Riparian Forest Buffer Action Team— Final Product October 17, 2019

Seeking: Final approval of MB for this Action Team to proceed to PSC with its summary findings and suggestions as outlined below.

Background: Riparian Forest Buffers are a cornerstone BMP of the Chesapeake Bay Program partnership and we have been at it for over 20 years. While progress has greatly slowed, recent innovations and momentum show promise for future advances in implementation.

The Riparian Forest Buffer Action Team was formed by the MB during the Strategic Review of the RFB outcome. The purpose of the Action Team was to suggest a leadership course of action to the PSC. The RFB Action Team went before the PSC in November 2018 at which time the PSC asked they return with a more specific proposal.

At the next PSC:
Incorporating suggestions from the September MB, co-leads Matt Keefer and Sally Claggett will present 1) background information about the value of RFB in the Chesapeake, 2) examples of specific operational challenges to restoring RFBs and innovative solutions to them, and 3) suggestions on how to scale-up these solutions and role of leadership to proceed.

The PSC will have a decision document with the following 3 key suggestions:

1) **Develop and oversee a new regional flexible buffer program with new, dedicated funding** (simple, per-acre funding, include planting and maintenance).
   WHY: Even though this is one of the most cost-effective and all-around important practices for the Bay, substantial new resources have not been made available. Landowners need an easy-to-use, unrestrictive program that is quick to get on-the-ground. Elements of this program have been tested on a smaller scale. Technical assistance, site prep, planting, and maintenance would be integrated for a fixed cost per acre. It is time we invested in implementation.
   HOW: We envision a combined match of federal, state, and local/private funds starting at about $5 million per year and ramping up to $10 million after several years. This amount would fund roughly 300-600 acres per state at a fixed cost of between $3,500 and $5,500 per acre. The $5-10 million is still only a fraction of what is needed, but we are confident that this amount of dedicated funding could leverage more resources and additional funding from private sources once program efficiencies are ironed-out.

2) **Leadership and Communications – what can happen now**
   WHY: 1) RFB crosses sectors and jurisdictions and breaks silos as a forestry, agriculture and storm water practice– it is all of these--- and should be administered in an overarching and integrated fashion. The riparian area is both vital to ecosystems and finite: it should be proactively managed. There has been confusion on priorities and programs among landowners and the many partners responsible for getting trees in the ground. There should be no doubt about the preferred practice for the riparian land base.
   HOW: Leaders strategize together on potential solutions to shared challenges. Leaders participate by attending planting events with media, communicate more about RFB to Congress, state legislatures, target audiences and the public. Leaders prioritize buffers when making decisions on resource allocation in both urban and agricultural sectors. Leaders ensure that buffers are incorporated in resolutions and other high-level documents and communications. Leaders foster local and private sector champions to help them share messages with their peers and others on the importance of buffers.

3) **Work with USDA (i.e., FSA, NRCS) to maximize existing programs**
   WHY: USDA programs, especially CREP (a state-federal program) have garnered past success. These programs still have great potential for deployment in the watershed, and the 2018 Farm Bill language could have a significant positive effect.
   HOW: PSC members (or other appointed group) could engage at a high-level with USDA and help them to 1) establish and institutionalize RFB's as a Priority Practice for agricultural land within their state, and 2) address state-identified improvements to CREP.