Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay

Commonwealth of Virginia Summary

Chesapeake Riparian Forest Buffer Initiative

Over the past year in Virginia, state and federal agencies, agricultural groups, environmental organizations and other stakeholders have developed a set of strategies to accelerate the implementation of programs that establish riparian forest buffers. These buffers are not only important for cost-effectively meeting water quality goals, they are also vital parts of the ecosystem – restoring the health of freshwater fisheries, reducing downstream flooding, enhancing wildlife habitat, storing carbon, and cleaning the air.

Currently, Virginia relies heavily on riparian forest buffers as a best management practice for meeting its nitrogen reduction goals; fully 9% of these reductions are expected to result from the use of these buffers.[1] The state's Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP) proposes the creation of 6,215 acres of new riparian forest each year for a total of 80,820 acres by 2025 – a significant acceleration of current efforts. From 2012 to 2014, Virginia's annual accomplishments averaged only 250 acres/year through the USDA Farm Service Agency's Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP).[2]

Without an aggressive effort to increase riparian forest buffers, the Commonwealth of Virginia will need to find other (and often more costly) strategies to reduce over 1 million pounds of nitrogen, nearly 100,000 pounds of phosphorus, and 50,000 tons of sediment to reach their 2025 total pollutant reduction goals.[3] Virginia also has 8,500 acres of riparian forest buffers in 10 to 15 year CREP contracts, set to expire by 2018.[4] Unless re-enrolled or otherwise retained, losing these acres will further undermine Virginia's ability to achieve its water quality goals.

Recommendations/Strategies

To address these challenges, the Virginia State Task Force developed several "high priority" strategies that require a mix of federal and state policy flexibility, new funding and enhanced partnerships.[5]

1. Amend CREP Agreement to provide additional state funding to ensure that farmers can install riparian forest buffers and stream exclusion fencing at no cost and better integrate state and federal cost share programs. Expand the number of acres in the state eligible for CREP.
2. Make the riparian forest buffer practice more attractive to farmers by providing additional "incentives." Amend CREP Agreement to raise the "rental payment incentive" from 120% to 150%.
3. Provide greater flexibility in state and local programs to best address local conditions and costs. This includes delegating authority to CREP committees to "waive" some caps on cost-share payments.
4. Provide high-level federal and state leadership to inspire local staff and partners to implement riparian forest buffers. A history of CREP in the Chesapeake shows that forest buffers are implemented where local offices "champion" their use (75% are in just 25% of the counties).
5. Expand partnerships, increase training for conservation professionals, and provide outreach resources needed to increase awareness of riparian forest buffers and state and federal programs and to market the practice in the farming community.

[1] Chesapeake Bay Program Scenario Builder and Modeling Teams. "Determining the Relative Reductions of BMPs in the Phase II WIPs. March 13, 2013.

[2] Number cited for CP-22 practice only

[3] Chesapeake Bay Program Modeling Team. "Estimated additional lbs. of nutrients and sediment that would need to be offset due to slower progress toward Riparian Forest Buffer WIP goals." November 13, 2014.

[4] USDA Farm Service Agency. "CRP CP22 Enrollment Activity in Chesapeake Bay Watershed, FY 2012-FY 2015." December 31, 2014.

[5] The complete report can be found at www.allianceforthebay.org/riparian-forest-initiative.

Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Summary

Chesapeake Riparian Forest Buffer Initiative

Over the past year in Pennsylvania, state and federal agencies, agricultural groups, environmental organizations and other stakeholders have developed a set of strategies to accelerate the implementation of programs that establish riparian forest buffers. These buffers are not only important for cost-effectively meeting water quality goals, they are also vital parts of the ecosystem – restoring the health of freshwater fisheries, reducing downstream flooding, enhancing wildlife habitat, storing carbon, and cleaning the air.

Currently, Pennsylvania relies heavily on riparian forest buffers as a best management practice for meeting its nitrogen reduction goals; fully 13% of these reductions are expected to result from the use of these buffers.[1] The state's Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP) proposes the creation of 6,895 acres of new riparian forest each year for a total of 89,630 acres by 2025 – a significant acceleration of current efforts. From 2012 to 2014, Pennsylvania's annual accomplishments averaged only 271 acres per year through the USDA Farm Service Agency's Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP).[2]

Without an aggressive effort to increase riparian forest buffers, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania will need to find other (and often more costly) strategies to reduce over 2 million pounds of nitrogen, nearly 40,000 pounds of phosphorus, and 30,000 tons of sediment to reach their 2025 total pollutant reduction goals.[3] Pennsylvania also has 7,400 acres of riparian forest buffers in 10 to 15 year CREP contracts, set to expire by 2018.[4] Unless re-enrolled or otherwise retained, losing these acres will further undermine Virginia's ability to achieve its water quality goals.

Recommendations/Strategies

To address these challenges, the Pennsylvania State Task Force developed several priority strategies that require a mix of federal and state policy flexibility, new funding and enhanced partnerships.[5]

1. Expand the provision of technical assistance and on-farm site visits throughout the life of RFB contracts through expanded federal and state staffing and partnerships with NGOs.
2. Increase outreach to farmers by creating regional specialists to service high priority areas.
3. Continue to provide state cost-share assistance for riparian forest buffers to leverage federal investments and create incentive for riparian forest buffers as stream protection practices.
4. Expand partnerships, increase training for conservation professionals, and provide outreach resources needed to increase awareness of riparian forest buffers and state and federal programs and to market the practice in the farming community.
5. Provide high-level federal and state leadership to inspire local staff and partners to implement riparian forest buffers. A history of CREP in the Chesapeake shows that forest buffers are implemented where local offices "champion" their use (75% of riparian forest buffers are in just 25% of the counties).
6. Work with State partners to review current levels of staffing to ensure that outreach and technical assistance efforts are successful.

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[1] Chesapeake Bay Program Scenario Builder and Modeling Teams. "Determining the Relative Reductions of BMPs in the Phase II WIPs. March 13, 2013.

[2] Number cited for CP-22 practice only

[3] Chesapeake Bay Program Modeling Team. "Estimated additional lbs. of nutrients and sediment that would need to be offset due to slower progress toward Riparian Forest Buffer WIP goals." November 13, 2014.

[4] USDA Farm Service Agency. "CRP CP22 Enrollment Activity in Chesapeake Bay Watershed, FY 2012-FY 2015." December 31, 2014.

[5] The complete report can be found at www.allianceforthebay.org/riparian-forest-initiative.

Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay

State of New York Summary

Chesapeake Riparian Forest Buffer Initiative

Over the past year in New York, state and federal agencies, agricultural groups, environmental organizations and other stakeholders have developed a set of strategies to accelerate the implementation of programs that establish riparian forest buffers. These buffers are not only important for cost-effectively meeting water quality goals, they are also vital parts of the ecosystem – restoring the health of freshwater fisheries, reducing downstream flooding, enhancing wildlife habitat, storing carbon, and cleaning the air.

Currently, New York expects riparian forest buffers to generate 5% of the state's nitrogen reduction goals.[1] The state's Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP) proposes the creation of 475 acres per year for a total of 6,180 acres by 2025 – a significant acceleration of current efforts. Between 2012 and 2014, New York's efforts averaged 20 acres per year through the USDA Farm Service Agency's Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP).[2]

Without an aggressive effort to increase these buffers, New York will need to find other (and often more costly) strategies to reduce 41,000 pounds of nitrogen, nearly 2,000 pounds of phosphorus, and 900 tons of sediment to meet their total pollutant reduction goals for 2025.[3] New York also has 5,000 acres of riparian forest buffers in 10 to 15 year CREP contracts, set to expire by 2018.[4] Unless re-enrolled or otherwise retained, losing these acres will further undermine New York's ability to achieve its water quality goals.

Recommendations/Strategies

To address these challenges, the New York State Task Force developed several priority strategies that require a mix of federal and state policy flexibility, new funding and enhanced partnerships.[5]

1. Amend the State CREP Agreement to make the riparian forest buffer practice more attractive to cropland farmers by providing "financial incentives." The State of New York is proposing a new $200 per acre incentive payment for cropland farmers that implement forest buffers. The Task Force also recommends raising the "rental payment incentive" from 145% to 200%.
2. Expand partnerships, increase training for conservation professionals, and provide outreach resources needed to increase awareness of riparian forest buffers and state and federal programs and to market the practice in the farming community.
3. Ensure program success through enhanced financial and technical assistance to farmers. New York is requesting increased financial assistance and policy flexibility that will help farmers handle challenges to successfully establishing forest buffers.
4. Provide greater flexibility in state and local programs to best address local conditions and costs. This includes delegating authority to CREP committees to "waive" some caps on cost-share payments.
5. Provide high-level federal and state leadership to inspire local staff and partners to implement riparian forest buffers. A history of CREP in the Chesapeake shows that forest buffers are implemented where local offices "champion" their use (75% of Riparian forest buffers are in just 25% of the counties).
6. Provide funding for state partners to meet identified levels of staffing to ensure outreach and assistance efforts are successful.

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[1] Chesapeake Bay Program Scenario Builder and Modeling Teams. "Determining the Relative Reductions of BMPs in the Phase II WIPs. March 13, 2013.

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[3] Chesapeake Bay Program Modeling Team. "Estimated additional lbs. of nutrients and sediment that would need to be offset due to slower progress toward Riparian Forest Buffer WIP goals." November 13, 2014.

[4] USDA Farm Service Agency. "CRP CP22 Enrollment Activity in Chesapeake Bay Watershed, FY 2012-FY 2015." December 31, 2014.

[5] The complete report can be found at www.allianceforthebay.org/riparian-forest-initiative.

Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay

State of West Virginia Summary

Chesapeake Riparian Forest Buffer Initiative

Over the past year in West Virginia, state and federal agencies, agricultural groups, environmental organizations and other stakeholders have developed a set of strategies to accelerate the implementation of programs that establish riparian forest buffers. These buffers are not only important for cost-effectively meeting water quality goals, they are also vital parts of the ecosystem – restoring the health of freshwater fisheries, reducing downstream flooding, enhancing wildlife habitat, storing carbon, and cleaning the air.

Currently, West Virginia expects riparian forest buffers to generate 5% of the state's nitrogen reduction goals.[1] The state's Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP) proposes the creation of 250 acres per year for a total of 3,250 acres – a significant acceleration of current efforts. Between 2012 and 2014, state partners averaged 119 acres per year through the USDA Farm Service Agency's Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP).[2]

Without an aggressive effort to increase riparian forest buffers, the State of West Virginia will need to find other (and often more costly) strategies to reduce 45,000 pounds of nitrogen, nearly 2,000 pounds of phosphorus, and 1,400 tons of sediment to meet their total pollutant reduction goals for 2025.[3] West Virginia also has 5,000 acres of riparian forest buffers in 10 to 15 year CREP contracts, set to expire by 2018.[4] Unless re-enrolled or otherwise retained, losing these acres will further undermine West Virginia's ability to achieve its water quality goals.

Recommendations/Strategies

To address these challenges, the West Virginia State Task Force developed several priority strategies that require a mix of federal and state policy flexibility, new funding and enhanced partnerships.[5]

1. Amend CREP Agreement to add Monroe County to the state's CREP funding area to ensure that farmers in all of the state's portion of the Chesapeake Bay watershed are have access to funding and assistance. The State is also proposing to expand the number of acres eligible for CREP.
2. Expand partnerships, increase training for conservation professionals, and provide outreach resources needed to increase awareness of riparian forest buffers and state and federal programs and to market the practice in the farming community.
3. Ensure program success through enhanced financial and technical assistance to farmers. Increase financial assistance and policy flexibility that will help farmers handle challenges to successfully establishing their forest buffer. This includes increasing funding for maintenance
4. Provide greater flexibility to state and local programs to best address local conditions and costs. This includes delegating authority to CREP committees to "waive" caps on cost-share payments.
5. Expand the use of NGO partnerships to provide turnkey RFB implementation and maintenance.
6. Provide high-level federal and state leadership to inspire local staff and partners to implement RFBs. A history of CREP in the Chesapeake shows that forest buffers are implemented where local offices "champion" their use (75% of riparian forest buffers are in just 25% of the counties).
7. Provide funding to meet identified levels of staffing to ensure outreach and assistance efforts are successful.

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[1] Chesapeake Bay Program Scenario Builder and Modeling Teams. "Determining the Relative Reductions of BMPs in the Phase II WIPs. March 13, 2013.

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[3] Chesapeake Bay Program Modeling Team. "Estimated additional lbs. of nutrients and sediment that would need to be offset due to slower progress toward Riparian Forest Buffer WIP goals." November 13, 2014.

[4] USDA Farm Service Agency. "CRP CP22 Enrollment Activity in Chesapeake Bay Watershed, FY 2012-FY 2015." December 31, 2014.

[5] The complete report can be found at www.allianceforthebay.org/riparian-forest-initiative.

Over the past year in Maryland, state and federal agencies, agricultural groups, environmental organizations and other stakeholders have developed a set of strategies to accelerate the implementation of programs that establish riparian forest buffers. These buffers are not only important for cost-effectively meeting water quality goals, they are also vital parts of the ecosystem – restoring the health of freshwater fisheries, reducing downstream flooding, enhancing wildlife habitat, storing carbon, and cleaning the air.

Currently, Maryland expects riparian forest buffers to generate 5% of the state's nitrogen reduction goals.[1] The state's Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP) proposes the creation of 90 acres per year for a total of 1,190 acres. Currently Maryland is meeting its annual target. If this rate cannot be sustained, the state would need to find other (and often more costly) strategies to reduce over 29,000 pounds of nitrogen and 7,000 tons of sediment to meet their total pollutant reduction goals for 2025.[2]

Maryland also has 11,250 acres of riparian forest buffers in 10 to 15 year CREP contracts, set to expire by 2018.[3] Unless re-enrolled or otherwise retained, losing these acres will further undermine Maryland's ability to achieve its water quality goals.

Recommendations/Strategies
To address these challenges, the Maryland State Task Force developed several priority strategies that require a mix of federal and state policy flexibility, new funding and enhanced partnerships.[4]

1. Implement a multi-stakeholder outreach campaign to Increase farmer awareness of state and federal programs.
2. Amend CREP Agreement to enhance financial and technical assistance to farmers. Specifically, increase financial assistance and policy flexibility that helps farmers successfully establish forest buffers. Create a state-run funding pool to contract and better implement buffer maintenance.
3. Provide funding and expand partnerships to increase training for conservation professionals and provide resources needed to market the practice in the farming community.
4. Provide high-level federal and state leadership to inspire local staff and partners to implement riparian forest buffers. A history of CREP in the Chesapeake shows that forest buffers are implemented where local offices "champion" their use (75% of riparian forest buffers are in just 25% of the counties).
5. Work with state partners to review current levels of staffing to ensure outreach and technical assistance efforts are successful.
6. Provide greater flexibility to state and local programs to address local conditions and costs: delegate authority to CREP committees to "waive" caps on cost-share payments and revise policies to allow conversion of grass buffer practices to forest buffers where natural regeneration of trees occurs.
7. Conduct an analysis to determine if financial incentives are competitive enough on cropland.

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[1] Chesapeake Bay Program Scenario Builder and Modeling Teams. "Determining the Relative Reductions of BMPs in the Phase II WIPs. March 13, 2013.

[2] Chesapeake Bay Program Modeling Team. "Estimated additional lbs. of nutrients and sediment that would need to be offset due to slower progress toward Riparian Forest Buffer WIP goals." November 13, 2014.

[3] USDA Farm Service Agency. "CRP CP22 Enrollment Activity in Chesapeake Bay Watershed, FY 2012-FY 2015." December 31, 2014.

[4] The complete report can be found at www.allianceforthebay.org/riparian-forest-initiative.

Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay

State of Delaware Summary

Chesapeake Riparian Forest Buffer Initiative

Over the past year in Delaware, state and federal agencies, agricultural groups, environmental organizations and other stakeholders have developed a set of strategies to accelerate the implementation of programs that establish riparian forest buffers. These buffers are not only important for cost-effectively meeting water quality goals, they are also vital parts of the ecosystem – restoring the health of freshwater fisheries, reducing downstream flooding, enhancing wildlife habitat, storing carbon, and cleaning the air.

Currently, Delaware relies heavily on riparian forest buffers as a best management practice for meeting its nitrogen reduction goals; fully 10% of these reductions are expected to result from the use of these buffers.[1] The state's Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP) proposes the creation of 370 new acres per year for a total of 4,790 acres by 2025.

If the state is unable to sustain this rate, other (and often more costly) strategies would be needed to reduce over 125,000 pounds of nitrogen, 6,000 pounds of phosphorus and 5,000 tons of sediment to meet their total pollutant reduction goals for 2025.[2] Delaware only has 64 acres of riparian forest buffers in 10 to 15 year CREP contracts that are set to expire by 2018.[3] To sustain forward progress, these acres should be re-enrolled or otherwise retained.

Recommendations/Strategies

To address these challenges, the Delaware State Task Force developed several priority strategies that require a mix of federal and state policy flexibility, new funding and enhanced partnerships.[4]

1. Amend the state CREP Agreement to make the riparian forest buffer practice more attractive to cropland farmers by providing more financial incentives. Delaware is proposing a new $200 per acre bonus payment for farmers that implement a forest buffer through CREP.
2. Work with state legislature to ensure stable, long term matching funds for CREP funding.
3. Increase farmer awareness of state and federal programs through a multi-stakeholder outreach campaign.
4. Ensure program success through enhanced financial and technical assistance to farmers. Delaware is requesting increased financial assistance that will help farmers handle challenges to successfully establishing their forest buffer. This includes developing new standards for implementing riparian forest buffers along tax ditches.
5. Provide high-level federal and state leadership to inspire local staff and partners to implement RFBs. A history of CREP in the Chesapeake shows that forest buffers are implemented where local offices "champion" their use (75% of riparian forest buffers are in just 25% of the counties).

[1] Chesapeake Bay Program Scenario Builder and Modeling Teams. "Determining the Relative Reductions of BMPs in the Phase II WIPs. March 13, 2013.

[2] Chesapeake Bay Program Modeling Team. "Estimated additional lbs. of nutrients and sediment that would need to be offset due to slower progress toward Riparian Forest Buffer WIP goals." November 13, 2014.

[3] USDA Farm Service Agency. "CRP CP22 Enrollment Activity in Chesapeake Bay Watershed, FY 2012-FY 2015." December 31, 2014.

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