



2019 ANNUAL REPORT



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Photo by Don Brainard



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A Note from USC's Coordinator

Right before my eyes, another year has gone by! As I sit here reflecting on the USC's accomplishments in 2019, and looking forward to those we are planning to tackle in 2020, it never ceases to amaze me how fast time goes and how much work was done! In 2019, USC members and partners worked with the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to update the Watershed Implementation Plan for the Chesapeake Bay. We were able to complete Phase 3, and now find ourselves looking ahead to the 2025 deadline, and meeting those watershed goals.

The bottom-line is, now that the plan is complete, we need to roll up our sleeves and get the work done. The numbers seem insurmountable, possibly unachievable, but instead of dwelling on those numbers, we need to focus on what we do best. That is working with our local communities, farms and rural landowners on project planning, developing designs, and implementing practices throughout the watershed, the same way we did in 2019, and the same way we will in 2020. As you look through the accomplishments of the USC and our partners for 2019, ask yourself what can you do to help the cause. Conserving our natural resources in the watershed includes a variety of water quality improvements, stream corridor and wetland restoration work, grazing systems, and much, much more. It's time we think outside the box as we move forward to 2025 and open ourselves up to new ideas, new partnerships and new opportunities in the watershed! And I for one am excited to see what comes next ...

Wendy Walsh


USC Ag Team

The USC Ag Team consists of Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) technical staff from multiple counties and our USC Ag Coordinator working together to support and assist agricultural operations within the coalition. Together we can better improve water quality both locally and ultimately in the Chesapeake Bay. We also are responsible for tracking all of the nutrient and sediment reducing projects implemented across the New York part of the watershed, demonstrating our efforts to meet load reduction goals for the Chesapeake Bay.

A Glance at New York's 2019 BMP Progress Reporting

 172,849 Acres of Conservation Planning


 11,422 Acres of Cover Crops

 16,772 Acres of Tillage Practices


 3,241 Acres of Riparian Forest Buffer

 34,840 Acres of Prescribed Grazing

 216 Manure Storages

 47 Farms with Precision Feed

 1,540 Acres of Grass Buffer

 72,137 Acres of Nutrient Management

Chesapeake Bay Data

The Chesapeake Bay Program generates reports on an annual basis to show the progress for each data submission. New York's DRAFT 2019 nutrient reduction numbers for all sectors are estimated to annually reduce Nitrogen by 578,953.39 pounds, Phosphorus by 5,739.72 pounds, and Sediment by 7,453,349.13. These numbers represent the reduction of nutrients to the tidal waters of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed on an annual basis. The 2019 DRAFT progress will be finalized in the Spring of 2020.

2019 Ag Team Funding Partners

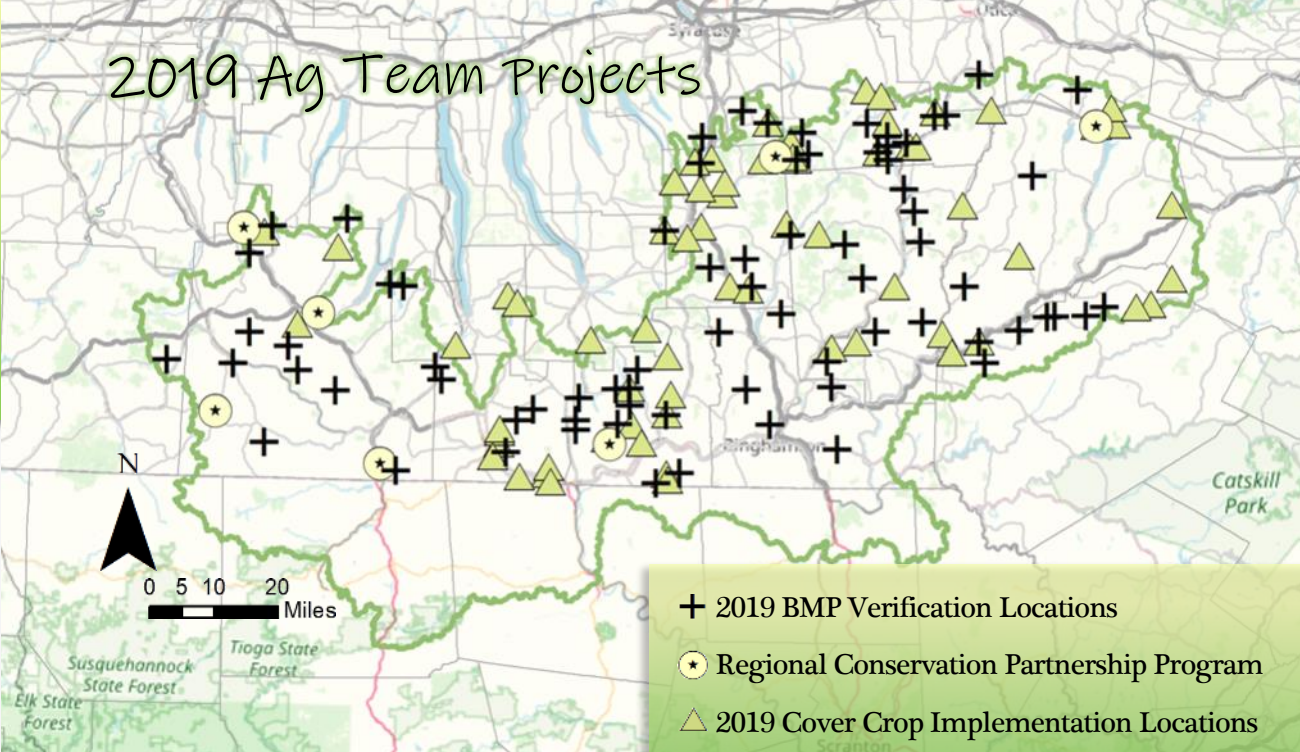
♦ NYS Department of
Environmental Conservation

♦ National Fish and
Wildlife Foundation

♦ Natural Resources
Conservation Services



2019 Ag Team Projects



Watershed Implementation Plan Update



In the spring of 2019, the USC, in coordination with DEC and Farm Bureau, held 5 farmer/public outreach meetings. These meetings were spread out across the watershed to review New York's Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP). The meetings were held in Tioga, Cortland, Otsego, Madison, and Steuben counties with approximately 120 attendees. The DRAFT WIP was submitted to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in April of 2019. Twenty-three public comments were received and addressed, and the Final WIP was submitted for the EPA's evaluation on August 23, 2019. The EPA WIP Evaluation was received in December of 2019, and is currently being reviewed.

2019 Ag Team Highlights

3

Methods of cover crop planting - traditional, high boy, and helicopter

7

Landowners contracted through Round 2 of RCPP

30,074

Feet of stream exclusion fence

5

Acres of ag tree planting

\$350K

Made available for the planting of 8,812 acres of cover crops.

USC Buffer Team

The goal of the USC Buffer Team is to promote the restoration and long-term functionality of riparian areas for water and habitat quality. These goals are achieved through innovative programming. The team is dedicated to ensuring practice functionality through education, outreach, and technical assistance. Data collection to better understand buffer functionality is also a priority as is providing technical support for buffer issues to USC members. We strive to engage partners and utilize partnerships to leverage additional work to promote the mission of the USC.

Buffer Steward Program

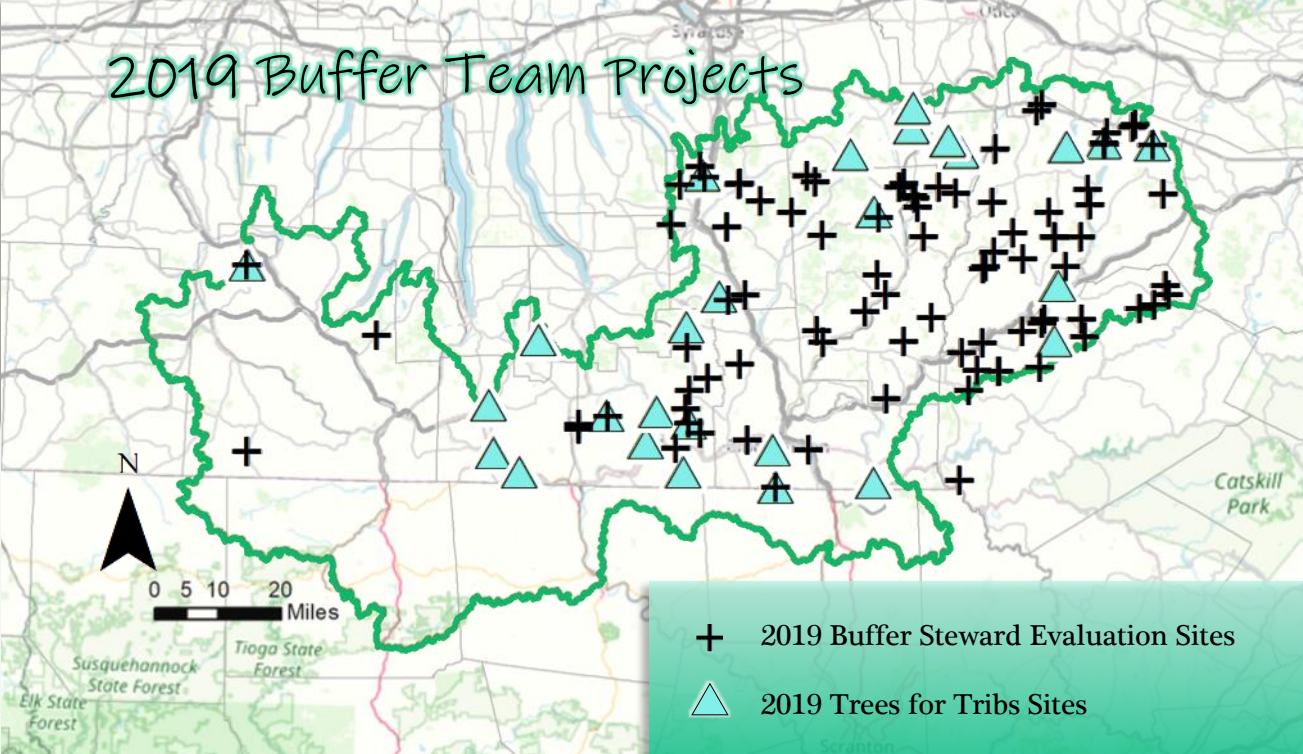
The USC Buffer Steward Program was created in 2019 as a way to ensure that riparian forest buffer establishment goals were being met. Riparian buffers are a growing practice, requiring management activities to ensure successful establishment. It has been found through technical assistance to landowners, and as communicated at the NY Riparian Forest Buffer Task Force meetings, that landowners often do not have the tools to successfully establish this practice on their own. Through the Steward Program, stewards are hired within individual SWCDs and tasked with evaluating riparian forest establishment, determining the appropriate establishment activities needed, and then facilitating those activities. The first year of the program was a success with the following accomplishments:

- ♦ Approximately 750 acres of buffer received steward attention in 2019 through evaluations and/or establishment activities;
- ♦ 6 stewards were hired throughout the watershed;
- ♦ 5 counties participated by hiring stewards to perform evaluations and establishment activities;
- ♦ Over 60 landowners were contacted regarding their buffers;
- ♦ Stewards conducted establishment activities such as tube straightening, weed pulling, removing trees tubes, weed whacking and/or replanting when needed on most of the planted acreage; and
- ♦ The majority of the evaluations took place on CREP buffers, but buffers implemented through other programs were also evaluated. Riparian buffers implemented through NYS Ag Nonpoint Source, Environmental Quality Incentive Program, USC Water Quality Program (funded through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF)), and NYS DEC's Trees for Tributaries Program were also stewarded in 2019.

The USC Buffer Steward Program will take place again in 2020!



2019 Buffer Team Projects



2019 Buffer Team Volunteer Organizations

- ♦ SUNY Oneonta
- ♦ Ranch Riders 4-H Club
- ♦ Owego Rotary Club
- ♦ Loon Lake Watershed Improvement Alliance
- ♦ Numerous landowners across the watershed



2019 Buffer Team Funding Partners

- ♦ NYS Department of Environmental Conservation
- ♦ National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
- ♦ United States Department of Agriculture
- ♦ United States Forest Service
- ♦ NYS Department of Ag and Markets
- ♦ One Tree Planted



8

Counties participated in Trees for Tribes

5

Counties hired buffer stewards through NFWF funding

29

Projects implemented through Trees for Tribes

5,900

Trees/shrubs planted through the Trees for Tribes program

\$159k

Paid to New York landowners for CREP incentive payments

2019 Buffer Team Highlights

USC Stream Team

The USC Stream Team strives to provide technical expertise and training to USC members and the watershed community. Stream condition and challenges in the Southern Tier of New York and Northern Tier of Pennsylvania are a direct result of the unique interaction of geology, topography, climate and cultural impacts of the region. The Stream Team offers valuable information to municipal officials, decision makers, communities and landowners in working with stream dynamics. Our goal is to be recognized as a source of quality, value driven technical assistance in addressing stream corridor rehabilitation and watershed assessments in the region.

NY Rising Community Watershed Assessments

The NY Rising Community project utilized the same watershed assessment template as our I-4 project to identify sustainable flood mitigation measures. This project assessed six watersheds, three in Broome County, Chamberlain, Fuller Hollow, and Brixius, and three in Tioga County, Apalachin, Huntington and Wappasening. The watersheds, a mixture of urban and rural communities, were assessed by the consulting firm, Inter Fluve. The assessment reflected the approach and philosophy of the USC, identifying potential watershed improvement projects, and moving towards preliminary designs of critical projects. Through this funding, designs will be brought to 30% completion, where the municipalities or local conservation districts can then work to apply for implementation funding.

NY Rising Assessment, Tioga County



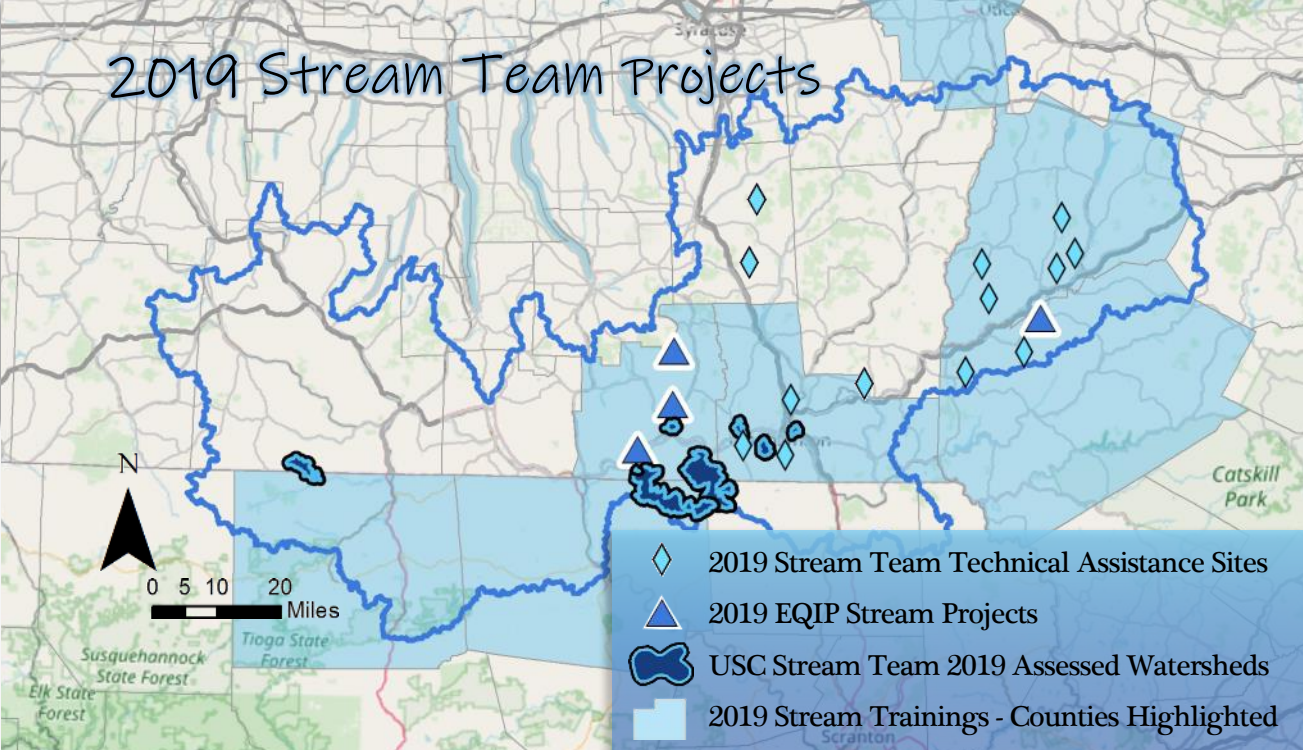
Stream Construction, Tioga County



Stream Team Construction

The USC Stream Program implemented 4 streambank stabilization projects in 2019 through NRCS EQIP funding. These projects protected 1,840 linear feet of streambank using 3,518 tons of stone. Project implementation began in January, and wrapped up in October. Stream work addressed actively migrating streambanks with rock placement, stream rock deflectors and rooted willow stakes. We would like to thank Districts for continuing to involve USC in their stream project planning, and for looking to USC for implementation support.

2019 Stream Team Projects



Stream Team Technical Assistance

At the very core of the USC's record of achievement is its ability to share the vast resources of member expertise. Through all program areas, the USC provides this expertise into its delivery of accomplishments. The USC's Stream Team is no exception to this. During 2019, members of the team assisted SWCDs through on-site evaluations for some sites, and in identifying preliminary design approaches for others. On many projects, the USC has provided full design packages under the umbrella of a local engineer.

2019 Stream Team Funding Partners

- ◆ National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
- ◆ Natural Resources Conservation Services
- ◆ New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
- ◆ New York State Governor's Office of Storm Recovery
- ◆ United States Fish and Wildlife Service

2019 Stream Team Highlights

7

Watersheds assessed

1,840

Linear feet of streambank stabilized

3,518

Tons of rock used to stabilize streambanks

4

NRCS EQIP streambank projects implemented

13

Counties received technical assistance throughout the watershed



USC Wetland Team

The USC Wetland Team is an example of an effective programmatic approach to delivering wetland conservation at a watershed scale. While wetlands are understood to provide nutrient and runoff retention as well as habitat to many unique species, their benefits are often overlooked across the watershed. We are dedicated to increasing wetland restoration and expanding wetland education and understanding across our region. We support a wide variety of wetland-related programs, providing site review, monitoring, design, construction and maintenance assistance to partners, members and our other USC teams alike.

2019 Wetland Team Funding Partners

- ♦ National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
- ♦ NYS Department of Environmental Conservation
- ♦ NYS Department of Transportation
- ♦ Natural Resources Conservation Services
- ♦ SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry
- ♦ The Wetland Trust
- ♦ United States Fish and Wildlife Service

DOT Monitoring Site, Tompkins County



Wetland Delineation Training, Chenango County

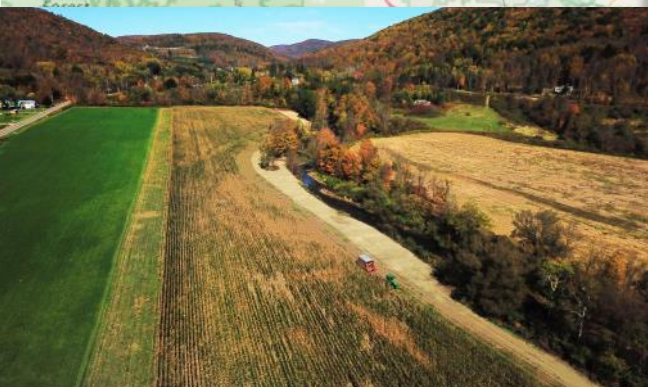


Empire Wetland Mitigation Site, Chemung County

Wetland Training

The USC Wetland Team participated and/or hosted eight wetland outreach events in seven counties in 2019. Our team partnered with colleges, high schools and middle schools to educate students about wetlands, wetland issues, wetland flora and fauna, and the Chesapeake Bay. A May, 2019 training invited 75 high school students to tour a wetland and learn about wetland sampling techniques and macro-invertebrate identification. In addition to school-aged education, the USC Wetland Team hosted several professional training events in 2019. During an August Wetland Delineation Training, the Wetland Team invited a long-time wetland delineation trainer to the TWT Wetland Field Station for a three-day classroom and field training session.

2019 Wetland Team Projects



DEC WQIP Wetland and Stream Berm Removal Project

The USC Wetland Team has concluded a 4-year-long WQIP Southern Tier Natural Infrastructure Implementation grant through the New York State Department of Environmental

Conservation. Goals for this grant were to construct 36 acres of wetland complexes and remove 6,000 linear feet of streamside berm. With the project winding down, project accomplishments include building, 78 wetland pools throughout 9 state forests for a total of 48.7 acres of wetland complex, and removing 6,431 linear feet of streamside berms at 7 sites across the watershed.

This project has added floodflow detention, nutrient retention, groundwater recharge and specialized habitat to the USC watershed through wetland restoration, and restored flood plain area, helping decrease the peak discharge in streams where streamside berms were removed.

2019 Wetland Team Highlights

1,300

Linear feet of streamside berm removed

14

Acres of restored wetland

733

Watershed residents educated about wetland issues

98.5

Acres of mitigation wetland management and monitoring

451.8

Acres of mitigation site planning

A Focus on Outreach

5

Bi-Monthly Newsletters

12

Project Spotlights in the USC Newsletter

29

E & O Events

2,439

E & O Event Attendees

13,739

Facebook Views

USC Education and Outreach Committee

In 2019, the USC established the Education and Outreach (E & O) Committee. This committee was developed with the goal of focusing on outreach throughout the USC watershed and beyond. The committee met frequently throughout the year to collaborate on outreach across the program teams and watershed.

Key E & O activities for 2019 included:

- ♦ Increasing USC's information exchange by:
 - ♦ Producing a bi-monthly newsletter that was distributed to USC Members including information on existing programs and activities, upcoming events, and highlighting innovative projects completed by USC and our partners.
 - ♦ Increasing our presence at outreach events, developing outreach materials and giveaways to spread the word about our programs.
 - ♦ Hosting and participating in training events targeted to a variety of interest groups and ages, from middle school on up, across the watershed.
- ♦ Increasing USC's web presence by:
 - ♦ Increasing Facebook post frequency and content diversity, resulting in a 214% increase in post views, and a similar increase in post responses.



- ♦ Completing a website overhaul, revising site content, layout and functionality. Our current webpage includes a projects blog, calendars for each USC Team, and a members only page.



New USC website

Emphasis on trainings, outreach and outreach materials



2019 Committee Representation

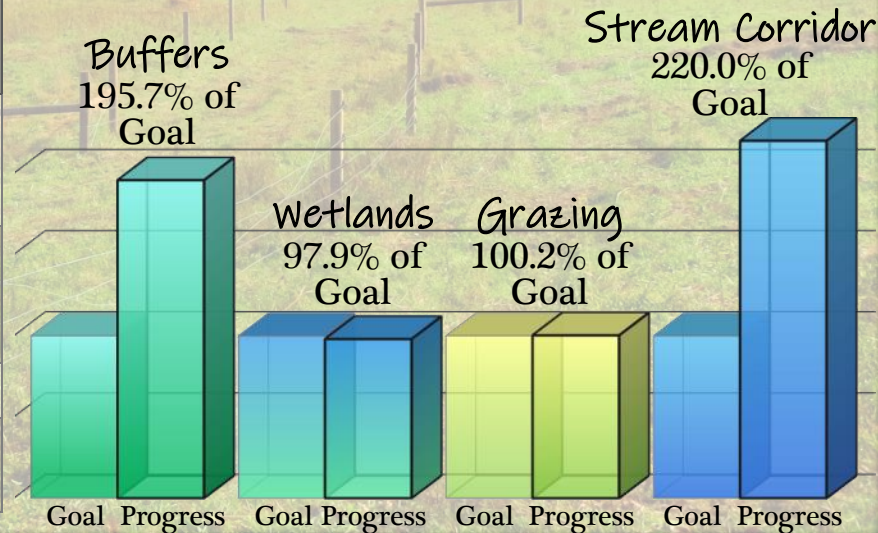
- ♦ Chesapeake Bay Program (CBP) Agricultural Workgroup
- ♦ CBP Citizen's Advisory Committee
- ♦ CBP Forestry Workgroup
- ♦ CBP Riparian Forest Buffer Action Team
- ♦ CBP Stream Health Workgroup
- ♦ CBP Water Quality Goal Implementation Team
- ♦ CBP Watershed Technical Workgroup
- ♦ CBP Wetland Workgroup and Outreach Subcommittee
- ♦ New York State Ag & Markets Municipal Sub-Committee

USC Water Quality Program

While new to us, the USC Water Quality Program builds on our existing, team-based structure and regional-scale implementation delivery system for addressing nutrient and sediment loads in the Chesapeake Bay Headwaters. This program acknowledges that our primary focus areas: agriculture, streams, and wetlands are interconnected across the watershed, and the integration of team projects makes sense. Many recent USC Water Quality Program projects exclude livestock from waterways and/or promote grazing practices, while also implementing forested buffers and enhancing wetland areas. In addition to benefiting water quality, practices installed improve cattle health, increase habitat diversity, and reduce flooding across the watershed. We employ an application process for awarding funding for individual projects to ensure equitable and consistent distribution of funds while meeting grant deliverables.

Our goal is to continue this program for years to come, as it can be used by districts to fill gaps with state and federal programming, but has also been used as stand alone funding for project implementation. Funding matched, or leveraged with this program is about 40% of total project costs.

	Project Goals	Project Progress
Buffer	100 acres (75 forest, 25 grass)	195.73 acres (190.43 forest, 5.3 grass)
Wetland	12 acres	11.75 acres (4.5 enhanced, 7.25 created)
Grazing	440 acres	440.9 acres
Stream Corridor	4,000 feet	8,800 feet



Additional
Projects
Implemented

8

Stream Crossings

43,724

Feet of Stream
Exclusion
Fencing

11

Watering
Systems

19,317

Feet of
Waterline



Looking

Ag Team Goals

- ♦ Increase knowledge and understanding of BMP Verification Program.
- ♦ Increase Nutrient Management Planning efforts.
- ♦ Continue to seek additional funding opportunities.
- ♦ Increase Best Management Practice implementation to improve water quality locally, and in the Chesapeake Bay.
- ♦ Increase capacity within district offices through addition of technical and engineering staff.

Targeted 2020 Projects

- ♦ With partners, continue oversight of 12 contracts through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program within 6 counties.
- ♦ With partners, develop and administer an additional round of funding through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program.
- ♦ Continue to increase Cover Crop implementation across the Watershed through the USC Cover Crop Implementation Project (funding provided by NYS DEC).
- ♦ Provide additional training on the AEM Database Online Tool and BMP Verification Protocols.
- ♦ Implement prescribed grazing systems through USC Water Quality Program funding.

Buffer Team Goals

- ♦ Continue to seek out and secure funding for stream corridor rehabilitation and prescribed grazing projects that include riparian buffers.
- ♦ Increase capacity to plan and coordinate riparian buffer projects within the USC geographical area.
- ♦ Collaborate with conservation partners to fill gaps within their programs to implement buffers.
- ♦ Support partners in their initiatives to implement riparian buffers.
- ♦ Lead a robust education and outreach agenda regarding water quality and the function of riparian areas.

Targeted 2020 Projects

- ♦ Continue the USC Buffer Steward Program to evaluate and establish riparian forest buffers.
- ♦ Coordinate the DEC's Trees for Tributaries Program throughout the watershed.
- ♦ Provide CREP assistance through our NRCS Contribution Agreement.
- ♦ Work with new partners to address riparian restoration across the landscape.

Ahead

Stream Team Goals

- ♦ Engage in statewide initiative to develop road ditch maintenance program.
- ♦ Conduct and facilitate trainings on Emergency Stream Intervention, Best Management Practice Implementation, and the USC Stream Corridor Assessment Guide to contractors, municipal officials and SWCD members.
- ♦ Secure funding for a Stream Team Engineering Technician.
- ♦ Develop and secure funding for USC Stream Team application that allows information to be collected and retained for both project assessment and implementation.

Targeted 2020 Projects

- ♦ Continue implementation of stream BMPs and training with funding through NYS DEC WQIP program.
- ♦ Provide technical support to member SWCDs and communities.
- ♦ Expand NAACC inventories with the development of an improved “culvert condition” assessment tool.
- ♦ Further work under the NY Rising Communities Regional Susquehanna River Initiative Floodplain Management and Stream Restoration Projects in Broome and Tioga Counties.

Wetland Team Goals

- ♦ Continue working to increase wetland restoration across the watershed with emphasis on projects that meet CBP model BMP reporting standards.
- ♦ Expand wetland education efforts through increased participation in public outreach events, and develop age-appropriate outreach materials for those events.

Targeted 2020 Projects

- ♦ Host a soils identification field and office training, July 16th (Rain date July 23rd).
- ♦ Begin implementation of restoration sites for 2018 DEC WQIP project “Expanding Wetland Work in the Watershed”, and continue site identification.
- ♦ Develop wetland mitigation plans for sites in the Mohawk, Oneida, Finger Lakes and Chemung River Service Areas for the In-Lieu Fee Program; Continue to search for sites in active watersheds without current sites identified.
- ♦ Continue monitoring and performing maintenance at existing wetland mitigation sites in Tompkins, Chemung and Steuben Counties.
- ♦ Implement 2 EQIP stream stabilization projects and NFWF Spencer Lake berm removal project.
- ♦ Construct USC Water Quality Program wetland restoration projects - sites identified.
- ♦ Continue assisting USC Teams and Partners with construction and maintenance needs.



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