



Riparian Consortium

Annual Report

July 2021 - June 2022



Photograph by Green Fin Studio



A Letter From The Convener

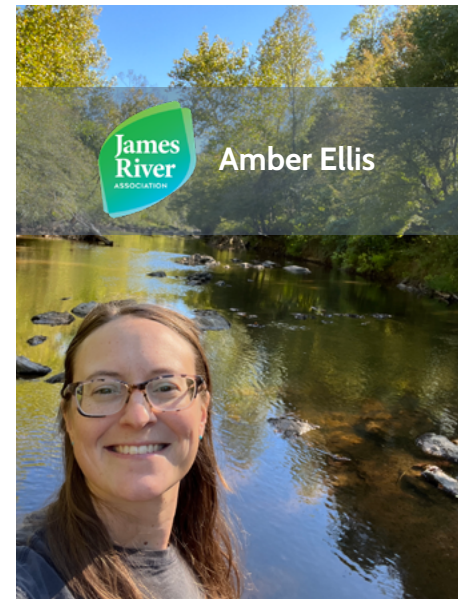
Over the past year, it has been inspiring to watch partnerships grow and deepen, and the impacts of the Riparian Consortium to not only ripple across the James River Watershed, but across Virginia and the Chesapeake Bay.

The James River Association (JRA), on behalf of the Consortium, successfully received a \$1 million grant in early 2022 from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation! This will allow us to continue growing partnerships to tackle some of the larger barriers to riparian forest buffer restoration. In the fourth year of the Consortium, we are digging in to build workforce capacity for riparian restoration, steward our riparian buffers, and create engaging opportunities for our partners and others to share knowledge.

In the past year we have seen an increase in state funding that supports the restoration of our riparian forests, including funds dedicated to the Virginia Department of Forestry to increase production at the Augusta Tree Nursery, bring back the New Kent Nursery, and to add positions dedicated to improving Virginia's watersheds. It was also a record year for funding for the Virginia Agriculture Cost-Share program administered through the Virginia Soil and Water Conservation Districts. Consortium partners created memorable moments for families and friends along the banks of the Slate River in Buckingham County and along the James River in Goochland through field days that were filled with learning, fun, and enjoying the beauty of our riparian forests.

Whether you've been with the Consortium from its launch in 2019 or just learning about us, we invite you to join us in whatever way best meets your needs. Sign up for a newsletter, join us for a field trip, reach out for a one-on-one, tell a friend about a program that can help them restore their buffer, or join an Action Team. We're grateful for you and all the ways that you take part in the healing of our streamside ecosystems for clean water in the James River and beyond.

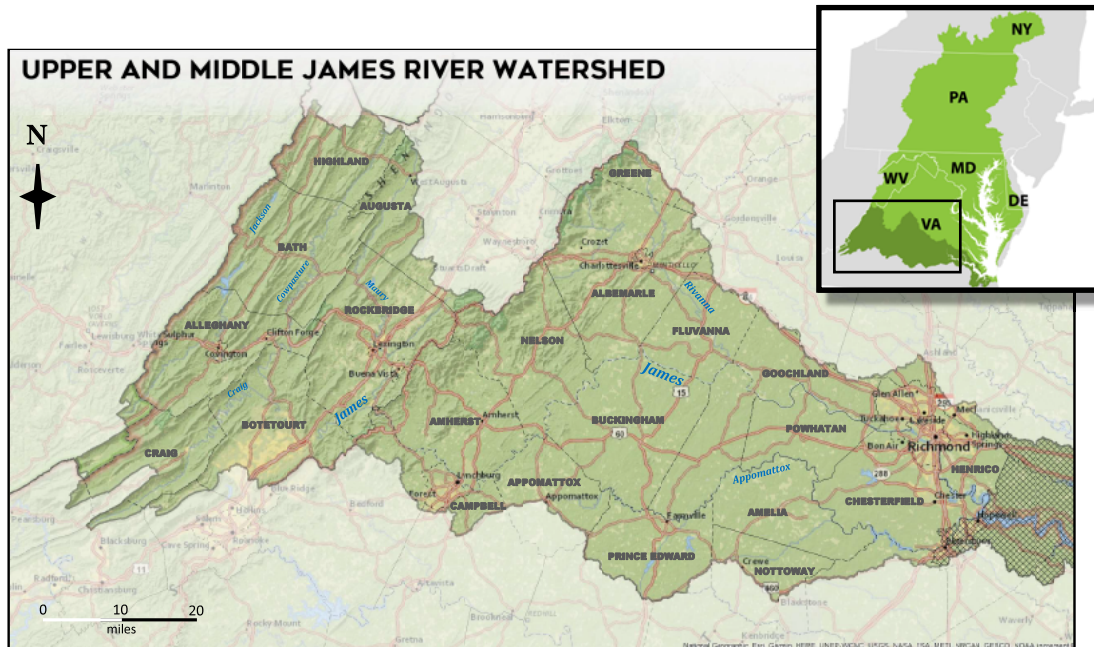
Amber Ellis
Restoration Director
JRA



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, Emily Carlson, and Philippa Belsches (Dialogue + Design)



 **198**
event attendees

The Planning Team organized six Consortium meetings and events, which included online meetings and Field Visits that engaged 198 attendees in topics such as reporting buffer BMPs, riparian buffer maintenance, riparian plants, and streambank stabilization. The 3rd Annual Buffer Summit included sessions to celebrate the benefits of buffers that engaged a range of practitioners and stakeholders in October of 2021 engaging 73 participants. Two reports were developed including an Urban Buffers Key Issues Report, as well as a Key Issues Report on Streambank Stabilization that was developed by Dialogue + Design Associates. The Planning Team continues to serve as the logistical arm of the Consortium including organizing monthly Steering Committee meetings, sending out a monthly newsletter, maintaining project contact lists, holding two Planning Team calls a month, engaging new Consortium members, and making sure all the events of the Consortium run smoothly.

Targeting & Outreach Team

Leads: Casey Johnson (JRA); Dave and Paula Jasinski (Green Fin Studio)

The Targeting and Outreach team held two outreach events to engage the public. In Fall 2021, we held a Farm and Float Tour that started at Clover Forest in Goochland that showcased the buffer and conservation work taking place on the property, followed by a float on the James River. In April of 2022, the team held their second outreach event where participants rotated between stations to learn about water quality monitoring, buffer plant identification, and the history of batteaux and lock systems on the Slate River in Buckingham. Outreach materials were developed to inform the public and landowners including a “Buffer Frequently Asked Questions” document, a buffer education module for public officials, a “Buffers Over Time” graphic, and a Buffer Maintenance graphic. Another outreach material, the Riparian Native Plant Guide, is currently under development with an expected completion date of late next year.



 **4**

outreach documents
completed

Knowledge Network Team

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



29

CBLP-Buffers certificates earned

In 2022, team leadership transitioned to the CBLP for coordination. Two separate roundtables were convened including 'Business of Buffers' hosted by CBLP and 'Bay Wide Buffer Experts' hosted by Stroud. Another round of the CBLP-Buffers certificate series was held in Fall 2021 with a deepened network of training partners including Virginia Cooperative Extension, Department of Forestry, JRA, and Blue Ridge PRISM. Over the past year there are 29 new CBLP-Buffers certificate holders (17 in Virginia and 7 through the State Farm Department of Corrections partnership). CBLP also ran an advanced Urban Buffer Design Charrette in Fall 2021 for 19 buffer professionals. JRA, Virginia Tech and Conservation Services developed a concept for a Master's Student to develop a Virginia-specific Riparian Buffer Manual for Contractors to provide up to date methodology for successful buffer planning, installation, maintenance and establishment. ACB updated and refined the digital repository for buffer articles/studies housed at <https://chesapeakeforestbuffers.net/> and developed a [Riparian Buffer Maintenance Video](#) for the Consortium website.

Implementation Team

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

The JRA, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, and the Virginia Department of Forestry have collectively installed 662 acres of riparian forest buffer through the James River Buffer Program (JRBP) since its launch in Spring 2019 through Spring 2022. 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. In Summer 2022, the JRA, Virginia Department of Forestry, Natural Resource Conservation Service, and the Farm Service Agency launched a pilot James River Stewardship Program that brought on 2 Seasonal Stewardship Assistants to assess over 200 acres of previously installed riparian forest buffers in Rockbridge, Bath, and Alleghany Counties, which will then be prioritized for maintenance assistance. This Team administered a Mini-Grant in Summer 2021 that supported Capital Region Land Conservancy and ND Ponics with riparian forest buffer projects in Henrico and Rockbridge Counties. The State Farm Task Force continues to make progress on excluding cattle and restoring riparian forest buffers on this almost 4,000 acre Department of Corrections facility in Powhatan and Goochland. Thus far 5,550 linear feet of fencing has been installed and 12.6 acres of buffer planted. The Task Force hosted Consortium partners in September 2021 for a tour of the property.



317

acres of riparian forest buffer installed through JRBP

Partner Project Highlight

Live Staking at Hope's Legacy

The Consortium held an in-person Live Staking Workshop in February of 2022. Live staking is a technique for stream restoration that involves planting 2 - 3 foot cuttings from riparian trees into stream banks. These cuttings, if planted properly, then grow into trees whose root system helps stabilize the soil and improve the water quality.

The workshop took place at Hope's Legacy Equine Rescue in Afton, Virginia, which has rescued over 500 horses, ponies, mules, and donkeys since opening in 2008. Nicola McGoff of Wild Ginter Field Services demonstrated the live staking technique to 20 participants. These participants then planted hundreds of willow, alder, and dogwood live stakes into a tributary of the James River running through the Hope's Legacy Equine Rescue property.

The livestakes have grown substantially since February, now growing leaves and small branches, a good sign of survival. Not only did this workshop help to stabilize the stream bank and restore the small stretch of river on the property, the knowledge gained during this workshop was essential to partners of the Consortium to facilitate other live stake plantings. Partners including CBF and JRA planted hundreds of live stakes during their own stream restoration projects. The knowledge and skills gained during the workshop will continue to be used to further the mission of the Consortium by supporting healthy riparian buffers today and tomorrow.

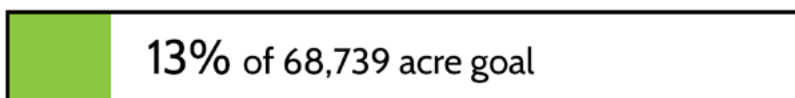


3 MONTHS
LATER

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



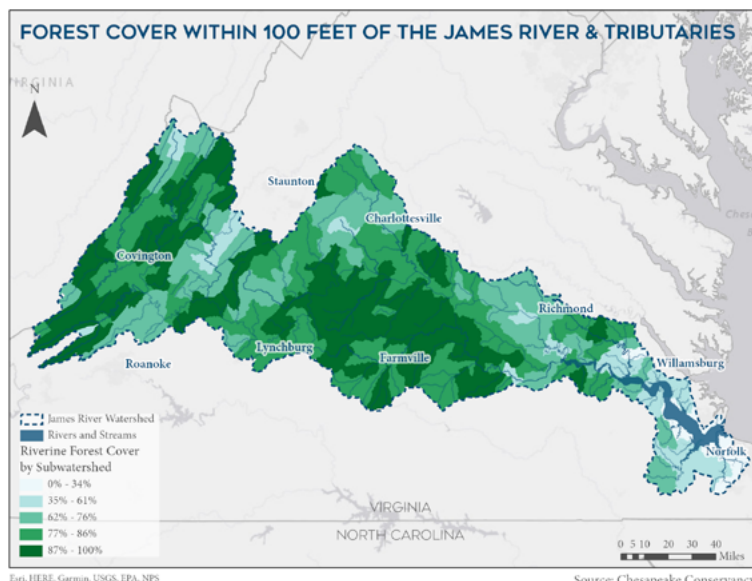
Forest Buffer Goal Progress



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 2021 across Hydrologic Unit Code 12 (HUC12) subwatersheds in the Upper and Middle James watersheds.



% 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 Landscape Professionals
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 Wildlife Resources
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 July 2021 and June 2022.



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 \$15.595 million grant program designed to accelerate and advance significant water quality improvements throughout the James River watershed. Over the past year, VEE awarded \$754,700 to Trout Unlimited to continue their riparian restoration work in the Upper James. The Chesapeake Bay Foundation, James River Association, and the Virginia Department of Forestry have continued to get buffers on the ground through the James River Buffer Program through their active VEE-JRWQIP grants.



National Fish and Wildlife Foundation - Chesapeake Bay Stewardship Fund (NFWF-CBSF): Working in partnership with government agencies and private corporations, the NFWF-CBSF supported restoration through three competitive grant programs - the Innovative Nutrient and Sediment Reduction Grant Program, Small Watershed Grants Program, and the Chesapeake WILD Grants Program. Over the past year, NFWF has awarded at least \$1,750,600 to support riparian restoration work the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, James River Association, NDPonics, Rivanna Conservation Alliance, Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts. \$1,00,000 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 (DCR) in partnership with Virginia's 47 Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD), and funded by the General Assembly through deposits to the Water Quality Improvement Fund and a portion of recordation fees. In 2022, DCR allocated \$86.1 million to SWCDs within the Chesapeake Bay watershed for the VACS program, which includes over \$28 million to SWCDs serving portions of the Upper and Middle James Watershed. The VACS program includes, but is not limited to, practices to help exclude livestock and restore 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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