



# Chesapeake Bay Program

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## CHESAPEAKE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL DIRECTIVE NO. 94-1

### Riparian Forest Buffers

The restoration of water quality and living resources are the principal goals of the 1987 Chesapeake Bay Agreement. To achieve these goals, we agreed to reduce nutrients in the main stem of Chesapeake Bay 40 percent by the year 2000 and to sustain this level thereafter. In 1992, we reaffirmed these goals and also recognized the importance of the tributaries to the Bay ecosystem. We thus began to develop tributary specific nutrient reduction strategies to achieve water quality requirements necessary to restore living resources in the tributaries as well as the mainstem of the Chesapeake Bay. In 1993, we furthered our commitment to these living resources by agreeing to construct migratory fish passages and remove stream blockages in the tributaries to restore hundreds of miles of historic spawning areas. We now recognize that forests along waterways, also known as "riparian forests," are an important resource that protects water quality and provides habitat and food necessary to support fish survival and reproduction. Used as buffers, riparian forests provide a means of helping us achieve our restoration goals in the tributaries.

#### BASED ON SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH INTO THE ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS OF RIPARIAN FOREST BUFFERS, WE HAVE FOUND THAT:

€ Forests have the ability to absorb and denitrify nitrogen in surface and groundwater, and to trap phosphorus laden sediment and other pollutants resulting from adjacent land uses, thereby protecting water quality.

€ Riparian forests provide shade, organic matter, and often control stream bank stability, which in turn provide a range of living resource habitat benefits, including the moderation of stream temperature, support of the food web, protection of fish habitat, and sediment and erosion control.

€ Riparian forest buffers deliver the greatest range of environmental benefits of any type of stream buffer.

#### THE ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS OF RIPARIAN FOREST BUFFERS AND THEIR POTENTIAL IN HELPING US MEET OUR NUTRIENT REDUCTION GOALS REPRESENT A UNIQUE

**OPPORTUNITY TO DEVELOP A COMPREHENSIVE BASINWIDE POLICY TO MAINTAIN AND RESTORE THIS VITAL RESOURCE. A POLICY IS TIMELY FOR THE FOLLOWING REASONS:**

- € Since much has been done by state and federal agencies, private landowners, and industry to improve water quality through the protection of riparian forests, it is now appropriate for the Chesapeake Executive Council to adopt a comprehensive policy addressing riparian forest buffers in the Chesapeake tributaries.
- € Much of the inventory of riparian forests has been conducted or is underway, and as we learn more about the extent and condition of these forests, a policy is needed to guide management actions.
- € The tributary strategies to date have identified riparian forest buffers as an important best management practice in controlling nutrient loading to streams.
- € As we provide for migratory fish passage, it becomes even more important to ensure favorable water quality and habitat in those streams and rivers.
- € Maintaining longterm caps on nutrients in the tributaries will require approaches that maintain ecosystem or watershed scale functions, like those provided by healthy riparian forests.

**THEREFORE, TO FURTHER OUR COMMITMENTS MADE IN THE 1987 CHESAPEAKE BAY AGREEMENT, WE WILL:**

- € Recognize the value of riparian areas in the Chesapeake Bay watershed and commit to develop a policy which will enhance the maintenance, restoration and stewardship of this valuable resource.
- € Convene a panel or task force to recommend a Chesapeake Bay Program policy on riparian forest buffers. To ensure broad public input, the panel will conduct a series of workshops or roundtables involving landowners, federal, state and local governments, non-profit organizations, business, industry, scientists, and citizens.
- € Request the panel to consider and make recommendations, where appropriate, for:
  - € accepted definitions of forest buffers which address the ecologically beneficial characteristics and functions of riparian forests while accommodating resource management activities appropriate within the riparian zone;
  - € a quantifiable goal or goals, measured in acres, stream miles or other appropriate terms, to serve as a longterm target for the maintenance and restoration of riparian forests, as well as a timetable for achieving this goal;
  - € ways to strengthen communication and partnerships while recognizing the rights and responsibilities of federal, state and local governments, private landowners, and the public, so as to better coordinate policy and program actions regarding riparian forest buffers;
  - € ways to support other stream protection efforts where landowners or land managers are unable to implement riparian forest buffers.
- € Request the panel to submit an interim report to the Executive Council in 1995, outlining the major policy findings and any appropriate recommendations, and to submit final recommendations for a riparian forest buffer policy in 1996 for consideration by the Executive Council.

By this DIRECTIVE, we reaffirm our commitments made in the Chesapeake Bay Agreement to restore and protect the ecological integrity, productivity and beneficial uses of the Chesapeake Bay. In recognition of our commitments, we the undersigned agree to further our efforts through this directive which is hereby incorporated into the overall Chesapeake Bay Program.

DATE: October 14, 1994

SIGNERS:

For the Commonwealth of Virginia<*George F. Allen, Governor*

For the State of Maryland<*William Donald Schaefer, Governor*

For the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania<*Robert Casey, Governor*

For the District of Columbia<*Sharon Pratt Kelly, Mayor*

For the United States of America<*Carol M. Browner, Administrator, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency*

For the Chesapeake Bay Commission<*Elmo S. Cross, Jr., Chairman*

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*Last modified 4 March 1996*