etc.);
19. Farm tours of RFBs sponsored by NGOs? Provide food/beverages – have good sales people sell the program;
20. Continued use of signage that denotes RFBs
21. Funding for RFB posters to place in county offices
22. Develop a slide show and provide speakers to local organizations such as Rotary, Kiwanis, Garden Club, High School Environmental Classes, etc to talk about RFB. This can create buzz and support for the effort.

Establishment, Maintenance, Compliance and Reenrollment

Maryland is working on establishment, maintenance, compliance and reenrollment policy.

Next steps include:

1. Increase in field status reviews;
2. Seek increased flexibility to reenroll or upgrade existing CP21 grass filter strips that have grown into trees (see above policy or guidance adjustments and Feb 27th request);
3. Seeking increased maintenance incentive and creation of state administered pool of funding for maintenance that is used to hire subcontractors to conduct the work (see incentives and Feb 27th request);
4. Seek funding for training for agencies and TSPs to ensure new RFB participants get a “cradle to grave” understanding of establishment and maintenance responsibilities;
5. Further consideration of and research into options, such as deer fencing, increased herbicide applications, etc.;
6. Seek extension of establishment period from 2-4 years (see above policy or guidance adjustments & Feb 27th request);
7. Prioritize funding and staffing to provide outreach to landowners with expiring CP22 RFBs (including site visits to assess whether there are compliance issues to be addressed) and seek non-FSA funding to help landowners address compliance issues³;
8. Seek additional flexibility in maintenance requirements for CP21 grass filter strips to allow for some natural regeneration of trees

³ Note: FSA provides 50% cost share for re-planting RFBs that have failed due to “acts of God”, such as flooding or drought.

Technical Assistance Delivery

Next steps include:

1. Research TA needs at county by county level;
2. Seek funding for additional staffing (FSA, NRCS, MDNR Forest Service, qualified NGOs)
3. Made request in Feb. 27 proposal to FSA to pool maintenance financial assistance to administer a network of maintenance providers.
4. Seek funding for training;

Increased Financial Incentives

Next steps include:

1. As discussed above, in its Feb. 27 funding request to FSA, Maryland is seeking to raise annual maintenance payments to \$10/acre/year or up to \$150/acre over the life of the CRP contract.
2. Maryland will conduct a review of the financial incentives and opportunity costs forgone by participating in CRP.
3. Depending upon the results of this economic study, Maryland may request higher incentives from FSA with budget estimates, including any increases in non-federal match.

Other recommendations

1. MDNR, NRCS and other partners implement new RCPP to purchase permanent easements on CREP enrollments through Rural Legacy, ACEP and other easement programs;
2. Seek additional funding to meet demand for perpetual easements.
3. Examine terms of all applicable easement programs to see what terms & conditions are – is land physically capable of farming (but that includes hay land, pasture, etc, not just cropland)? Some Maryland CREP participants have entered into permanent or long-term easements, such as through Maryland's Rural Legacy Program. Many of these landowners, and their successors, need outreach to better understand their easement commitments and any potential impact on ability to reenroll in CREP as well as technical and, if possible, financial assistance with maintenance of RFBs.

Appendix A: Listening Session Participants

Name	Organization
Myron Frock	Carroll County
Mark Martin	Carroll County Farm Service Agency
Stan Pennington	Carroll County Soil Conservation District
Mike Tracey	Carroll County Soil Conservation District
Tom Hughes	Charles County Planning Commission
Rob Schnabel	Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Jamie Weaver	DNR Forest Service
Beth Sanders	DNR Forest Service
Dave Gailey	DNR Forest Service
Mark Muir	DNR Forest Service
Dan Rider	DNR Forest Service
Robert Wieland	Economist
Amelia A Farrell	Farm Service Agency
Patrick Goode	Farm Service Agency
John Barga	Farm Service Agency
Missy Donnelly	Farm Service Agency
	Landowner

	Landowner
Mike Russell	Maryland Department of Agriculture
Tom Kovak	Maryland Department of Agriculture/Soil Conservation District
Matt Teffeau	Maryland Farm Bureau
Colby Ferguson	Maryland Farm Bureau
Amy Jacobs	Nature Conservancy
Denise Lovelady	Office of Congressman Andy Harris
Yates Clagett	Prince George's Soil Conservation District
Diana Lagunes	Prince George's Soil Conservation District
Kim Kempel	Queen Anne's County Farm Service Agency
Sean Clougherty	Reporter
Serry O'Mara	Talbot County Farm Bureau
Elisa Deflaux	Talbot County Planning and Permits
Nancy Steward	University of Maryland Extension
Lyle Almond	University of Maryland Extension
Jim Lewis	University of Maryland Extension

Appendix B: Maryland CREP Accomplishments

Maryland's CREP - Highlighted Accomplishments

- First state to enter into an agreement with USDA for the CREP in 1997, and the first state to begin experiencing expiring contracts and re-enrollment issues in 2007.
- Maryland has excelled at obtaining producer enrollment, exceeding all Bay states except PA.
- MD enrollment in CREP is higher than any East Coast state other than PA.
- MD enrolled approximately 16,000 more acres currently than the average of all Bay states (quite an accomplishment given the State's size and agricultural land base).
- By 2007, MD was ranked fifth nationally for enrolled acres.
- By 2012, even though MD was at the height of its expiring contracts and the first state nationally to experience the issues of re-enrollments for five prior consecutive years, MD ranked 9th nationally for enrolled acres.
- After contract expirations started to show up nationally in 2012, MD lost 10.8% of its enrolled acres. PA lost 14.9% in the same period from 2012 to 2014. The other Bay states, who had later agreement dates, showed losses more consistent with the national average loss of 1.3% between 2012 and 2014.
- It is expected that given the fact that between 10% and 30% of contracted acres will expire in other Bay states over the next two to five years, losses will continue to be more consistent with MD and PA.
- The entire CRP program has seen a reduction of enrolled acres nationally by more than 30% in the past 7 years. MD total CRP acreage declined by only 18% in comparison.
- MD pays the highest per acre payment for CREP of all Bay states, not including the additional State signing bonus of \$100/ac.
- MD pays 16.5% more than the average of all Bay states' payments
- MD pays more than double what VA and WVA pay, 40% more than PA and DE, and 15% more than NY.
- Maryland listed 41 agricultural milestone actions in the 2013 milestone to accelerate Bay restoration and meet the TMDL Watershed Implementation Plan, phase II goal. These actions included four categories of CREP practices: HEL, or highly erodible land protection; riparian grass buffers; riparian forest buffers; and wetlands. The 2013 Chesapeake Milestone goals and achievements for these conservation practices as of September 30, 2013 were as follows:
 - Riparian Grass Buffers- 2165 acres or 402% of 538 acre goal
 - Riparian Forest Buffers- 578 acres or 262% of 221 acre goal
 - Wetlands –443 acres or 69% of 645 acre goal
 - Protection of Highly Erodible Land- 2445 acres or 402% of 608 acre goal
- The 2015 Chesapeake Milestone goals are for the period 7/1/14-6/30/15 and achievements for these conservation practices as of September 30, 2014 were as follows:

- Riparian Grass Buffers- 1121 acres or 129% of 866 acre goal
- Riparian Forest Buffers- 358 acres or 100% of 353 acre goal
- Wetlands – 154 acres or 24% of 645 acre goal
- Protection of Highly Erodible Land- 931 acres or 96% of 973 acre goal