

## Riparian Forest Buffer Considerations for Pennsylvania's Phase 3 WIP

July 3, 2018

The Forestry Workgroup (including the 70+ members of the RFB Advisory Committee members) are prepared to support the implementation of Pennsylvania's WIP. Riparian forest buffers are one of the most efficient and cost-effective BMPs for improving water quality. In addition to improving water quality, they provide both terrestrial and aquatic habitat, provide shade to cool waterways, and restoration activities help connect citizens to their local watersheds.

Support and momentum are building for riparian forest buffers across the watershed. Thanks to the efforts of many partners, we feel that we have a strong foundation on which to build a long-term, successful riparian forest buffer program for Pennsylvania.

As plans are being finalized, the Forestry Workgroup offers the following considerations regarding riparian forest buffers:

1. Communications
  - a. Up-to-date and consistent messaging
  - b. Importance of co-benefits of buffers
  - c. Incorporate findings from PA in the Balance
    - i. Messaging to generate demand for buffers from both farmers and other landowners
    - ii. Messaging to general audiences resulting in acceptance and support for buffers
    - iii. Creating the culture of stewardship and normalization of forested buffers in both rural and urban landscapes
  - d. Use social science and targeted marketing to reach specific audiences in specific places where focused efforts are needed
  - e. Producer led, farmer-to-farmer critical for outreach to agriculture communities
2. Agency and partner leadership and coordinated commitment to forest buffers
  - a. Leveraging funding and resources
  - b. Consistent support for priority practices like forest buffers
  - c. Consistent messaging and communication
  - d. Capitalize on regional partner networks
  - e. Capitalize on organizational strengths
  - f. Coordinate, collaborate, and innovate
3. Technical assistance
  - a. Landowner-focused; service-oriented
  - b. Identify roles and capacities of agencies, NGOs, and businesses

- c. Data shows that occurrence of concentrated technical assistance efforts on the ground equals higher levels of implementation
  - d. Adequate TA training needed to ensure field offices, conservation districts, other local partners understand, support, and advocate for buffers in their service areas
  - e. More is needed across the board
4. Funding
- a. Both public and private
  - b. Flexible and streamlined
  - c. Explore and offer landowner incentives
  - d. Incorporate buffers into farm operations and whole-farm planning
  - e. Innovation needed, such as income-producing buffers and “pay for success” models
  - f. Current capacity (including technical assistance) = 1,400 acres annually
  - g. CREP is a critical program and should be enhanced and improved to meet increasing demands for forest buffers.
5. Reporting and tracking
- a. Overall, one streamlined, user-friendly, accessible system is needed
  - b. Practice Keeper enhancements will improve the existing system
  - c. Improvements are needed for partner-reported and privately-funded projects
  - d. Functionality for tracking, viewing, and communicating progress is key
6. Site preparation and maintenance
- a. Practices, methods have improved significantly over early planting efforts, resulting in higher success rates and much lower mortality
  - b. Early investments in both site preparation and post-planting maintenance are critical to success
  - c. Landowners need to clearly understand their roles and responsibilities
  - d. Successful site preparation and maintenance can overcome many barriers to adoption, such as aesthetics
  - e. Experts recommend the development of a stand-alone buffer maintenance model to ensure long-term success. The approach needs to empower landowners to take ownership of their buffers, while also providing funding and assistance for critical practices during the first several years of establishment.
7. Riparian Forest Buffer Width
- a. Our Goal across the PA Bay Watershed is a 100-foot width for all riparian forest buffers. A minimum average width should be no less than 35 feet. The effectiveness of buffers diminish greatly with narrowing average width.
  - b. Pursue greater incentives for wider buffers
  - c. Trees provide greater overall benefits compared to grass buffers

8. Concentrated flow paths
  - a. Consistent messaging: problems with concentrated flow paths can be overcome with correct practice combinations and improved design
  - b. Training and guidelines needed
  
9. Stream Restoration and Legacy Sediments
  - a. Where does Stream Restoration fit in the WIP? Gain understanding of all protocols, associated practices, etc.
  - b. Need all workgroups to fully understand the science, true extent of applicability, and assumptions associated with Legacy Sediments- review forthcoming STAC report
  - c. When implementing stream restoration projects, forest buffers should also be planted on that site when feasible
  
10. Conserving existing riparian forests
  - a. Consistent feedback from stakeholders- conservation of mature, existing buffers is critical to ensure progress
  - b. Included in the Land Conservation Scenario
  - c. Provide incentives to landowners and/or partners (land trusts, municipalities, etc.) for conserving riparian forests