



Photography by Kyle LaFerriere Photography LLC

# Riparian Consortium

Annual Report  
January 2019 - June 2021

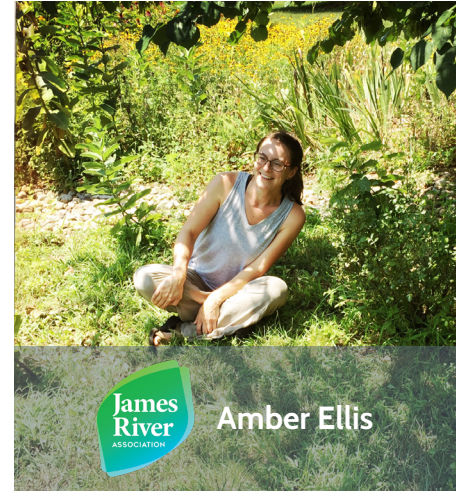




# A Letter From The Convener

The forested banks of the James River and its tributaries, also known as riparian forest buffers, are vibrant spaces that bring us joy and healing, stabilize our banks, provide shade, food, and cool water for wildlife, and are one of the best landscapes to filter pollutants for a cleaner James River and our local streams.

Unfortunately, thousands of miles of tributaries across the Upper and Middle James watersheds lack these riparian forest buffers. In 2019, several partners got together to form the Upper & Middle James Riparian Consortium, which has now grown to over 300 members representing nonprofits, state agencies, local government, and private businesses. These past 3 years have been filled with proactive listening, figuring out a structure that would allow us to do the most meaningful and impactful work together, and moving ideas into action.



Partnerships across the world faced challenges due to the Covid pandemic, but the collaborative spirit I've witnessed in the James River watershed despite these challenges brings me hope for what's on the other side. Since our launch, we have grown a more expansive network of partners that are all headed towards the same vision of "Growing partnerships for healthy streamside ecosystems for clean water in the James River today and tomorrow." While we have a lot to celebrate, we still face key challenges in need of creative solutions to support stewardship of our existing riparian forest buffers, increase our riparian work force from designers, plant nurseries, and contractors, effective solutions to severe streambank erosion seen across the watershed, and ensuring that our work is addressing the needs of our most vulnerable communities across the watershed. I am excited to continue to work with old and new partners to ensure we restore and protect our streamside forests for the health of our communities, our wildlife, and our River. I can't wait to see what the next year brings!

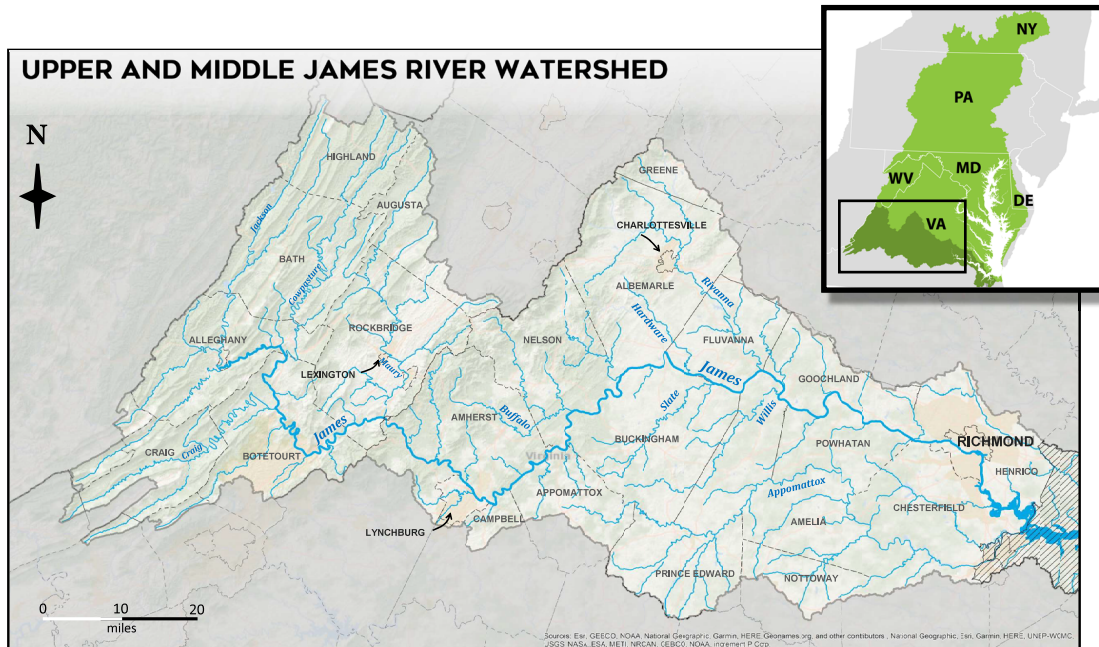
My biggest lesson that I'm learning over and over as a convener, is for a resilient collaborative, we must stay open to new approaches and new perspectives, no matter how messy it gets. Just like our buffers... messy is good!

don't establish the  
boundaries  
first,  
the squares, triangles,  
boxes  
of preconceived  
possibility,  
and then  
pour  
life into them, trimming  
off left-over edges,  
ending potential:  
~ A.R. Ammons

# Mission, Vision, and Values

## Mission





The Upper and Middle James Riparian Consortium is a network of private, non-profit, and public partners. We share expertise and resources to increase implementation, as well as awareness of riparian buffers and their value to landowners, with a priority focus on riparian forest buffers, across the Upper and Middle James watersheds (as shown below).



## Vision

Growing partnerships to create healthy streamside ecosystems for clean water in the James River today and tomorrow.

## Values

-  **Collaboration** - We can go further together and seek opportunities to support, collaborate with, and learn from diverse partners both within and outside the James River watershed.
-  **Stewardship** - We care for our existing riparian buffers and believe that stewardship is vital to sustained improvements in water quality and successful buffers.
-  **Holistic** - We integrate practices such as livestock exclusion fencing, streambank stabilization, grass and forest buffers, and conservation easements that respond to landowner, landscape, and habitat needs.
-  **Initiative** - We are proactive and take initiative to create solutions that respond to the needs of Consortium partners and our streamside ecosystems for long-term health of the James River and our communities.



# Team Updates

## Planning Team

Leads: Amber Ellis (JRA); Christine Gyovai, Lea Taylor, and Emily Carlson (Dialogue + Design)



2019 began with an interview-based assessment of the opportunities, needs, and ideas for the Consortium which resulted in a Key Issues Report prepared by Dialogue + Design Associates. The identified core needs included the importance of maintenance, identifying partner strengths and roles, knowledge of existing cost-assistance programs, custom outreach approaches, and more effective communication. Over the three years, we have held 18 events, ranging from Consortium meetings and Buffer Summits to virtual Happy Hours, with the goal of creating spaces for learning, brainstorming, and connection. A [Guiding Document](#) was developed to outline the process, vision, goals, structure, and partner roles, followed by an [Action Plan](#) with priority actions based on the Consortium's goals.

 **572** partners engaged

## Targeting & Outreach Team

Leads: Casey Johnson (JRA); Dave and Paula Jasinski (Green Fin Studio); Lisa Fraley-McNeal (Center for Watershed Protection)

To strategize outreach for riparian buffers to high priority parcels in the watershed as identified in the James River Restoration Planner, the Center for Watershed Protection led a targeting analysis in Powhatan, Goochland, and Buckingham County. To help landowners and partners be more knowledgeable about available programs, the Chesapeake Conservancy developed and launched the [Streamside Program Report](#) tool that narrows down programs and best contact based on address and landowner objectives. Engaging the public was difficult because of Covid, but in June 2021, we hosted a tour of Virginia Tech's Catawba Sustainability Center and their riparian forest buffer research.



 **3** county landowner analyses completed



## Knowledge Network Team

Leads: Shereen Hughes (Wetlands Watch and CBLP); Beth Ginter (Chesapeake Conservation Landscaping Council); Jenny McGarvey (Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay)



In response to the need for more education about buffers, the Chesapeake Bay Landscape Professional Program (CBLP)-Buffers Certificate training pilot was developed and launched in 2020. This mix of field and virtual modules covers site assessment, design, implementation, and maintenance. The training was also modified to pilot at State Farm, a Virginia Department of Corrections (DOC) Facility. Stroud and JRA also installed a research plot to test stone mulching as an alternative to herbicides for riparian forest buffers. They are also working on a digital repository for buffer research articles and resources.

 **18** CBLP-Buffers  
Certificates earned

## Implementation Team

Leads: Amber Ellis (JRA); Samuel Vest (Trout Unlimited)

In response to partners interest in tools to assist with coordination, the Conservancy developed the Coordination Tool that is updated quarterly and displays WIP III buffer progress, partner work areas, and catalogues prioritization datasets. The JRA and Virginia Department of Forestry launched the James River Buffer Program, which collectively installed 345 acres of riparian forest buffer between 2019-2020. This program is eligible to any type of landowner in the Middle and Upper James and covers 100% of the costs for design, site preparation, installation, and three years of establishment support. This Team is currently developing another program to address stewardship challenges of existing forest buffers.



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 **345** acres of riparian  
forest buffer  
installed through James  
River Buffer Program



# Partner Project Highlight

## Restoring the James River at The State Farm

Covering approximately 4,000 acres along both sides of the James River in Powhatan and Goochland lies the Virginia Department of Corrections State Farm facility. This working farm includes a 200-head dairy operation, 1100-head beef cattle operation, 1200 acres of grain, and a variety of other cropland and processing plants. State Farm has been in need of a Conservation Plan for years, but due to size and complexity, a strong collaborative approach had been missing. That's where the Consortium comes in.

The State Farm conservation plan was designed by a team of local, state, and federal agencies and private-nonprofit organizations that bring considerable expertise and financial support to the project. The State Farm Task Force is made of the following partners, several of whom are key members of the Consortium:



Amber Ellis  
Joey Shelton



Deya Ramsden



Hunter Landis  
Kenny Raiford



Keith Burgess



Karen Johnson



Nicole Shuman

The plan calls for over 100,000 linear feet of fencing to exclude cattles from streams, restoration of over 100 acres of streamside forests and 10 acres of wetlands, as well as incorporating conservation training opportunities for offenders following the CBLP-Buffers Certificate developed through the Consortium. Implementation of the first phase started in Spring 2021 with the installation of 1,200 linear feet of fencing, 10 acres of riparian forest buffer, 6 inmates and 4 DOC staff participated in a Fixed-Knot Fencing Workshop in fall 2020 and 8 inmates completed the CBLP-Buffers Certificate Training on buffer planning, installation, and maintenance. Due to the magnitude of the project, it is expected that planning and implementation will continue into 2022 or beyond. The breaking of ground at the State Farm and the success of strengthening collaboration across agencies and organizations is an inspiration for what we can do together.



BEFORE



AFTER

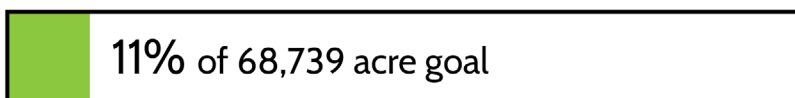
Restoration activities at the State Farm is being accomplished through the generous support of the Virginia Environmental Endowment, State Lands Fund Program, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and the Virginia Aquatic Resource Trust Fund.



# Watershed Implementation Plan Phase III Progress

Riparian buffers, both forest and grass buffers, play a key role in the Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL), a “pollution diet” to restore clean water in the Chesapeake Bay and the region’s streams, creeks, and rivers. The graphics below show reported progress towards the Watershed Implementation Plan Phase III (WIP III) buffer goal progress within the Upper and Middle James River Watersheds. To see more detailed information by County or subwatershed, visit the Consortium’s [Coordination Tool](https://jamesriverconsortium.org/about/about-resources/) at <https://jamesriverconsortium.org/about/about-resources/>

## Overall Buffer Progress



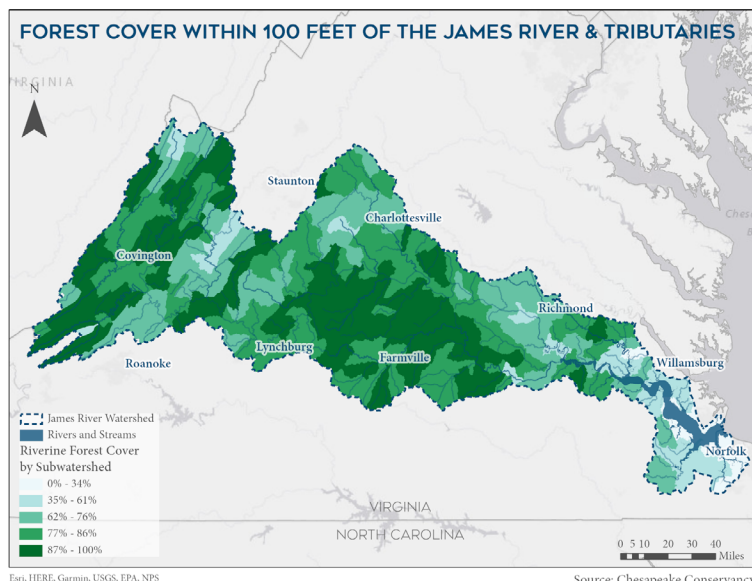
### Forest Buffer Goal Progress



### Grass Buffer Goal Progress



Source: This information is pulled from the Chesapeake Bay Program’s Chesapeake Assessment Scenario Tool (CAST) and is a sum of reported progress through 2020 across Hydrologic Unit Code 12 (HUC12) subwatersheds in the Upper and Middle James watersheds.



Esri, HERE, Garmin, USGS, EPA, NPS

Source: Chesapeake Conservancy

## % of Waterways with Riparian Forest

An analysis of high-resolution land cover data conducted by the Chesapeake Conservancy in 2021 indicates **78%** of riparian areas within 100 feet of the James River and its tributaries across the watershed are forested with trees and shrubs.



# Steering Committee and Funders

## Steering Committee

James River Association  
Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay  
Chesapeake Bay Foundation  
Green Fin Studio  
Monacan SWCD  
Natural Bridge SWCD  
Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Peter Francisco SWCD

Stroud Water Research Center  
Thomas Jefferson SWCD  
Trout Unlimited  
Virginia Cooperative Extension  
Virginia Department of Forestry  
Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries  
Virginia Tech  
Dialogue + Design Associates (as facilitator)

## Thank you to our funders!

A special thank you goes to the investments by the following funders who have supported riparian restoration efforts in the Upper and Middle James Watersheds between January 2019 and July 2021.



**Virginia Environmental Endowment** - James River Water Quality Improvement Program (VEE-JRWQIP): In April 2018, VEE announced the creation of the James River Water Quality Improvement Program, a new \$15.595 million grant program designed to accelerate and advance significant water quality improvements throughout the James River watershed. VEE has awarded \$5,520,297 to the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, James River Association, Trout Unlimited, and the Virginia Department of Forestry.

"The collaborative buffer work that the James River Association and its partners are moving forward in the James River watershed is extraordinary. It is setting a new standard for how to accomplish riparian buffer restoration within the Commonwealth and beyond. The Virginia Environmental Endowment is very pleased to be providing over \$5 million to support this important effort."

- Joseph H. Maroon, VEE Executive Director



**National Fish and Wildlife Foundation** - Chesapeake Bay Stewardship Fund (NFWF-CBSF): Working in partnership with government agencies and private corporations, the NFWF-CBSF supports restoration with cycles each year through two competitive grant programs - the Innovative Nutrient and Sediment Reduction Grant Program and the Small Watershed Grants Program. NFWF has awarded at least \$3,037,102 to the Headwaters Soil and Water Conservation District, James River Association, Rivanna Conservation Alliance, and Trout Unlimited. \$1,750,000 of that has been specifically for supporting the Consortium.

**Virginia Agricultural Cost Share Program (VACS)** - The VACS Program offers cost-share and technical assistance to farmers to support more than 70 conservation practices tailored to improving local water quality. It is implemented by the Department of Conservation and Recreation in partnership with Virginia's 47 Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and funded by the General Assembly through deposits to the Water Quality Improvement Fund and a portion of recordation fees. Between FY2019 and FY2022, DCR has allocated over \$42 million to Soil and Water Conservation Districts serving portions of the Upper and Middle James Watershed for cost-share on practices to protect water quality, including stream exclusion fencing and riparian buffers. Notably, this allocation does not include the share of costs covered by farmers and landowners voluntarily participating in the VACS Program.





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