



Chesapeake Bay Program

Science. Restoration. Partnership.

Forestry Workgroup October Meeting

October 7th, 2026

9:00 - 11:00 am

[Visit the meeting webpage for meeting materials and additional information.](#)

Purpose:

- Provide updates on the draft Healthy Forests and Trees Management Strategy
- Learn about a new brook trout decision support tool that could help inform riparian restoration and conservation efforts
- Discuss the new riparian forest protected lands target
- Share lessons learned from recent partner projects focused on improving forest conservation on ag lands and leveraging volunteers to maintain riparian forest plantings

Actions and Decisions:

- **Announcements**
 - With a quorum of voting members present, the FWG approved Michelle Katoski, USGS, as an at-large member of the FWG. One additional at-large vacancy remains. Please reach out to Katie Brownson (Katherine.Brownson@usda.gov) if you would like to nominate yourself or others for this role.
 - The group will discuss tree supply, nursery supply, urban trees and buffers, and any context for seed source, stock of different sizes, species, etc, at the November meeting. If this is a topic of interest to you, please reach out to Nancy Sonti (nancy.f.sonti@usda.gov) to help FWG leadership understand what information would be most useful to share with the group.
- **Healthy Forestry and Trees Management Strategy**
 - Katie Brownson will reach out to the FWG once the full draft Management Strategy chapter has been completed for the Healthy Landscapes Goal.
- **Brook Trout Decision Support Tool**
 - Please reach out to Mike Evans mevans@chesapeakeconservancy.org with feedback on the Brook Trout Decision Support Tool and/or with responses to the discussion questions provided in the [presentation](#).
- **Riparian Forest Protected Lands Target**
 - The FWG will continue discussions on the development of the Riparian Forest Protected Lands target at subsequent FWG meetings. In particular, Sophie Waterman, USGS, will work to provide additional information on trends and to provide options for the FWG's consideration.
- **Riparian Rangers: A Collective Community Approach to Successful Afforestation**
 - The FWG will discuss workforce development and collaborate with the Workforce Workgroup at future FWG meetings.

Meeting Minutes

I. Welcome and Introductions

Lead: Katie Brownson, USFS

- Katie Brownson, USFS, welcomed participants from the Brook Trout and Protected Lands Workgroup who were invited to hear presentations on relevant topics.

II. Announcements

Lead: Katie Brownson, USFS

- New [Chesapeake Bay Shared Stewardship Agreement signed!](#)
 - The Chesapeake Bay Stewardship Agreement between the Forest Service and all state forestry agencies in the Watershed was signed back in September. This document was updated to bring alignment with the revised Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement and to renew the intention for collaboration. The press release is linked [here](#), and the agreement is posted to today's calendar page.
- E3 Update- Scenario approved at [9/29 CWGT meeting](#)
 - Katie provided an update on the E3 Scenario development. The Forestry Workgroup and other source sector workgroups put forward recommendations to the Goal Team for their consideration. The recommendations for the developed sector and the natural sector were accepted as they were. But for the Agricultural/Forestry BMPs, there were two different proposals put forward to the Clean Water goal team (one from the Forestry Workgroup and one from the Agriculture Workgroup). Ultimately, what the Clean Water Goal team settled on was an attempt at a compromise scenario. It did result in an E3 scenario that has a buffer width reduced from 30 meters to 20 meters. It reduced our ag tree planting target from 3% to 2%, and it reduced agroforestry from 10% to 5% of ag lands. However, it ultimately ended up being higher than what the Agriculture Workgroup had proposed. You can view the compromise scenario [here](#).
- Tree Canopy and Forest Buffer Indicator Updates
 - The tree canopy and forest buffer indicators will be updated this year with the planting data and will maintain the net change data that had been reported previously. Katie is in the process of updating the documentation for both of those indicators. The planting data was shared at the September meeting. Some big increases in tree canopy were noted in 2024, but planting numbers leveled out in 2025, and the forest buffer numbers stayed pretty much on par with where they were the previous year. Indicator updates are moving forward and, while indicator updates would normally be posted to Chesapeake Progress, that site is currently being reworked to be more in line with the new Agreement, so they will temporarily be put on Chesapeake Data.
- Staffer update- Applications for the new [Healthy Landscapes staffer](#) are open now! Please share with your networks!
 - Katie noted that the application for the staffer position that supports the FWG has been posted and encouraged FWG members to pass on the position description to those who may be interested, ahead of the October 15th application deadline. Given the delay in the hiring process for this staffer role, there is not currently a calendar invitation for the November meeting. The meeting will still be held at the normal date/time, and another staffer will distribute the calendar invitation for that meeting.

- November Meeting
 - Nancy Sonti made an additional announcement noting that, for the November meeting, they're hoping to discuss tree supply, nursery supply, urban trees and buffers, and any context for seed source, stock of different sizes, species, etc. If this is a topic of interest to you, Nancy encouraged reaching out to FWG leadership to help them understand what information would be most useful to share with the group, what challenges exist, and what resources are available.
- New at-large member nomination- Michelle Katoski, USGS
 - Katie introduced Michelle as a new at-large member nominee. Michelle Katoski, USGS, provided an overview of her background to the group. You can view Michelle's bio [here](#).
 - With a quorum of voting members present, Katie requested that the group voice any stops or holds on approving Michelle as an at-large member of the FWG. No objections were shared, and Michelle was confirmed as an at-large member. Congratulations, Michelle!
 - There is still one additional vacancy in the at-large membership. Please reach out to Katie if you are interested in nominating yourself or others for this position.

Decisions:

- With a quorum of voting members present, the FWG approved Michelle Katoski, USGS, as an at-large member of the FWG. One additional at-large vacancy remains. Please reach out to Katie Brownson (Katherine.Brownson@usda.gov) if you would like to nominate yourself or others for this role.

Actions:

- The group will discuss tree supply, nursery supply for both urban trees and buffers, and any context for seed source, stock of different sizes, species, etc, at the November meeting. If this is a topic of interest to you, please reach out to Nancy Sonti (nancy.f.sonti@usda.gov) to help FWG leadership understand what information would be most useful to share with the group.

III. Round Robin Updates

Lead: Katie Brownson, USFS

Discussion Notes:

USC: Lydia Brinkley: We have started planting and kicked it off with two events. One was a silvopasture workshop, since many silvopasture projects will be implemented this fall, and the second was a groundbreaking ceremony for the New York State Community Reforestation (CoRe) Program. That will plant 71 acres in urban areas and is mostly riparian. I am glad that you are going to bring up nursery issues, and we will follow up, because we've had plenty this Fall. We are working with a company called CNY drones, and we are piloting monitoring for stem density within restoration sites. They are surveying a site, comparing vegetation, putting it through AI/model, and they hope to use our planting sites as demonstration sites in this coming Spring.

- Anne Hairston-Strang: Some of our foresters have gotten drones and gotten licensed, so we have been using them to determine whether things have been sprayed and making sure contracts have been fulfilled. However, we haven't been using them for survival checks, per se. It may be challenging based on what I know, but if you do have a live tree in the

middle of a spray circle, you can probably do a good job. If you want to talk to Melissa Nash in Garrett County, that would probably be the best contact. Her staff has been the source of a lot the expanding drone piloting licensing.

- Lydia Brinkley: It seems pretty cool so far. I'd love to let you guys know the results when we have them.
- Chris Guy (in chat): FWS has certified Drone operators that may be available. They may be able to do the flights, not necessarily the analysis.

NY: Cassie Davis: New York State DEC recently released an [urban heat island extreme heat toolkit](#), in partnership with SUNY ESF and Davey Trees. It combines a few mapping tools to see how we can plan to coordinate resilience investments based on where the impacts, vulnerabilities, and needs are going to be the greatest, and highlights that tree canopy is one of the recommendations to reduce urban heat island effects. We also recently announced that 700 acres of Pinnacle State Park have been transferred into McCarthy Hills State Forest. It was an old golf course that was previously closed in 2017, so looking forward to having that previously state parkland now be managed as forest.

NY: Molly Hassett: From the Division of Lands and Forests, we had a Regenerate New York grant go out recently, which covers the whole state, but includes the Chesapeake Bay area of our state. We are hoping to award some projects focused on forest restoration as well as afforestation across the state. We also have a new program we are hoping to award soon called Advancing Forest Markets. It is a federally funded program, and it's going to be providing incentives for reforestation supply chain production increases, so money to nurseries to increase seed collection and tree seedling production, as well as some funding on the forest product side of things.

- **Nancy Sonti:** I think I heard from the New York City Pecan Group that they are excited about that funding for nurseries!

PA: Matt Keefer: We are awaiting on the announcements of the last round of our community watershed forestry grants. As far as next year's grants, there's a webinar on November 5th, and it would be important to attend because we've made changes with the grant program to better align the process to separate BMPs. Later this week, we are celebrating harvesting a billion board feet from our state forests, since we developed our management plan in 2003. That's a sustainable management plan focused on regeneration. The celebration is up in Potter County, which is very close to where the three watersheds come together (Geneseo, Chesapeake Bay, Ohio). They are going to saw the log at the Lumber Heritage Museum with an old steam driven saw mill. Lastly, I'd like to welcome Christine Ticehurst to the group. She is our new Community Forest Manager.

- Christine introduced herself to the group and noted that she is looking forward to connecting more with the group in the future.

ACB: Ryan Davis: Our planting season is underway. The biggest update I have from PA is about our Pennsylvania Woodland Resilience Enhancement Network program. It is a Forest Service funded, direct forest landowner support system, and really close partnership with DCNR. Last year, it took five years for us to fully obligate the funding, which is 4.2 million dollars. It looks like 135 landowners are being supported currently, and we are entering the phase where we are going to be opening up the waitlist to serve a couple more landowners, so we are really excited about that.

- Teddi Stark (in chat): I forgot to mention during PA's time- along with PA DEP and SCC, we're hosting EPA on a tour of EPA-funded projects later this month, on the 26th. We're excited to show off a buffer planted via our C2P2 grant program w/ EPA funds near Ronks, PA.

DE: Jenna Talbot (in chat): We are still accepting applications for the DeCAP and buffer programs, that's all at this time. – DNREC

MD: Anne Hairston-Strang: We were excited about the Shared Stewardship Agreement. It was a wonderful day and highlighted some of the restorations and the connection to people and workforce. We were also able to send Matt Hurd up to Climate Week to talk about forest policy around climate. We continue to make progress on agroforestry; Francis Smith is going to be presenting at a conference at Rutgers at the end of the month, and we continue to partner with Maryland Department of Agriculture on those agroforestry/soil health practices. We've wrapped up the Liberty Tree Planting. We've been trying to plant a Liberty Tree offspring in every county of Maryland for the U.S. 250th and the Forest Service's 120th anniversary. We are also excited to be almost at the hiring stage for our nursery staff.

- Alanna Crowley: I am finalizing our buffer reports, so I can have those out for the next meeting.

CBF: Rob Schnabel: Next week, we have our Beyond Sustainable Regenerative Farm Tour coming up in Frederick County. This is our third annual event where we visit a couple of farms and have a very comprehensive full day of learning. You will hear from farmers how regenerative agriculture helps with their bottom line economics and how they farm. We will have folks like American Farmland Trust, Future Harvest, DNR, Forest Service, Maryland Extension. Last week, NRCS announced they increased the funding from 1 billion dollars (up from 7 million) for regenerative agriculture. Not enough folks understand what it is, how it really applies on the ground, and how it helps with ecosystem function, water, climate, biodiversity, and farmer bottom line economics. So, this is a day of learning. Feel free to join us. At the second farm, there will be a forestry station where we will talk about buffers, agroforestry, and there will also be a rain simulator station to talk about water. (Rob placed the QR code for the event in the chat).

ACB: Craig Highfield: We're getting ready to plant 75 acres of riparian and upland forests this fall. We're increasing the amount we're planting in Virginia; we have 45 acres of buffer going in this fall as well.

Virginia DOF: Patricia Nylander: DOF will be releasing its statewide canopy plan. It will be a statewide forest land and urban tree canopy conservation plan, and it will be released to the General Assembly in November. We've got our statewide buffer summit in Virginia a week from today. Even though it's not taking place within the Bay, we will definitely have a lot of Bay participants joining. We will be down at Hungry Mother State Park in Southeast Virginia. Two weeks from today is the Rappahannock River Symposium, taking place in Fredericksburg, Virginia. It will be a great day session talking about buffers, stream health, and clean water. Our CBLP buffer training is coming up in October (webinar portion) and November (in-person session for Virginia). We worked on a committee to develop a silvopasture practice for our State Cost Share Assistance Program (VACS). We came up with a draft practice, similar to the federal practice in terms of specifications, but we are hoping to try and create a silvopasture state cost share program for potential participants. However, it has to be voted on, so that will go to the full Technical Advisory Committee to be voted on in November.

- Patricia Nylander (in chat):
 - <https://jamesriverconsortium.org/news-events/annual-buffer-summit/>
 - <https://www.rappahannockroundtable.org/rappahannock-river-symposium/>
- Robbie Coville (in chat): Patricia it would be great to see what your state silvopasture criteria looks like, either in this state or in final (hopefully) approved form. Our Chesapeake Agroforestry Network was just discussing silvopasture standards yesterday, mostly based on PA's Dept of Ag newly-approved support for silvopasture as a water conservation BMP
 - Patricia Nylander (in chat): Would be happy to share it, pending the vote on it in the upcoming TAC meeting.

Cacapon Institute (WV): Frank Rodgers: We are in the midst of our fall season. We are planting just shy of 800 trees in developed lands with neighborhoods, a couple of faith based groups, and some schools. We're renewing our six grow out stations at middle schools across the Potomac Basin where we have several thousand smaller trees in two gallon pots growing. We are looking forward to a great fall planting season.

- Frank Cacapon (in chat): I should have mentioned Dan Coogan, CBPO Director, and some EPA folks came to WV for an E. Panhandle tour.

DC: Robert Corletta: We got through a big, historic storm on Labor Day weekend, and now we are shifting to planting, which we are starting up next week. We are also continuing to do our Urban Tree Canopy Analysis.

IV. Healthy Forests and Trees Management Strategy

Lead: Katie Brownson, USFS

Katie provided an update on the current status of the Healthy Forests and Trees Management Strategy, including input received from the Healthy Landscapes Goal Team and the Bay Program's Strategic Engagement Team.

Decisions: N/A

Actions:

- Katie Brownson will reach out to the FWG once the full draft Management Strategy chapter has been completed for the Healthy Landscapes Goal. FWG members can coordinate with their leadership on any further updates needed to the Healthy Forests and Trees draft sub-chapter, which is accessible on the calendar page and linked [here](#).

Discussion Notes:

- **Anne Hairston-Strang:** (In reference to the differing lists of Signatory Programs and Authorities collected by CBPO and FWG leadership) If I am remembering correctly, I think a lot of it was fairly well aligned, but just making sure we're not missing anything.
 - Katie Brownson: They are fairly well aligned. I think the main difference is that we had more programs than they do. I don't know if that was an intentional list to trim it down. I think the ship has sailed for this round, just with the timing and needing to get drafts to the policy steering committee, but we are going to have several more opportunities to revise and work to improve the list. I did post the list collected by the Bay Program on the calendar page too. So, I definitely encourage folks to check out that list. If you do see something that's really critical that is missing and you had included it in your list, please do flag that. I think the Goal Team is going to try to coordinate that in a more holistic way, rather than a Workgroup-by-Workgroup approach. I will get back to you on that.
 - Anne Hairston-Strang: One of the other asks was the funding amounts. Have they figured out that that's not a particularly useful ask because of the variation in how programs are delivered and budgeted?
 - Katie Brownson: I think that point has been raised, but I think they still want a snapshot in time.
 - Anne Hairston-Strang: I think it's important to the feds to be able to show that it's not just federal money flowing into it. So, I think it is good to be noting the fact that states are putting huge amounts of money into these programs. I think it's

useful in that context, but in terms of them really understanding how much state and local governments are putting into this, I don't think it cuts the mustard.

- Elizabeth Hoffman (in chat): Anne, agree on how valuable that metric is. Also if a program just began but would be part of our forward facing strategy, should not prevent those programs from being listed.
- **Matt Keefer:** I just want to have a chance to talk with our leadership. So, will you be giving us a draft before it goes out, or should we just use the draft that is sent to the PSC?
 - Katie Brownson: I think the draft that gets sent to the PSC will be the one to be used. I can distribute the full Healthy Landscapes Goal Chapter once that is available. Unless we get any edits from the Goal Team, I think the version on the calendar page for today is the most updated version of our subchapter.
 - Anne Hairston-Strang: Matt brings up a good flag that, when these things are moving forward, coordinate with your leadership to help build awareness and support.
 - Katie Brownson: Yes, that is a good point, thank you. I will make sure I am sharing out the final versions with the group to make sure you are in the loop, so you can do that briefing.

V. **Brook Trout Decision Support Tool**

Lead: Mike Evans, Alicia Sabatino, Charlotte Weinstein, Chesapeake Conservancy

The Chesapeake Conservancy's Conservation Innovation Center is building a decision support tool to help stakeholders identify the most impactful opportunities for brook trout habitat restoration. For a given amount of restoration effort provided by a user (meters of riparian buffer planting, acres conserved, etc.), the tool quantifies the change in brook trout habitat suitability at every NHD stream reach throughout their native range in the Northeast United States. We are using the Brook Trout species distribution model developed by the USGS Aquatic Gap Analysis Program to translate user-defined restoration scenarios into estimated change in brook trout occurrence probability. The result is a ranked list of stream reaches and their estimated impact for a given level of restoration effort. This project is funded by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, and intended to support state fisheries management agencies and the Chesapeake Bay program implement brook trout habitat restoration goals by identifying opportunities that will provide maximum return on investment. Mike and Charlotte provided an overview of this tool, before opening it up to questions and feedback from the group.

Decisions: N/A

Actions:

- Please reach out to Mike Evans mevans@chesapeakeconservancy.org with feedback on the Brook Trout Decision Support Tool and/or with responses to the discussion questions provided in the [presentation](#).

Discussion Notes:

- **Fred Henson:** Is the highlighted reach that you get as a result of your tool showing where the riparian buffer planting should occur? Or is that showing the benefit you would get if you do that much planting somewhere upstream in the catchment?

- Mike Evans: That's a good clarifying question. Currently, for simplicity, it's visualizing the reach that's going to get the benefit. The final version of the tool will highlight the upstream reaches that should be planted to achieve that benefit.
- **Dan Goetz:** You said you were doing it for Maine. Does that Model work for the whole watershed currently and, if so, is elevation and temperature part of that overall prioritization assessment? Forest cover in Maine is a little bit different than forest cover in Maryland or Pennsylvania without accounting for elevation and temperature.
 - Mike Evans: The short answer is, yes, those things are accounted for. We recorded that demo in Maine. The tool currently works everywhere in the Watershed, but all across that native range of Brook Trout in the northeast. What's responsible for the different shape and magnitude of those curves is that at every stream reach, the response of that reach to forest cover is influenced by all the other variables that go into the AGAP model of which temperature, elevation, slope, mine density, a host of other things are included. So, every single stream reach takes into account all those other variables, and then we're simply looking at the response to one variable given the conditions at that reach.
- **Peter Claggett (in chat):** The model does not appear sensitive to increases in riparian buffer coverage from 30%-70% for a given reach. Is this an accurate interpretation?
 - Mike Evans (in chat): Good observation Peter, we've noticed that too. I'd be interested in a fish biologists' interpretation, but it is consistent with some rule of thumb thresholds that have been brought up in discussions about forest buffer coverage
 - Katie Brownson (in chat): That caught my eye too but it looked like that was just for one specific reach- I'd be curious to know what it looks like if those reach curves were averaged
- **Katie Brownson (in chat):** Very cool! What are the options for customizing the boundary area for the analysis?
- **Michelle Katoski (in chat):** Does the tool use the NHD v2.1 (1:100,000 resolution) or the NHD HR (1:24,000) resolution linework?
 - Mike Evans (in chat): Michelle I believe we are using NHD HR. Need to double check because there was some crosswalking needed to align with what the AGAP program used
- **Katie Ombalski:** I co-chair the Brook Trout Workgroup with Dan. I just wanted to say thank you for letting us come in and for having Mike present. This is an effort for us to try to increase collaboration between the Workgroups, so I really appreciate it.
 - Katie Brownson: I'm sorry we are a little crunched for time. Hopefully this is just the start of a bigger conversation as we are getting into our work plan and thinking about how we can best target our efforts to improve benefits for multiple outcomes. This is just a teaser for more to come.
- **Mike Evans (in chat):** Anyone interested in providing further thoughts/questions on the tool please use the QR code or reach out to me directly mevans@chesapeakeconservancy.org Your feedback will help determine the design and functionality of the tool

VI. Riparian Forest Protected Lands Target

Lead: Sophie Waterman, USGS

The 2025 Watershed Agreement includes a placeholder for a new riparian forest protected lands target. Sophie provided a brief overview of the protected lands dataset and the current amount of protected riparian forest. We then had a brief discussion on potential numeric targets for 2040.

Decisions: N/A

Actions:

- The FWG will continue discussions on the development of the Riparian Forest Protected Lands target at subsequent FWG meetings. In particular, Sophie Waterman, USGS, will work to provide additional information on trends and to provide options for the FWG's consideration.

Discussion Notes:

- **Rob Schnabel:** You all have the wonderful county by county forest cover. It would be cool to have county by county percent buffered streams, that type of thing. As we set our goals last time, Maryland went county by county and heard from them, and counties set their own riparian buffer goals. Having a baseline of what's available would be the way to start that conversation. We got to know where we are to set a new goal. So, that would be helpful.
 - Sophie Waterman: I also want to note that we are keeping this buffer target broad and general. Focusing in on priority areas or focusing in on specific locations is something that we are planning on adding to our workplan. So, we're just thinking big numbers right now- the whole watershed- to set the target to give everybody in the watershed something tangible to reach for, and then going into the specifics within our workplan.
- **Matthew Keefer:** I am guessing for PA that a big chunk of the existing, protected, forested buffer lands are going to be in the North Central where there's that big block of state forest. It's going to be similar down through the ridge and valley. So, I'd be curious to see what that distribution of acreage is. Regarding the two approaches that you mentioned, we have a popular farmland conservation program, and we've talked about focusing our efforts on farms that are already preserved. So, we've had some early conversations with Department of Ag to move some of that forward. So, that would be an "easy button" for outreach. Theoretically, once you plant those trees, they're going to be on protected land. We've talked about buffer easement programs; that's a big lift. Who is the holder? Who is going to monitor? It seems like a popular knee-jerk. People say, if you want buffers, purchase that strip of land or protect it in some way. Theoretically, the landowner is being compensated, and it may help get around the idea of taking land out of protection. So, there are benefits to each approach, but there are certainly going to be costs and challenges. I understand the broad, bay-wide numbers, but seeing some of the finer details might help.
 - Katie Brownson: Building on what you were saying, Matt, this was intended to be a first look. Next time we bring it back, we can see if there is additional granularity we can provide with trends. I don't know what will be possible for the GSAT team to put together, but we can provide additional information on where we are now and bring some options for the group to consider. I know one of the approaches we took when developing the protected lands target for forest was looking at the percentage of forest we have now within the protected lands footprint and then saying, if we grow the protected lands target to this, what

would we need to maintain that same proportion of protected lands and forests?
We could consider doing something similar to get at that high level watershed wide number and throw that out as an option to play around with.

- **Sophie Waterman:** I will definitely take into consideration your points on county by county, maps that would be useful in the conversation, and next time we can dig in and talk about options. Happy to get the baseline out there and excited that this conversation is getting going!

VII. Meeting the Healthy Forests and Trees Outcome Goals and Maximizing the Conservation and Community Benefits of Agriculture Preservation

Lead: Rob Schnabel, Chesapeake Bay Foundation

Rob shared updates and lessons learned from multiple recent efforts in MD including:

- The “Maryland Climate-Smart Agriculture Road to Resilience” report, January 2026, by the Harry Hughes Center of Agroecology
- A GIS analysis of Agriculture Preservation Programs and Forest Cover by Program using Frederick County as an example
- Frederick Climate Response and Resilience Report and Forests
- Maryland Agriculture Land Preservation Foundation Program, existing ranking criteria and suggested modifications
- Creating a consistent and comprehensive riparian forest buffer program in Maryland.

Decisions: N/A

Actions: N/A

Discussion Notes:

- **Patricia Nylander (in chat):** whether it's CREP or not, I think the take home is having a diversity of programs available to landowners/producers/homeowners, etc. Great info Rob, thank you!!
- **Jeffrey Lerner (in chat):** For Rob: if 30% of Frederick County farms are vulnerable, would taking some land out of production to establish buffers make that worse or be relatively benign? Curious how forestry BMPs affect sustainability of farms.
- **Rob Schnabel (in chat):** Jeff- We are promoting Regenerative Agriculture for ecosystem function, overall farm resilience, where Trees are a critical component for on farm water cycle and biodiversity. Working with natural systems help farmers reduce costly chemical inputs for improved economic viability. Example trees improve the fungi soil health community on working lands, this soil biology improves water infiltration and water retention, while reducing chemical fertilizer inputs. Education is the critical component; hence the Beyond Sustainable - Regenerative Farm Tours, on-farm learning for decision makers, agencies and farmers.
- **Lydia Brinkley:** Who funds your permanent easement program? Is it the state of Maryland?
 - Rob Schnabel: It's funded through Maryland's Open Space Program. It's a part of our landmark land preservation program, but it's the Maryland Department of Natural Resource's Program Open Space that funds our permanent easements on CREP properties.

- Anne Hairston-Strang: It's a transfer tax. The same transfer tax funds MALPF, it funds our land acquisition program, it funds us, and it funds a lot of different things.
- Rob Schnabel: It's a ½ a percent tax on any kind of transfer. It's a wonderful program that started in the late 1990s.
- Anne Hairston-Strang: I think it's earlier than that. It also tracks the real estate market. It's a wonderful funding source. It's been tremendous for land conservation in Maryland, but it's not consistent.
- **Rob Schnabel:** Do folks agree we need to upgrade our current CREP program, given the limiting factors? Go back to your states and counties and look at the current land preservation programs. Is there a forest component? Are you requiring forest buffers? Are you requiring maintaining current forests in those lands? Or are folks allowed to clear that land? We've got to maximize our public dollars as much as possible if we're going to be successful.
 - Anne Hairston-Strang: Each of the programs are managed by somebody, and they're going to make the decisions on those programs. I think the conversation we need to have is what are the things that have made the program work? The CBI program has been a reaction to the places where CREP wasn't working all that well. So, I think the useful conversation is what are the program characteristics that can make it work better? All of us can take those back, talk with partners, and say here are ways to maximize the effectiveness of the public investments that we are making.

VIII. **Riparian Rangers: A Collective Community Approach to Successful Afforestation**

Lead: Ryan Davis, Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay

Ryan shared accomplishments and lessons learned from their Riparian Rangers program in PA, which trained volunteers to help maintain and monitor afforestation sites after planting.

Decisions: N/A

Actions:

- The FWG will discuss workforce development and collaborate with the Workforce Workgroup at future FWG meetings.

Discussion Notes:

- **Rob Schnabel (in chat):** Great presentation Ryan! It's fun to work with the next gen of conservationists. CBF has been working with numerous colleges as part of their Alternative Spring Breaker programs. March best time for maintenance. They recharge the battery!
- **Matthew Keefer (in chat):** great presentation Ryan. appreciate all you do to innovate and move ideas forward!. gotta run.
- **Elizabeth Hoffman (in chat):** Thanks for sharing more on Riparian Rangers! Does demand ever exceed your capacity and how do you prioritize farms (properties) eligible for the program? Do you ever more formally partner with workforce development programs in addition to volunteers (such as CBT's Chesapeake Conservation and Climate Corps)? Does this program coordinate with Chesapeake Conservancy's program - <https://www.chesapeakeconservancy.org/projects/aggregate-buffer-maintenance-program?>

- Ryan Davis: We have had [participants from] the C4 (Chesapeake Climate and Conservation Corps). Currently, we kind of have our own model for that, where we have a little bit more control over things. There are technicians. We currently have 8 technicians, so it's a long-term seasonal job. It started out as 10 months, but we've been able to extend all of them through 2027. Our field work needs are covered by folks who are very early in their career. We have been able to mentor them, and, in 2027, they are going to be starting year two. I have really high hopes for all of them. That has been a super successful workforce development program. We have been able to gain high talent over the years by hiring people who started out on our field team. Some of the people who are leading our programs and our forest team started out as technicians. I highly recommend trying some of these models out because the field work never ends. Let's get young people out and give them a shot to help us out. Everyone benefits from it; especially the trees!
- Katie Brownson: Thanks so much, Ryan. That's a good teaser for another topic we will be discussing at some of our upcoming workgroup meetings- workforce development and partnering more with our Workforce Workgroup!
- **Elizabeth Hoffman (in chat):** Great presentation. Interesting to consider how awareness of these programs could help with adoption of these practices! Maintenance is a large concern of the farming population so this could help address that.

IX. Wrap-Up

X. Adjourn

Next Meeting: November 4th, 9-11 am

Attendees:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| ● Katherine Brownson, USFS | ● Robert Corletta, DDOT |
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