Riparian Forest Buffer Outcome

Management Strategy

2015–2025, v.1

Photo Credit: Heather Richards

I. Introduction

Of the many best management practices that improve the quality of waters and habitats in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, the single best management practice (BMP) may be the restoration of riparian forest buffers. Woody vegetation historically occurred along most streams in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed prior to European settlement, except where conditions were too wet, frequently disturbed, or salty. This historic condition is considered the optimal natural condition for streamside vegetation of the watershed and sets the target condition for buffer restoration. Riparian forest buffers (RFB) provide critical barriers between polluting landscapes and receiving waterways using relatively little land. Forest buffers reduce the adverse effect of excessive nitrogen, phosphorus and suspended

sediment inputs. Per acre, they likely provide more benefits and are more cost-effective than any other BMP, especially when considering the added value of habitat at the critical juncture of land and water.

Forest buffers have been part of the fabric of Bay restoration since 1994 when the Executive Council first called upon the Chesapeake Bay Program (CBP) to develop a policy to "enhance riparian stewardship and efforts to conserve and restore riparian forest buffers (Directive 94-1)." Since then, many goals and plans have been put into place. These have met with varying degrees of success. The current effort, the Riparian Forest Buffer Initiative (hereafter, the Initiative), is the biggest, most concerted effort by state and federal agencies to increase riparian forest buffers in the watershed to date.

II. Goal, Outcome and Baseline

This management strategy identifies approaches for achieving the following goal and outcome:

Vital Habitats Goal

Restore, enhance and protect a network of land and water habitats to support fish and wildlife, and to afford other public benefits, including water quality, recreational uses and scenic value across the watershed.

Riparian Forest Buffer Outcome

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.

Baseline and Current Condition

Roughly 58 percent of the roughly 288,000 total riparian miles in the Bay watershed has forest buffers in place. A goal of 900 miles/year was a goal first set by the states in 2007. Since that time, this goal has never been reached. The current rate of restoration/tree planting, is shown in Figure 1. Average annual mileage for the past 4 years was 220 miles. In a 10-year period, from 2001-2010, average annual mileage was 650 miles. Buffer width is not prescribed but is between 35 and 300' wide. A 100' wide buffer is recommended. Average width currently is 103'.

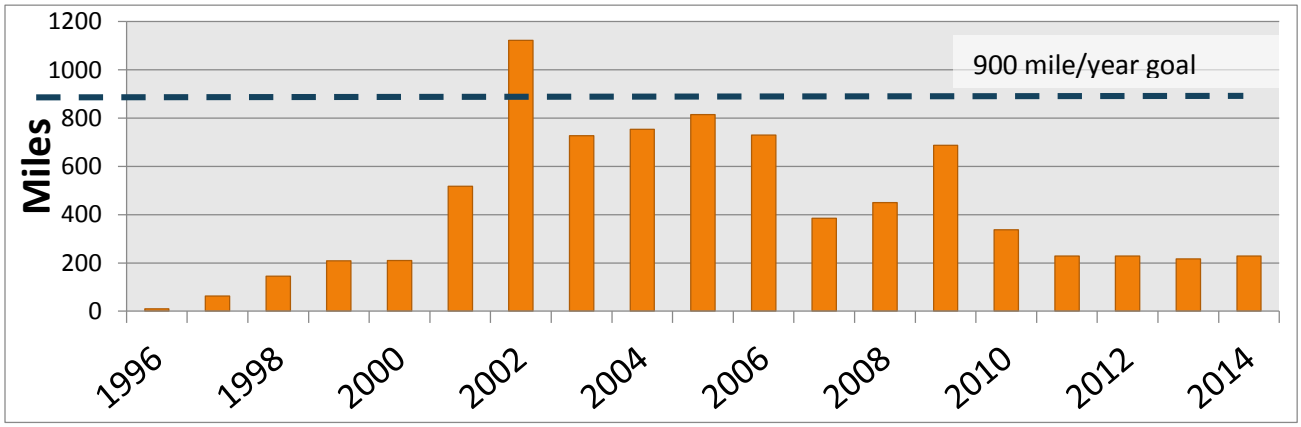

Figure 1. Miles of new riparian forest buffer reported by states to the Forestry Workgroup, CBP.

III. Participating Partners

The following partners have participated in the development of this strategy. Most participation has occurred as part of a State Task Force.

Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement Signatories

- Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
- State of Delaware
- State of West Virginia
- Chesapeake Bay Commission
- Commonwealth of Virginia
- State of New York
- State of Maryland

Other Key Participants

- **Federal:** Farm Service Agency, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Forest Service, US Geologic Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of Defense, Environmental Protection Agency, National Park Service, Army Corps of Engineers, Smithsonian Institution
- **Non-Governmental:** Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Trout Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy, Cacapon Institute, Casey Trees, Parks and People (Baltimore and Washington, D.C.), Delaware Center for Horticulture, Baltimore Greenspace, TreeBaltimore, Pennsylvania Conservation Districts, Stroud Water Research Center, Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited, Potomac Conservancy, Virginia Farm Bureau, Virginia Grain Producers, Virginia Agribusiness Council, Virginia Cattlemen's Association, Virginia Dairymen's Association, Maryland Farm Bureau Federation

Local Participation

Local Government Advisory Council; Soil and Water Conservation Districts; Anne Arundel County; Arlington County; Prince Georges County; Cumberland, MD; Fairfax County; Annapolis, MD; Baltimore County

IV. Factors Influencing Success

The following are natural and human factors that influence the partnership's ability to attain the riparian forest buffer 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:

a. Fluctuation in commodity crop values
b. Inter-generational transfer of agricultural lands
c. Loss of agricultural lands
d. 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:

a. Federal/state/local leadership place insufficient emphasis on RFB as a priority practice and allow less beneficial practices to successfully compete for riparian space
b. Technical assistance is insufficient
c. Lack of interagency coordination and staff training at all levels of government
d. Lackluster incentives, and incentives that are not strategic and do not leverage resources wisely
e. Federal funds go unused, sometimes for lack of a 20% match
f. Federal programs lack the flexibility states and landowners need
g. 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
h. 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
i. Lack of information available to landowners and technical assistance providers
j. Unsatisfactory survival of buffer plantings and maintenance issues primarily due to excess deer and vole browse and competing vegetation
k. Complicated cost-share program application and implementation process accompanied by unclear communication
l. Lack of targeting riparian forest buffers to where they would do the most good
m. 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.

V. Current Efforts and Gaps

CBP partners have been working on the RFB outcome for over 20 years, and the partnership has amassed a lot of knowledge about what works and what does not work. An important new effort to learn from the past and make program improvements is the Riparian Forest Buffer Initiative. With this Initiative comes an unprecedented commitment to this practice from two key players— USDA's Farm Service Agency and Natural Resource Conservation Service—who have been strongly engaged with each state and also at the regional level. This was an important step since the CBP Forestry Workgroup had provided sole leadership at the regional level for RFB, an agricultural practice.

The Chesapeake Riparian Forest Buffer Initiative

The need for the initiative was outlined in a report released by the Forestry Workgroup in February 2014 called Buffering the Bay. It was envisioned, in part, as a means of developing this Management Strategy. USDA, EPA and the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay are leading the initiative. The 2014-2015 timeline for the Initiative is:

- March—Steering Committee forms
- May—Innovators' Roundtable
- June—Leadership Summit
- September—State Task Forces form
- November—Task Force draft reports
- February—Task Force final reports
- June—Final initiative event/next steps

As part of the Initiative, a recent listing of gaps/barriers was compiled (see Appendix A). Gaps were also discussed as part of each state's task force process. These gaps have led to a list of strategic elements that has remained consistent since the RFB Innovators' Roundtable in May 2014 when they were first outlined. These strategic elements, in order of importance, are in Table 1. Broad-based management approaches address each element. These approaches will be the basis for the 2016-2017 biennial workplan to accompany this Management Strategy. The workplan for this Strategy is of critical importance as it will itemize how the listed strategic actions will be implemented and link partner commitments to resources that translate to on-the-ground accomplishments.

Actions, Tools and Support to Empower Local Government and Others

- The Local Government Advisory Council has been engaged in the process of developing this Management Strategy.
- Targeting tools from federal and state government are available and will be better disseminated, with training, to local partners. These tools and high-resolution land cover imagery can help partners see how much opportunity exists in their area and where RFB program delivery should be targeted.
- Other programs, tools and support have been identified in the State Task Force reports and are partially reflected in the summary of them provided in the Appendix.

VI. Management Approaches

The partnership will work together to implement the following management approaches through specified actions and resources to be itemized in the biennial workplan. These approaches seek to address the factors affecting our ability to meet the goal and the gaps previously identified (see Table 1) and have been identified as needed by our partners in order to meet the RFB goal.

Table 1. Strategic elements and management approaches to address them.

Strategy Elements	Description	Management Approaches
Leadership	Landowners need clear messages on the best way to manage riparian areas	• Work across federal/state agencies • Use state funding to strategically leverage federal funding • Apply for CREP Amendments • Partners stay engaged as changes are made
Programmatic Barriers	Federal programs that pay for RFB are underutilized (additional $5 million offered by FSA to address barriers)	• Increase landowner incentives • Streamline application process • Communicate about practice/CRP more clearly in writing and orally. Include cost-effectiveness.
Technical assistance (TA)	Need more TA: If landowner is properly informed and incentivized, more may enroll.	• Add staff • Expand use of RFB Teams- turnkey operations that help with everything from enrollment to maintenance (TU example) • Conduct more training for TA providers • Increase incentives for TA providers
New Enrollment	Outreach to landowners needs to be improved/increased	• Expand outreach resources and means of communicating them (webinars, annual RFB Forum, web presence, posters, etc.)
Establishment/ Maintenance	Poor survival of plantings discourages new enrollment	• Expand establishment period to 4-5 years • Increase incentives to conduct maintenance • Provide tech transfer opportunities on proper planting, maintenance • Ensure good growing stock
Re-enrollment	Existing contract holders need to be re-enrolled or rolled over to permanent easements.	• Reach out to existing contract holders • Establish programs to make existing contracts eligible for re-enrollment where necessary
Targeting	Targeting tools not often used and can be applied to greater benefit to water quality and brook trout habitat	• Create GIS maps of where buffers are most needed • Analyze existing tools to determine their usefulness
Easement programs	Riparian forest buffer easement programs are not active in most states	• States look to expand easement options, especially using agriculture preservation programs
Non-ag lands	Suburban areas need programs to protect and establish buffers	• Work with local governments • Protect existing buffers when ag lands are converted • Expand on backyard buffer program • Apply for grants

The RFB management approaches were summarized from strategies identified in the Innovators' Roundtable (Appendix B) and through the draft State Task Force reports (Appendix C). Of these, the four critical umbrella approaches are reiterated here:

- Renewed leadership for "all hands" approach
  - Engage federal, state and local leaders with each other, with USDA, and with progress on the RFB Initiative
  - Each state appoints a high-level coordinator to work across agencies on this outcome
  - Make non-federal match available as new opportunities present for federal funding
- Improve existing programs to make the RFB practice more appealing to landowners
  - Increase and improve Technical Assistance

  - Develop programs to assist landowner with maintenance
  - Amend state Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) agreements – increase flexibility and incentives; *support verification*
  - Conduct strategic, coordinated, and cost-effective RFB outreach across the watershed
  - Compile and disseminate information on what it takes to properly establish and maintain healthy multi-functional RFBs
- Make new program linkages and use financial leverage to conserve and restore more RFB
  - Look broadly to align related projects/funding (e.g., state preservation programs, stream restoration, etc.)
  - Make RFB conservation easements more appealing and manageable
  - Use federal funding as leverage to get more RFB
  - Integrate RFB as part of state stormwater programs (also see Tree Canopy MS)
- Apply science and technology to improve the RFB practice
  - Use geographic prioritization tools and analyze for effectiveness
    - for brook trout (e.g., Appalachian LCC tool)
    - for water quality (various)
  - Use demographic tools (outreach) and analyze for effectiveness
  - Improve tracking of total RFB using 1-2 M high-resolution imagery being acquired by CBP.

Approaches Targeted to Local Participation

- Many of the identified management approaches are critically important at the local level. For example, local leadership promoting RFB as an essential practice to achieve their water quality goals. Local officials should be involved with SWCD, RC&Ds, county offices of NRCS and FSA, and others working with landowners to ensure that the actions identified in this strategy are taking root and having an effect.
- Protect RFBs in local land use regulation. Local government has authority over conversion of agricultural land to another land use and loss of RFBs on agricultural lands is being tracked through the Chesapeake Bay Model and will have a negative impact on water quality. Tools to identify loss and potential loss of RFB will be made available.
- More programs for RFB on non-agricultural land need to be developed and promoted by local authorities. “Backyard buffers” and “Buffer in a Bag” are two such programs for suburban areas. RFB should be incorporated into State Stormwater Plans as a priority practice. Non-agricultural buffers are treated in more depth as part of Tree Canopy Management Strategy.
- Local governments are also landowners and should make it a priority to restore and protect riparian areas to forests wherever possible on public land.

Cross-Outcome Collaboration and Multiple Benefits

Riparian forest buffers provide multiple benefits; their restoration supports many of the outcomes of the 2014 Bay Watershed Agreement, most notably: water quality, brook trout, wetlands, tree canopy, and land protection. Management approaches that specifically benefit these other outcomes are:

- Add coordinators and technical assistance (TA) staff (wetlands, brook trout, water quality)
- Expand use of RFB teams- turnkey operations that help with everything from enrollment to maintenance (water quality, brook trout)

- Conduct more training for TA providers (water quality, wetlands, brook trout)
- Increase incentives for TA providers (water quality)
- Create GIS maps for targeting practices (brook trout, wetland, tree canopy, water quality)
- Expand RFB easement options through state and local policies/programs (look specifically at agricultural preservation programs) (land conservation)
- Refine tracking and monitoring programs through technology transfer (wetland, tree canopy, brook trout, water quality)

VII. Monitoring Progress

Current monitoring programs

State implementation of CBP BMP Verification, which recommends additional site visits, will strengthen monitoring and spur correction of maintenance issues associated with RFB. In most places, nearly 100 percent of plantings are visited by a professional, but new emphasis on maintenance combined with Verification will increase survival and make buffers more visually attractive.

Other forms of monitoring are based on tracking through annual progress reporting from the following sources:

- Contracted acres from FSA (these data can also be reported monthly and at the county level)
- Number of acres reported by states to CB Model
- Miles reported from Forestry Workgroup

New or proposed monitoring approaches

- Data derived from high-resolution satellite imagery are becoming more common and help monitor gain, loss, and survival of riparian forest buffers. These may be able to supplement one or more of the reports mentioned above. Resources to detect change in the amount of buffers using this imagery will be provided.
- Reports from partners on progress on actions in Management Strategy.
- Feedback on webinars and training that are proposed as part of the outreach strategy.

VIII. Assessing Progress

The biennial workplan will be the main tool for focusing collaboration across federal, state, local, and nongovernmental partners on the riparian forest buffer outcome. In addition to looking at program changes made at the regional level, we will track our progress in meeting the state actions set out in the State Task Force reports. Assessment of progress will be aligned with the cycle of state reporting for two-year milestones for the TMDL, because riparian forest buffer data are critical to meeting these milestones. Examining the alignment of the three sources of RFB data listed above will also indicate progress. As the first biennial workplan is nearing its end, another assessment process will be triggered to look at progress, challenges and lessons learned from the first workplan.

A draft of the biennial workplan for RFB will be available for comment in fall 2015. This will allow for the inclusion of all significant actions from the final RFB state task force reports action plan. CBP will work

with partners on compiling a subset of priority actions for the biennial workplan after this Management Strategy has been finalized.

IX. Adaptively Managing

The partnership will use the following approaches to ensure adaptive management:

- Tracking progress toward the annual 900-mile goal, as well as identifying trends and priority areas.
- Riparian Forest Buffer Initiative provides a means to engage additional partners in helping make progress on actions in the Management Strategy and workplan.
- Chesapeake partners involved in related goals, i.e., conservation, brook trout, wetlands, healthy watersheds and others, provide an important source of mutual feedback on what works well and what does not.
- Throughout the year, the partnership's communication tools, including websites, webinars and special announcements, will inform progress toward the RFB goal and highlight needs or opportunities for partnership members to engage.
- Monthly Forestry Workgroup meetings provide a regular venue for evaluating and adjusting particular strategies that support the annual 900-mile goal.
- Annual reporting by the partnership and its members of best practices, success stories and other qualitative and quantitative successes is another means to recognize the impacts of existing programs, reflect on and adapt existing and new strategies, and grow the capacity and stewardship required to increase the amount of riparian forest buffers in the watershed.

X. Biennial Workplan

A workplan to accompany this management strategy will be completed by April 2016. It will identify specific partner commitments for implementing the strategy and is expected to include the following information:

- Key actions
- Timeline for the action
- Expected outcome
- Partners responsible for each action
- Estimated resources

Appendix A.
Chesapeake Riparian Forest Buffer Initiative

Innovators' Roundtable
May 21, 2014

Common Barriers to Establishing Successful Riparian Forest Buffers

Programmatic Barriers

- Inconsistent availability of the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) hinders landowner outreach. These interruptions increase skepticism among landowners and program staff about CREP's viability. It is also difficult to talk about program benefits with landowners when the program is not currently open.
- Inconsistent leadership at the local level that recognizes that riparian forest buffers are a priority practice. Counties that prioritize riparian forest buffers have more success than those that do not.
- Environmental Quality Incentives Program does not leverage the implementation of riparian forest buffers through the CREP in application rankings. This limits the ability to leverage funding and provide a substantial incentive for riparian forest buffers.
- State FSA and NRCS goals do not include state watershed implementation targets. The lack of common goals disconnects state and federal priorities.
- Lack of coordination with other federal, state, and private conservation funding programs on how investments can be leveraged.
- State and local FSA and NRCS offices lack outcome-based performance measures to assess success (e.g. miles and acres of riparian forest buffer established).

Landowner Outreach and Customer Service

- Program communication is too complicated and hinders landowner enrollment.
- Lack of training for technical service providers, land trusts and other partners on the importance of riparian forest buffers, assessment of the costs and benefits of implementing forest buffers for landowners, and marketing strategies.
- Application process needs to be streamlined especially for offices where partners are not co-located. Agencies that are working together with a streamlined process have more success than those that do not.
- Landowners do not always have a point of contact on whom they can rely for guidance for the life of the contract

Establishment

- Successful establishment of a riparian forest buffer requires long-term maintenance. Fields of leaning or downed tree-tubes and other signs of failure discourage landowners from enrolling in programs.
- Incentives for establishment are inadequate and need to begin before planting and occur for at least five years.

- Given limited incentives, landowners have difficulty dealing with maintenance issues (e.g. invasive species, tree shelters, loss due to flooding, etc.) the first few years after planting.

Technical Assistance

- A lack of technical assistance for riparian forest buffers and related practices can create a bottleneck for implementation.
- There are limited funds made available for technical assistance

Conservation

- Riparian forest buffer easement programs are not active in most Chesapeake Bay jurisdictions.

Contract Reenrollment

- Many Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program contracts are set to expire in the next few years, and a lack of outreach and technical assistance and changing crop prices could lead to a decline in the area of riparian forest buffers.
- Grass buffer contracts that have naturally regenerated to forest may be unable to reenroll as a forest buffer.

Appendix B.
Chesapeake Riparian Forest Buffer Initiative--Strategies

Innovators' Roundtable
May 21, 2014

Key Strategies for Increasing Riparian Forest Buffers

Programmatic Strategies

- USDA should anticipate potential gaps in CREP funding as best as possible to make adjustments that keep the program open continuously for enrollment.
- State Conservationists should assign a ranking bonus to other conservation practices when a landowner includes a CREP riparian forest buffer. Bonus should not apply to grass buffers, stream exclusion fencing less than 35', or other practices that forgo a RFB
- State portion of cost-share programs could more clearly emphasize RFBs by increasing incentives for them compared to incentives provided for grass buffers.
- USDA and state cost-share programs should pair livestock exclusion and fencing with riparian forest buffers.
- To assist state partners, FSA State Executive Directors and State Conservationists should include WIP goals in their performance plans.
- FSA state executive directors and NRCS state conservationists should include outcome-based measures in performance plans (e.g., acres of riparian forest buffers with canopy closure). These goals should be passed-down to field staff.
- All riparian forest buffer partners should consistently measure success with mileage and acres of established forest buffers.
- Federal tax deduction for RFBs.
- State more creative on CREP 20 percent match (e.g., use easements).
- Pre-rankings screen for 35-foot forest buffer/scoring threshold that bypasses ranking batching—straight to contract.

Landowner Outreach and Customer Service

- USDA and other CREP partners should set a goal to provide a site -steward for every contract, so that landowners have access to consistent guidance.
- USDA and state partners should have a goal of processing CREP riparian forest buffer applications in one day.
- USDA should work with outside communication consultants to simplify messages and language targeted to landowners.
- Provide landowner incentives for canopy closure.
- USDA and states should set aside funding that would be available to replant forest buffers following flood events.
- USDA and states should establish and prioritize trainings for federal and state agency staff, technical service providers, land trusts, conservation groups, and other partners on the importance of riparian forest buffers, methods to assess the costs and benefits of implementing

forest buffers for landowners including benefits to herd and farm health, economic and environmental benefits of implementing wider forest buffers, and marketing and salesmanship.

- USDA Economic Research Service should work with state universities and other partners to evaluate how riparian forest buffers improve soil health and overall condition of their farms and how these conditions translate into the economic value of their farms. Studies should evaluate whether healthy farms are worth more than unhealthy farms.

Establishment

- Federal, state and private partners should establish a network of approved establishment and maintenance partners that can be accessed as needed by the FSA, NRCS, state agencies, foundations, and others to provide maintenance on CREP riparian forest buffers for invasive species, shelters, fences, etc.
- USDA should revise riparian forest buffer establishment standards and financial assistance to allow for a year of site preparation and at least five years of maintenance to ensure establishment.

Technical Assistance

- Technical assistance money provided to the NRCS from the FSA should be tied to outcome-based deliverables like acres of established riparian forest buffers.
- Insufficient resources for technical assistance often limit the ability to deliver the RFB practice.
- USDA should develop a mechanism that would allow the FSA to contract with non-governmental organizations and state partners to provide technical assistance to landowners.
- A Chesapeake Riparian Forest Buffer Leadership group should meet regularly with private foundations like the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Chesapeake Bay Funders Network, and businesses to evaluate ways for private funding to fill gaps in cost-share programs.

Conservation

- USDA should partner with state and private conservation easement programs to ensure that successful, riparian forest buffer easement programs are in place in each state.

Contract Reenrollment

- USDA and the states should establish a CREP contract reenrollment program to prioritize technical assistance and outreach.
- USDA should allow grass buffers that have naturally regenerated to forest to reenroll as riparian forest buffers.

Appendix C.
Summary of Recommended Actions from Draft Task Force Reports

Complete State Task Force reports can be found here.

A. Increase Financial Assistance

1. Increase payments/incentives for riparian forest buffer, e.g.:
   a) Update/increase marginal pastureland and cropland rental rates.
      i) USDA FSA is currently updating the marginal pastureland rental rates. Each state will provide feedback on the revised rates and ensure that they reflect local conditions.
      ii) Bay states are proposing various ways to increase incentives for riparian forest buffers enrolled in CREP.
   b) Adjust cost-share caps for riparian forest buffers and associated practices.
      i) States are requesting that USDA FSA headquarters provide flexibility for waiving cost-share caps. Requests less than $5,000 can be dealt with at local FSA offices. Requests between $5,000 and $20,000 can be handled by the State FSA office and requests greater than $20,000 by USDA FSA headquarters.
2. Link EQIP/CSP eligibility (additional ranking points) to having RFBs
   a) EQIP could do more to leverage the implementation of riparian forest buffers through CREP in application rankings. This limits the ability to leverage funding and provide a substantial incentive for riparian forest buffers.
      i) Virginia and other states are seeking guidance from USDA how to implement this approach.

B. Improve Technical Assistance

1. Improve staffing to provide better technical assistance for riparian forest buffers and related practices.
   a) Add staffing at local level to support riparian forest buffer enrollments and reenrollments.
      i) Technical assistance involves more than landowner contact. It includes education and additional support that may be needed by the landowner to facilitate RFB enrollment/establishment.
   b) Local level leadership should prioritize TA for riparian forest buffers ---counties that prioritize riparian forest buffers have more success than those that do not. Every state is developing mechanisms to place a priority on riparian forest buffers. Virginia is proposing to develop a coordinated strategy to communicate effectively the priority of this practice to field staff across multiple agencies.
   c) State Farm Service Agency and NRCS offices lack outcome-based performance measures to assess success (e.g., miles and acres of riparian forest buffer established).
   d) Develop “team” of experts--- could be circuit riders shared among counties—train knowledgeable of opportunities and program requirements. Provide materials (posters, pamphlets, question and answers, etc.).
      i) Pennsylvania is proposing to develop a set of regional CREP specialists that can be relied up on for regional assistance.

e) More training for technical service providers, land trusts, and other partners on the importance of riparian forest buffers, assessment of the costs/benefits forest buffers for landowners, and marketing strategies.
f) State Farm Service Agency and NRCS offices lack outcome-based performance measures to assess success (e.g., miles and acres of riparian forest buffer established).
g) Develop "team" of experts-- could be circuit riders shared among counties—train those knowledgeable of opportunities and program requirements. Provide materials (posters, pamphlets, question and answers, etc.).
    i) Pennsylvania is proposing to develop a set of regional CREP specialists that can be relied on for regional assistance.
h) More training for technical service providers, land trusts and other partners on the importance of riparian forest buffers, assessment of the costs/benefits of forest buffers for landowners and marketing strategies.

C. Improve Outreach

1. Simplify program communication to "plain English."
2. Develop and maintain a database of potential clients -use the data base to prioritize outreach efforts – use GIS data.
3. Provide additional resources (materials, databases) to the jurisdictions to target outreach efforts.
4. Training is planned throughout the watershed for outreach marketing opportunities and program requirements. Provide staff outreach materials (posters, pamphlets, question and answers, fact sheets and guides, etc.)
    a) Each state is developing training programs. For example, Pennsylvania is conducting USDA FSA and NRCS staff trainings to increase knowledge of riparian forest buffers, supporting practices and other related conservation programs.
5. Develop marketing platform
    a) Develop a vibrant web presence – with updated program information and "one-stop shop" website
    b) Have USDA/ERS mine data on existing enrollment to better understand the demographics of CRP participation and their operations
    c) Develop demographic media materials (dairy vs. grain producer, older vs. new farmer, tenant vs. absentee landowner, etc.)
    d) Conduct focus groups and do other analysis to better understand how to market the program
    e) Develop a state outreach committee comprised of major program participants
    f) Identify and conduct RFB farm tours
    g) Include agroforestry message in the marketing
    h) Explore the use of public service announcements
        i) Develop RFB signage that denotes RFBs to the general public
6. Improve outreach through partners/programs
    a) Use one-on-one outreach efforts – through the use of staff with good backgrounds of buffers and good marketing skills
    b) Seek to increase role of partners in outreach, particularly groups with large mailing lists, such as Farm Bureau
        (1) New York is establishing a buffer team in partnership with the Upper Susquehanna Coalition that will conduct outreach with producers.

c) Work with state agencies to cross-sell RFB enrollments when discussing agricultural certainty.
d) Explore outreach possibilities with partners with successful RCPP
e) Deliver consistent message to producers, from multiple sources

7. Develop a 1-800-CREP hotline

D. Improve Establishment, Maintenance, Compliance, Re-enrollment

1. Establishment
   a) Successful establishment of a riparian forest buffer requires prescriptive steps to be taken. Fields of leaning or downed tree-tubes and other signs of failure discourage landowners from enrolling in programs.
   b) Current resources provided for establishment are inadequate and need to begin before planting and occur for at least a four- to five-year period.
      i) Maryland and West Virginia are proposing to extend the establishment to four years.
   c) Consider new approaches and research of deer fencing, increased herbicide applications, specialized crews for establishment/maintenance.
      i) Maryland is proposing that maintenance funding ($10 per acre, see below) be provided to the state, and the state will pool the funding to coordinate maintenance crews.
      ii) West Virginia is seeking funding from USDA FSA to establish two riparian forest buffer circuit rider teams comprised of an FSA program technician, NRCS soil conservationist, and a service forester to conduct outreach and project implementation.
2. Maintenance and Compliance
   a) Seek higher maintenance rates
      i) Maryland, New York and West Virginia are proposing to increase the maintenance incentive payment from $5 per acre to $10 per acre or up to $150 per acre over a 15-year contract.
   b) Streamline the weed control approval process (number of field visits)
   c) Increase annual (in-field) status reviews/monitoring
      i) Pennsylvania is proposing to conduct annual site visits for the first five years after planting to assess survival, discuss maintenance needs and provide other technical assistance.
   d) Seek flexibility to reenroll/upgrade non-compliant CP21s (grass filter strips– that have trees) to be enrolled as a CP22. Provide one-time amnesty.
      i) Maryland is seeking to allow grass filter strips that have naturally regenerated to woody buffers into a wildlife habitat buffer.
3. Re-enrollment
   a) Prioritize technical assistance resources to expiring CP22s
      i) Pennsylvania is developing a campaign to provide information to landowners about reenrollment requirements and assess tree survival at least two years before the end of a contract.
      ii) West Virginia is seeking to allow reenrolling acres to receive a maintenance payment

E. Program/Policy/Leadership Actions

1. Expand the acreage cap of CREP
   a) West Virginia is requesting that its cap be expanded from 9,160 acres to 12,000 acres to accommodate adding the last part of the Chesapeake Bay watershed into CREP, Monroe County.
   b) Virginia is requesting an increase of 25,000 acres to 30,000 acres.
2. Allow for flexibility to pay partial Practice Incentive Payments (PIPs).
   a) This flexibility will allow USDA FSA to pay producers portions of their PIP as they install independent components of a riparian forest buffer practice (e.g., fencing).
3. Ensure inclusion of non-CP22 riparian forest buffers in WIP calculations.
   a) West Virginia and other states are seeking to develop a process for allowing other practices that meet the standards of a riparian forest buffer to be counted as such (e.g. wildlife habitat buffers).
4. Provide flexibility on marginal pastureland eligibility determinations.
5. Flexibility to allow simultaneous enrollment in RFB in CREP and stream bank stabilization in EQIP or to award more ranking points for EQIP offers that have RFBs.
   a) States are seeking this flexibility from USDA, but it is particularly important to New York and West Virginia.
6. Modify the design for CP22 standard to permit a grass strip adjacent to a drainage ditch to permit periodic maintenance activities of the drainage district.
   a) Maryland and Delaware are seeking to use the CREP wildlife habitat buffer eligible along drainage ditches, provided that the 15 feet closest to the ditch is maintained in grass.
7. Provide better accounting of current RFB activity including NRCS and state programs.
8. Farm Service Agency and NRCS goals should reflect state WIP targets.
9. Lack of coordination with other federal, state and private conservation funding programs on how investments can be leveraged.

F. Conservation

1. Revive easement programs at state level.
2. Work with local governments to protect existing buffers when agricultural lands are converted.
3. Utilize state/local/private easement to provide long-term resource protection.

G. Increase Use of Tools to Prioritize RFB Efforts

1. Virginia FSA and partners are proposing to expand the use of GIS with common land unit, soils, slope, erodibility and other data sets to target landowner outreach.
2. Re-enrollments (outreach)
3. Geographic
   a) for water quality
   b) for habitat
   c) many new tools/data to use
4. Demographic
   a) use market research (see above)
   b) pastures and larger farms with streams