



# Upper & Middle James Riparian Consortium

## Meeting Summary

February 23, 2023

### Meeting Overview

The first meeting of the Upper & Middle James Riparian Consortium (Consortium) took place as a morning virtual meeting, followed by an afternoon field visit on Thursday, February 23rd, 2023. Consortium partners gathered to explore outreach strategies to inspire people to take action through planting riparian forest buffers. Participants of the morning virtual meeting were treated to a presentation by Kristen Koch on Penn State Extension's Backyard Stream Repair program and resources. They also engaged in discussions about strategies for the James River watershed and heard updates about 2023 Consortium events and projects, including the Riparian Plant Guide with Green Fin Studio and Outreach Team activities with Casey Johnson of the James River Association. Participants of the afternoon field visit to a farm in Rockbridge County enjoyed spring-like weather and beautiful surroundings as they learned about the evolution of the property's buffer, planted in 2009 through the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). This site was also one of 29 properties assessed through the James River Stewardship Program in Summer 2022. The group concluded the field visit by conducting tree shelter maintenance.

The meeting was hosted by Amber Ellis, Restoration Director with the James River Association (JRA) and Convener of the Consortium. The morning's virtual meeting was facilitated by Christine Gyovai, Philippa Belsches and Emily Carlson of Dialogue + Design Associates. Presentations are linked in each section of the meeting summary below, and a list of [meeting participants](#) with affiliations is located at the end of the summary.

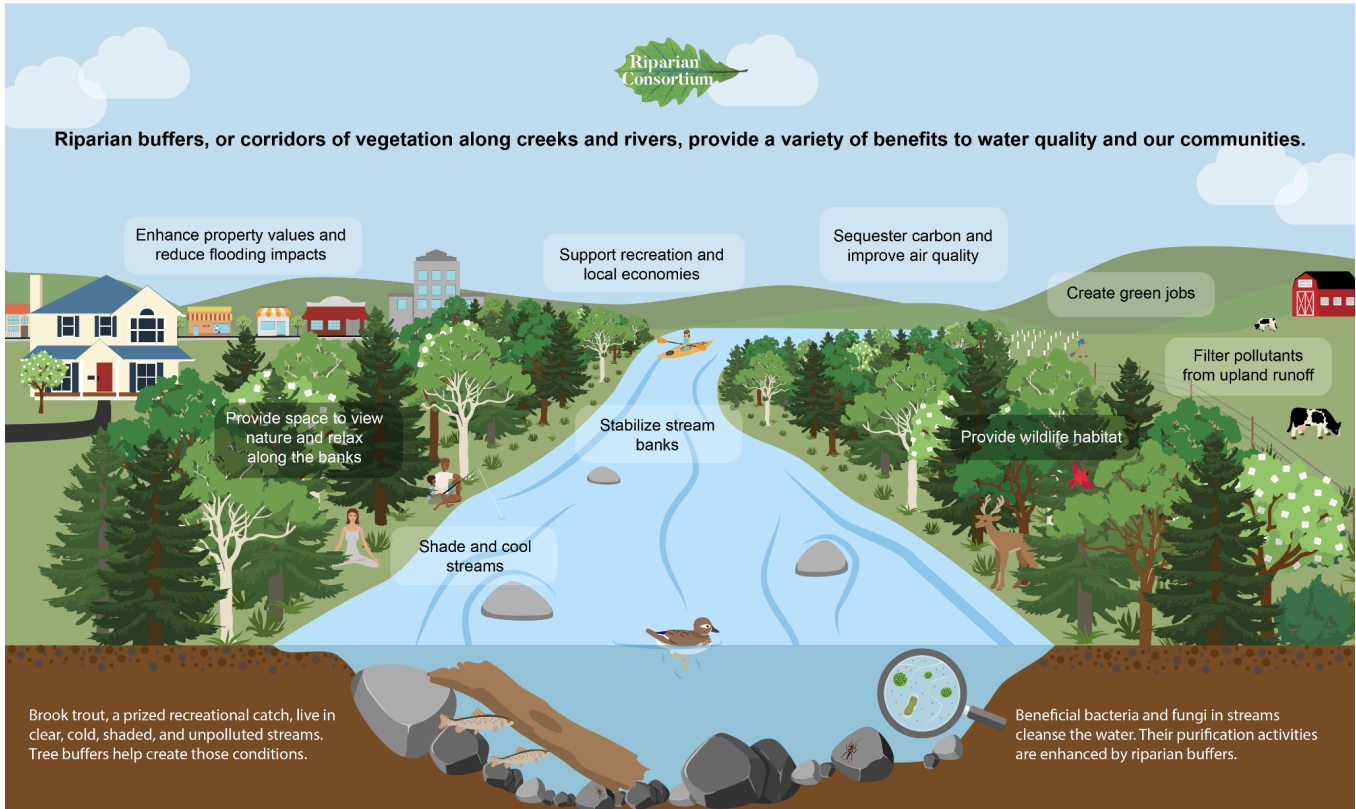


### Welcome, Introductions, and Consortium Overview

The Upper & Middle James Riparian Consortium was thrilled to welcome 39 participants to the virtual meeting. Following introductions, Amber Ellis with JRA provided an overview of the Consortium. Covering the Upper and Middle James watershed, and reaching and connecting with efforts across the state and beyond, the vision of the Consortium is “growing partnerships to create healthy streamside ecosystems for clean water in the James River today and tomorrow”. The focus of the Consortium is riparian forest buffers which offer benefits such as providing wildlife habitats, stabilizing streambanks, and providing space for people to enjoy.

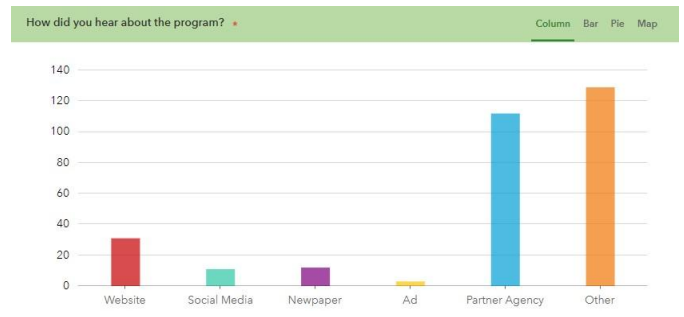
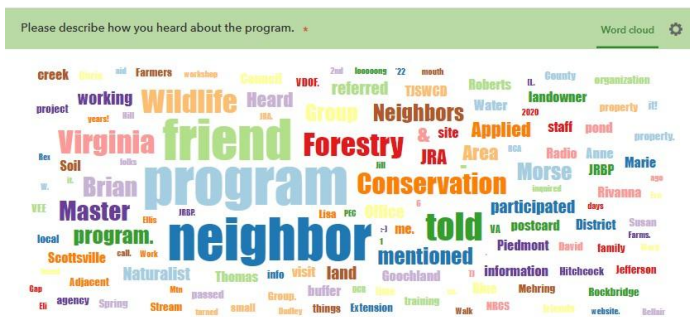
The mission states, “the Upper and Middle James Riparian Consortium is a network of private, non-profit, and public partners. We share expertise and resources to increase implementation, as well as awareness of riparian buffers and their value to landowners, with a priority focus on riparian forest buffers, across the Upper and Middle James watersheds.” The four values that are integrated into the

Consortium's work are the spirit of collaboration, stewardship, holistic approaches, and taking initiative. The James River Association and Dialogue + Design Associates serve on the Planning Team, with the Consortium's Steering Committee made up of wonderful partners. Decisions for the Consortium are made in a collaborative, data-driven manner. Four Action Teams, the Planning, Knowledge Network, Targeting & Outreach, and Implementation teams, lead the Consortium's work.



Amber also recognized Sarah Coffey of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation who has been a great asset to the Steering Committee and James River Buffer Program. This was Sarah's last meeting with the Consortium as she is changing positions. The Consortium is very appreciative of all her contributions.

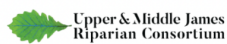
The James River Buffer Program, administered by JRA, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, and the Virginia Department of Forestry. In keeping with the meeting's theme of outreach, Amber noted that the majority of participants in the Buffer Program have not participated in similar programs in the past. Partners and word of mouth are the most significant ways in which people learn about the Buffer Program. Amber emphasized the importance of keeping these projects healthy and cared for in order to encourage landowners to spread the word.



Amber also shared a “Riparian Plant Highlight” on the Black Willow (*Salix nigra*) with the group. This fast growing, small tree/shrub is found in floodplain and wet areas, and is the most common willow in Virginia. It grows up to 30-60’ tall and wide and is best in full sun or part shade. It supports pollinators and is not preferred by deer.

Finally, Amber shared a fantastic [video](#) (here’s [a link](#) to a slightly longer version) that Joe Borzelleca, property owner of the site of the afternoon field visit, thoughtfully put together to describe the riparian buffer on his land and participation in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) and the James River Stewardship Program.

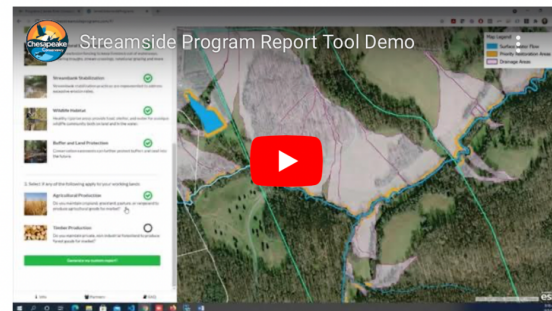
Amber encouraged participants to visit the Consortium’s website at [www.jamesriverconsortium.org](http://www.jamesriverconsortium.org) and access two resources to support outreach efforts, the [Coordination Tool](#), and the [Streamside Program Report Tool](#).



## Streamside Program Report Tool

Visit our [Streamside Program Report Tool](#), created by the [Chesapeake Conservancy](#), where you can enter a few basic questions about your land and objectives. The tool will narrow down eligible programs in your area and provide you with a report about your property and program information. You can also choose to simply browse the list of programs below and get in touch with the program providers directly to find out if a particular program suits your situation.

STREAMSIDE PROGRAM REPORT TOOL



video tutorial

*Streamside Program Report Tool:* <https://jamesriverconsortium.org/landowner-resources/funding-programs/>

Following Amber’s presentation Casey Johnson of the James River Association, who leads the Targeting and Outreach Team, gave an overview of the team’s plans for 2023. The Targeting and Outreach Team will align with Consortium’s 2023 priority areas through a number of webinars and workshops. The Team is also leading the development of the Riparian Plant Guide. Casey provided an overview of the functionality of the [Streamside Program Report Tool](#). The tool allows landowners to enter their address and discover funding programs available to support buffers on their properties. Amber and Casey’s presentations are available at this [link](#).

### Backyard Stream Repair - Engaging DIY Homeowners: An Education Strategy in Pennsylvania

Amber welcomed Kristen Koch with Penn State Extension to share a presentation on the Penn State Extension's Backyard Stream Repair program for owners and managers of small streams. The presentation provided an overview of the guidance manual and webinar series, and how these



resources can be adapted to other states, conservation practices, and audiences, including green industry professionals. Kristen's presentation can be found at this [link](#).

Key Highlights from Kristen's [presentation](#) include:

- **History of the program:** While there are many funding resources and programs available for riparian buffers on large land areas, this is not true for smaller properties. The goal of the program is to help streamside managers, including landowners, watershed groups, and municipal employees understand the health of the stream, and have the tools and resources to make decisions and access permits. The North Carolina Extension shared their program in the creation of Penn State's program.
- **Penn State Extension backyard stream repair products:**
  - [Simple Solutions for your Eroding Backyard Stream](#)
  - Webinar series with topics covered including, "Evaluating Your Stream", "Determining Your Options", "Choosing Plants for Your Stream", "Live Staking and Grading Your Stream", and "Maintaining Your Stream Repair Project & Next Steps". Field Days are offered to those who participate in webinars.  
<https://extension.psu.edu/backyard-stream-repair-series>
  - Additional resources available at <https://extension.psu.edu/backyard-stream-repair> including [FAQs](#)
- **Accomplishments to date:** Six to eight months after program completion. Penn State Extension reports strong results, with 75% of 800 participants educating their family and friends, and about 50% reporting they evaluated their stream, and/or prepared a planting plan for their stream repair project, and/or assisted someone else. 75% of completed projects took place on a private residence.
- **Considerations:** Kristen shared that this program can be duplicated elsewhere. Considerations in replicating the program include the existence of stream erosion, permit requirements, and the right climate for live staking.
- **Penn State Extension's Key Takeaway:** "People are interested in DIY opportunities. They just need the resources to get started".

Following Kristen's presentation, participants were invited to ask questions. When asked about how Penn State Extension generated the great demand for the webinars, Kristen shared that it went out through the Penn State Extension marketing lists and traditional promotional methods. Kristen was also asked about their stream health monitoring protocol. Kristen noted it is mostly a visual assessment looking to assess stability and sediment issues. This includes looking for vegetation on the streambanks, wildlife, and macroinvertebrates. Water clarity is assessed using a turbidity tube. Finally, Kristen was asked how landowners are paying for practices, and answered this is likely out of pocket and through available programs for free trees.

### Consortium Outreach Discussion

Following Kristen's informative and inspiring presentation, meeting participants broke into four small groups. Participants held rich discussions and provided thoughtful responses. The full group notes are located at this [link](#), which you are welcome to add additional ideas to. Key themes from the discussions are listed below:

**What most resonated for you from the Backyard Stream Repair talk? And/or What are the questions you hear most from the public about their streambanks?**

- There is value in building upon existing resources and supporting the cross pollination of ideas across state lines. There are amazing resources available from Pennsylvania and North Carolina.
- Empower landowners to do small DIY projects by supporting them with some assistance and resources.
- Landowner and partner education on the topic is important.
- “Word of mouth” plays a big role in outreach and educating landowners on riparian forest buffers.
- Common questions from the public relate to:
  - Maintenance of invasive species
  - Contact information and next steps for stream assessment
  - When is a bank too unstable for a buffer planting
  - Permitting needs
  - Urban plots

**Based on what you heard from the talk and what you hear from the public, what specific things do you think should be included in Consortium toolkits, webinars, and/or events, or that could be offered by a partner?**

- Utilizing Existing Resources:
  - Identifying and adapting relevant parts of the NC and PA Extension webinars for Virginia.
- Outreach and Information Sharing:
  - Outreach to turf management and landscaping companies, HOAs, suburban landowners, realtors, etc. with information on the basics of buffers and different landscaping options.
- Partner Programs:
  - Network of partner programs which offer BMPs.
  - Bring smaller conservation groups into more urban areas.
- Educational Resources:
  - Understanding the life cycle of the buffer.
  - Information for landowners on the basics of streambank intervention, especially after an initial site visit, including cost efficient options like live staking.
  - Stream health assessment methodology.
- On the Permitting Process:
  - Information and resources for landowners on how to navigate permitting and contact information for professionals who can assist with the work.



## Riparian Consortium Plant Guide

Casey Johnson shared an overview of the Riparian Plant Guide, an exciting project underway by the Targeting and Outreach Team. The goal of the Riparian Plant Guide is to raise awareness, celebrate the woody plants of Virginia’s riparian area, and to increase use by riparian landowners. The Plant Guide will be available both in print and online this fall. The main focus of the guide is selecting plants that work

best in a community. Green Fin Studio has conducted interviews, held a webinar, and created an initial mock-up of the guide. The Targeting and Outreach Team invites help with content creation for the guide. Please complete the [Plant Guide Survey](#) to vote on which plants should be included in the Plant Guide and to indicate if you would like to become more involved with content creation.

Dave Jasinski with Green Fin Studio shared an overview of the guide and the main suggestions and feedback they have received to date through the information gathering process. The Plant Guide will break plants into riparian zones types (wet, lowland, upland) to help prompt landowners to consider what type of zone is on their property. The guide will have conceptual diagrams for each type of zone and illustrations for six to twelve types of plants per zone. Each species will have a page with details and characteristics. There will also be a glossary of terms and an appendix with further information and resources.

Several participants suggested that it would be helpful for the Plant Guide to be regionally based instead of zone based considering the geographical differences across the state. Another idea is to indicate which type of region the plant would be best suited for, and alternatives for other parts of the state. A simple table with alternatives with regions could work. The Virginia Department of Conservation & Recreation's [VA Native Plant Guide](#) offers a good example of a simple graphic to share regional data.

Finally, meeting participants were asked to vote on a name for the Plant Guide.

- **Top Choice - Which Tree Should I Plant? A Guide for Selecting Riparian Trees and Shrubs in Virginia - 62%**
- *Choosing Plants for Your Riparian Buffer - 21%*
- *Virginia Riparian Buffer Guide - 12%*
- *Native Riparian Buffers - 0%*

### Field Visit in Rockbridge County, VA

The Upper & Middle James River Riparian Consortium is very appreciative to Joe Bozelleca, and his wife Ellen, for opening up their beautiful home and land to fifteen participants during afternoon field visit. This beautiful property has a 14 year old buffer planted through the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) in 2009. It was also one of 29 properties assessed through the James River Stewardship Program in Summer 2022. Participants learned about the history of the land, the evolution of the buffer, the long-term care of riparian buffers, the management of invasive species, including autumn olive and multiflora rose, and an overview of what was learned during the 2022 assessment.

Following the tour and discussion, participants performed tree shelter maintenance on the land's riparian buffer. Highlights included the evolution of best management practice installation at the site over time, engagement through different agencies and organizations,





and how the site owners initially became engaged through agency partners. Finally, participants noted that the site owners take an active role in stewarding the trees on the site, which substantially increases their survivability and health.

For more information please watch this fantastic video ([link](#)) put together by Joe for the event. Photos of the visit are included throughout this summary.

## Closing and Upcoming Consortium General Meeting

To learn more about resources, opportunities, and upcoming events, please visit the website at [www.jamesriverconsortium.org](http://www.jamesriverconsortium.org) and sign up for the Consortium's monthly newsletter there. We hope to see you on Tuesday, May 16th from 10:30 am to 5pm for the next Consortium General Meeting with a focus on urban buffers taking place in Peaks View Park in Lynchburg, VA. This meeting will be in-person and outside! The General Meeting will be followed by lunch and a stream walk. There will also be an optional paddle (registration required) on the James River. [Please RSVP at this link](#) by May 9th if you are interested - space is limited for the paddle trip. Please note that this year you must RSVP to receive a calendar invitation. *Thank you to all who participated in creating a wonderful meeting!*

## Meeting Participants

1. Alston Horn, Chesapeake Bay Foundation
2. Amber Ellis, James River Association
3. Anne Henley, VSLD
4. Barbara McGarry, VA Dept. of Conservation and Recreation
5. Bill Sweeney, Virginia Department of Forestry
6. Caitlin Verdu, Virginia Department of Forestry
7. Casey Johnson, James River Association
8. Christian Anderson, Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay
9. Daniel Mitchell, Trout Unlimited
10. Dave Jasinski, Green Fin Studio
11. Deanna Fehrer, Piedmont Soil and Water Conservation District
12. Devon Hathaway, Rivanna Conservation Alliance
13. Deya Ramsden, Virginia Department of Forestry
14. Eli Podyma, Virginia Department of Forestry
15. Gabriel Irigaray, Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission
16. Genevieve Goss, Valley Conservation Council
17. Jared Conner, USDA-NRCS, Lexington, VA
18. Javier Medina Sanchez, NRCS
19. Joey Shelton, James River Association
20. Jordan Bennett, James River Association
21. Kelly Snoddy, Peter Francisco Soil & Water Conservation District
22. Kim Biasioli, Piedmont Environmental Council
23. Kristen Koch, Penn State Extension
24. Kyle Simpson, Central Virginia Land Conservancy
25. Luke Longanecker, TJSWCD
26. Marilyn Knight, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Partners Program
27. Matt Kowalski, Chesapeake Bay Foundation
28. Morgan Brazeau, Lynchburg Water Resources
29. Patti Nylander, Virginia Department of Forestry
30. Robert Wilkinson, NRCS Lexington
31. Samuel Vest, Trout Unlimited
32. Sarah Coffey, Chesapeake Bay Foundation
33. Shereen Hughes, Wetlands Watch and Chesapeake Bay Landscape Professionals
34. Stephanie Saccone, Webbones
35. Susan Martin, Webbones
36. Teagan O'Brien, Virginia Department of Forestry
37. Christine Gyovai, Dialogue + Design Associates
38. Philippa Belsches, Dialogue + Design Associates
39. Emily Carlson, Dialogue + Design Associates