# Riparian Forest Buffer

## Goal

Continually increase the capacity of forest buffers to provide water quality and habitat benefits throughout the watershed. Restore 900 miles per year of riparian forest buffer and conserve existing buffers until at least 70 percent of riparian areas throughout the watershed are forested.

## Factors Influencing Success

The following are natural and human factors that influence the partnership’s ability to attain the riparian forest buffer (RFB) outcome. Because the restoration of riparian forest buffers is predominantly an agricultural practice, many of the factors influencing this outcome are common to agriculture. These are not readily within our control, and will not be ranked as part of this Management Strategy:

1. Fluctuation in commodity crop values
2. Inter-generational transfer of agricultural lands
3. Loss of agricultural lands
4. Lack of congressional authorization of a new Farm Bill, which caused Conservation Reserve Program to experience extensive delays in 2013 and 2014.

Note: Urban riparian buffers are included in the urban tree canopy and are addressed as part of the Tree Canopy Management Strategy along with related stormwater issues.

Other factors are more technical or relate to management/leadership. All of these factors have been identified to be of the highest order of priority from the various groups that have been assembled as part of the Initiative (specifically, the Steering Committee, State Task Forces, and the Innovators’ Roundtable). However, as part of a layered ranking exercise, the approximate order of importance was determined to be:

1. Federal/state/local leadership place insufficient emphasis on RFB as a priority practice and allow less beneficial practices to successfully compete for riparian space
2. Technical assistance is insufficient
3. Lack of interagency coordination and staff training at all levels of government
4. Lackluster incentives, and incentives that are not strategic and do not leverage resources wisely
5. Federal funds go unused, sometimes for lack of a 20% match
6. Federal programs lack the flexibility states and landowners need
7. Outreach to landowners with riparian areas needs to stress the importance of RFB, new information, and improved incentives for enrollment, re-enrollment, and permanent protection
8. Better understanding of why only 53% of RFB acres are re-enrolling upon expiration of first 15-year contract –work to increase re-enrollment or ease buffer
9. Lack of information available to landowners and technical assistance providers
10. Unsatisfactory survival of buffer plantings and maintenance issues primarily due to excess deer and vole browse and competing vegetation
11. Complicated cost-share program application and implementation process accompanied by unclear communication
12. Lack of targeting riparian forest buffers to where they would do the most good
13. Lack of focus on permanent protection of riparian forest buffers; they are often lost when agricultural lands are converted to development and small, linear easements are difficult to manage.

## Resulting Scoring Narrative

The complexity of factors require best professional judgement (BPJ) to discern the differences between some scores. For instance, multiple different combinations of practice effects could lead to judgments that a 4 is warranted instead of a 3 or 5.

There are 2 options. Please indicate your preferred option.

Option 1

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| --- | --- |
| **Score** | **Score Narrative for Riparian Forest Buffer** |
| 5 Substantial Improvement | Practice directly restores or conserves riparian forest buffer of width 100 feet or greater. |
| 4 Moderate to Substantial Improvement | Somewhere between 3 and 5 🡪 BPJ |
| 3 Moderate Improvement | Practice directly restores or conserves riparian forest buffer of width 35 to 99 feet. |
| 2 Slight to Moderate Improvement | Somewhere between 1 and 3 🡪 BPJ |
| 1 Slight Improvement | Practice directly restores or conserves riparian forest buffer of width 10 to 34 feet. |
| 0 No Effect | Practice has no impact on riparian forest buffers. |
| -1 Slight Worsening | Practice directly removes riparian forest buffer of width 10 to 34 feet. |
| - 2 Slight to Moderate Worsening | Somewhere between -1 and -3 🡪 BPJ |
| - 3 Moderate Worsening | Practice directly removes riparian forest buffer of width 35 to 99 feet. |
| - 4 Moderate to Substantial Worsening | Somewhere between -3 and -5 🡪 BPJ |
| - 5 Substantial Worsening | Practice directly removes riparian forest buffer of width 100 feet or greater. |

Option 2

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| --- | --- |
| **Score** | **Score Narrative for Riparian Forest Buffer** |
| 5 Substantial Improvement | Practice directly restores or conserves riparian forest buffer with width >35 feet. |
| 4 Moderate to Substantial Improvement | Somewhere between 3 and 5 🡪 BPJ |
| 3 Moderate Improvement | Practice establishes trees in the riparian zone, but not to width of 35 feet. |
| 2 Slight to Moderate Improvement | Somewhere between 1 and 3 🡪 BPJ |
| 1 Slight Improvement | Practice improves the survival or maintenance of existing buffer plantings or contributes to the permanence of riparian forest buffers. |
| 0 No Effect | Practice has no impact on riparian forest buffers. |
| -1 Slight Worsening | Practice worsens the survival or maintenance of existing buffer plantings or contributes to the transience of riparian forest buffers. |
| - 2 Slight to Moderate Worsening | Somewhere between -1 and -3 🡪 BPJ |
| - 3 Moderate Worsening | Practice removes trees in riparian buffer, but final width is >35 feet. |
| - 4 Moderate to Substantial Worsening | Somewhere between -3 and -5 🡪 BPJ |
| - 5 Substantial Worsening | Practice directly removes riparian forest buffer to width of > 35 feet to <35 feet. |