

Education Series Expounds Importance of Riparian Buffer Zones

The Challenge:

The health of the Chesapeake Bay starts with the water that flows off the land and into tributaries of the Bay. There are 288,000 miles of riparian waterways that form the Chesapeake watershed. Many of these tributaries lack sufficient riparian forest buffers—a critical component of the system. Riparian forest buffers function as filters to reduce sedimentation and nutrient loads in the watershed, improving the conditions of the immediate streams and all water heading downstream to the Bay. Restoring riparian forest buffers is one of the most sought-after practices for the Bay States to reduce these pollutants, which often come from farm lands.

The goal is to have a minimum of 70 percent of the riparian area in the watershed forested. Based on the number of streams in the Bay watershed, and an estimation of 55 percent of the land being forested, a target of 900 new miles of riparian forest buffers every year through 2036 is needed to reach the 70 percent threshold.

To address this problem, a group of leaders from around the Chesapeake initiated the Riparian Forest Buffer Initiative. The initiative included a process whereby Bay States could look at how this practice has been delivered and how it could be improved. One need addressed by all of the States was for training to improve delivery and performance.

The Solution:

Working in partnership with the Farm Service Agency and Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, the Forest Service hosted a series of Buffer Environmental Education webinars. Each webinar featured experts providing valuable how-to information on implementing riparian buffer programs and lessons learned.



Riparian forest buffers act as filters, absorbing pollutants and slowing runoff before they reach the water system. (Photo: Ben Longstaff, University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science)

Webinar Series Topics:

- How to Fund, Start, and Operate a Farm Stewardship Program
- Principles of Getting More Buffers on the Ground for Livestock Producers
- Why Is Restoring Streamside Buffers so Critical to the Health of the Bay?
- Tree Planting to Establishment, How to Improve Buffer Success and Save Money
- Addressing the Concerns of Aging Landowners
- Regional Conservation Partnership Program Projects in the Bay Watershed
- The West Virginia Fencing Project and How Could You Set up this Kind of Partnership in Your State?
- Success Strategies for Reaching Out to Absentee Landowners
- A Forester's Perspective on Buffer Outreach and Success

Resulting Benefits:

Between 50 and 150 participants from various organizations attended each webinar.

Sharing Success:

You can access all of the [Chesapeake Bay Riparian Buffer Webinars](#) at our Web site.

“... no other land use—pasture, cornfield, lawn, or urban street—consistently delivers the clear, pure water received from the forest.” –The State of Chesapeake Forests, September 2006



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