



Middle & Upper James Riparian Consortium Buffer Summit Summary

Wednesday, October 18th, 2023

Summit Overview

The fifth annual Buffer Summit & Celebration of the Middle and Upper James Riparian Consortium took place on October 18th at the beautiful Pocahontas State Park in Chesterfield, VA. The event included morning presentations, lunch, afternoon outdoor activities, and networking opportunities. Thank you to our presenters, Kevin McLean with the Department of Environmental Quality, Jordan Bennett with James River Association, Sarah Vollbrecht with Conservation Legacy, Cully McCurdy with the National Wild Turkey Federation, Kim Biasolli with Piedmont Environmental Council, Joey



Thompson with the Virginia Department of Recreation and Conservation, Ashley Moulton with the Capital Region Land Conservancy and Moulton Hot Natives, and Claire Sanderson with Rivanna Conservation Alliance who shared their time and expertise with the Consortium. Thank you to Pocahontas State Park, and to the Consortium Steering Committee and Planning Team for helping to make the day a success!

For more information about the Upper and Middle James Riparian Consortium (the Consortium), visit the website at: www.jamesriverconsortium.org. A list of [meeting participants](#) is included at the end of the meeting summary. The [event program](#) contains speaker bios and the Summit agenda.

Welcome and Consortium Overview

The 2023 Buffer Summit & Celebration was hosted by Amber Ellis, James River Association's (JRA) Restoration Director and Convener of the Consortium. The meeting was facilitated by Christine Gyovai and Philippa Belsches with Dialogue + Design Associates (D+D). Christine welcomed participants and Amber provided an [overview of the Consortium](#). The Consortium's mission is "to support a network of partners to raise awareness, build workforce capacity, and increase implementation of riparian forested buffers across the Upper and Middle James watersheds through collaboration". Its vision is "growing partnerships to create healthy streamside ecosystems for clean water in the James River today and tomorrow". Learn more about the Consortium, and how to get involved, by visiting the website at www.jamesriverconsortium.org.

James River Buffer Update from the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality

Kevin McLean, Chesapeake Bay Program Manager with the [Virginia Department of Environmental Quality \(DEQ\)](#) provided an update on the Chesapeake Bay Program Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP) and the state of buffers in the James River watershed. Kevin congratulated the Consortium in helping to make progress in meeting the goals in the Upper and Middle

State of Buffers in the James

Geography	BMP Type	Unit	Sum of Total Amount Credited		State Milestone	% of State Goal 2022
			2021	2022		
VA-02080201 - Upper James	Forest Buffer	Acres in Buffers	193	311	6,216	5
VA-02080203 - Middle James-Buffalo	Forest Buffer	Acres in Buffers	340	585	6,216	9
VA-02080205 - Middle James-Willis	Forest Buffer	Acres in Buffers	58	395	6,216	6

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DEQ

James. The data on riparian buffers in the James watershed show measurable success, and nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment levels progressing well. DEQ is looking for strategies to accelerate toward 2025 goals. Here is a [link to Kevin McLean's presentation](#).

Following Kevin's presentation, Kevin participated in a question and answer (Q&A) with Summit attendees. The Q&A included a discussion on the challenges legacy nitrogen poses in contributing to the current nitrogen level loads. When asked if the James has achieved the implementation goals for pollution reduction, Kevin replied that it has met the federal goals, but that chlorophyll A goals have not yet been achieved. Kevin noted that conversations are ongoing to determine how to continue achieving reductions in areas that have seen success in the past.



Growing Career Paths through the Consortium

Jordan Bennett of the [James River Association](#) and Sarah Vollbrecht of [Conservation Legacy](#) shared reflections on their time with the Consortium's James River Stewardship Program and how this experience shaped their career paths. The James River Stewardship Program (JRSP) is a collaborative effort of Consortium partners with the goals to 1) increase workforce capacity through internships and the Conservation Corps, and 2) address maintenance needs on buffers. Jordan Bennet was a JRA Stewardship Program intern during the summer of 2022. In April 2023 Jordan became the Restoration Coordinator for the James River Association and now oversees the interns in the Stewardship Program. Sarah Vollbrecht served as an Americorps crew leader for Conservation Legacy's Appalachian Conservation Corps in spring 2023 and became a staff crew leader for the Appalachian Conservation Corps in summer 2023. Both Jordan and Sarah appreciate the valuable experiences and opportunities provided to them through the James River Stewardship Program (JRSP). When asked by a Summit attendee about how to reach out to their generation regarding internships and job opportunities, Jordan and Sarah shared that social media and schools offer the best avenues. Learn more on Jordan and Sarah's career path [here](#). Following Jordan and Sarah's presentation, participants reflected on what or who most supported them in their career journeys, including:

- Diversity of experiences
- Mentors
- Employers taking a chance on them
- Internships with real responsibilities
- Internships that pay a living wage
- Access to outdoor space to get hands dirty
- Volunteering led to job opportunities

What is the James River Stewardship Program?

2 Overarching Goals

1. Increase workforce capacity through internships and corps
2. Address maintenance needs on buffers


Year 1 Accomplishments

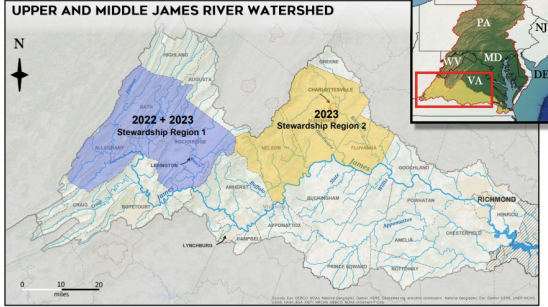
- Assessed 216.57 Acres
- Maintenance on 182.54 Acres

Year 2 Accomplishments


- Assessed 415.7 Acres
- Planned Maintenance on ~205 Acres

Contractors Used:





Partners:



Funded by National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

What we hear from the Seasonal Stewardship Assistants



Introduces them to a variety of organizations and agencies

Big but reachable acre goal


Mixed experience of building field knowledge through assessments, as well as critical thinking through data entry and recommendation reports

Work that will actually result in something!



Enjoyed social activities like the paddle

Let's Talk Turkey - Management practices to Benefit Wildlife and Create Diversity

The Consortium was pleased to welcome Cully McCurdy, District Biologist for VA, WV, NC with the [National Wild Turkey Federation \(NWTf\)](#) to the 2023 Buffer Summit. Cully shared fascinating information on turkey nesting, biology, survival rates, and habitats. Riparian areas are essential habitats for turkeys and landowners are often interested in attracting them to their properties. Cully described NWTf's efforts to implement and manage riparian areas and support turkey populations. Methods employed include planting hedgerows, systematically removing invasive species and replacing them to maintain nesting cover for turkeys. Cully also noted their work to reduce the use of herbicides and pre-emergents. To learn more about turkey biology, their riparian habitat, and NWTf projects and collaborations in the James River watershed, view Cully's full presentation [here](#). A few slides are also copied below.

 **Biology - Wild Turkey (Meleagris galapavo)**

- Polygamous
- Ground nesting
- 10 – 12 egg clutch
- Only female incubate and raise poults
- 28 day incubation
- Will re-nest
- Roost in trees



 **Brood Rearing Habitat**

- Herbaceous openings.
- NWSG or sparse legume non bunching grass.
- Maintain openings by late summer mowing or fall/winter burning if an option.
- Turkey poults must have very high protein diet.



Getting more bang for your buck!

Linear openings

- Roads provide shade
- Cut back and leave tops
- Can be done by hand at low cost
- Can maintain with a pole pruner

NRCS Farm Bill programs / Cost Share

- Cerulean and Golden-winged Warbler

Plan work during harvest

- Equipment is already on site
- Helps avoid site prep

Landings & skid roads

- Size doesn't matter, arrangement does!



Connecting and Protecting Riparian Corridors


Kim Biasioli, Senior Conservation Specialist with [Piedmont Environmental Council](#) (PEC), and Consortium member, concluded the morning presentations with a discussion on what makes a good riparian wildlife corridor, her efforts with the Albemarle Biodiversity Action Plan which identifies terrestrial and riparian corridors through the GIS analysis, and the tools being used towards their protection.



Kim highlighted four tools for connecting and protecting riparian corridors in her presentation, including 1) land conservation, 2) mapping & modeling, 3) policy initiatives, and 4) enhancing road crossings. Kim details efforts in Albemarle County related to each of these tools in her slides, located at this [link](#).

In the Q&A following her presentation, Kim shared that Albemarle County has adopted riparian protections primarily related to development. In response to a question regarding invasives, Kim noted that there are some cost-share programs available, but that the landowner is responsible for stewarding the land.

What makes a high-quality riparian corridor from a biodiversity standpoint?



- ❖ Width
- ❖ Native composition
- ❖ Disturbance regime
- ❖ Connectivity
- ❖ Landscape Context

Early Successional Associated Species decrease in abundance with increasing riparian buffer width

Late Successional Associated Species increase in abundance with increasing riparian buffer width

Edge Associated Species use riparian buffers as linear features on the landscape, regardless of buffer width


Different riparian buffer widths provide different **species' requirements**

Landscape Context (including adjacent stand age) can affect how species respond to riparian buffer widths:


Recent clearcuts create an edge and may or may not include additional retention patches

As adjacent stands age, the edge will be less defined and vegetation structure will change within the adjacent stands


Narrow
(0-29m)



Medium
(30-49m)



Wide
(50-100m)



Larsen-Gray and Loehle, 2022

Field Activities

After lunch, Buffer Summit participants had the opportunity to enjoy a variety of outdoor activities. The lovely weather and beautiful scenery were the perfect backdrop for taking part in stewardship projects, and exploring riparian buffers and streams at Pocahontas State Park. Thank you to our afternoon presenters for their engaging and informative sessions.

- **Riparian ID Sessions at Beaver Lake:** Joey Thompson from [Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation](#) led a riparian plant identification session focused on woody species. Ashley Moulton of [Capital Region Land Conservancy](#) and [Moulton Hot Natives](#) led a walk focused on understory herbaceous species.
- **Stewardship Activity:** Buffer Summit participants helped prepare garden beds around the Visitors Center, to ready the beds for park volunteers to turn them into a native plant garden this fall. Thank you to all who participated!
- **Creek Crawl:** Claire Sanderson of [Rivanna Conservation Alliance](#) led a Creek Crawl to explore life in the stream and to investigate aquatic life and learn about how these critters help determine the health of our waterways, and why riparian forests are crucial to supporting life underwater.



Meeting Participants

1. Alanna Ostrowski, Department of Forestry
2. Amber Ellis, James River Association
3. Anne Devine, Prince George County
4. Anne Marie Roberts, James River Association
5. April Bahen, VA Coastal Zone Management Program
6. Ashley Moulton, Capital Region Land Conservancy and Moulton Hot Natives
7. Bill Street, James River Association
8. Brianna Moring, James River Soil and Water Conservation District
9. Casey Johnson, James River Association
10. Christian Anderson, Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay
11. Christine, Gyovai, Dialogue + Design Association
12. Claire Sanderson, Rivanna Conservation Alliance
13. Cully McCurdy, National Wild Turkey Federation
14. David Jasinki, Green Fin Studio
15. Devon Hathaway, Rivanna Conservation Alliance
16. Dick Hall-Sizemore, Pocahontas Chapter, Virginia Native Plant Society
17. Elise Neuscheler, Friends of the Lower Appomattox River
18. Gregory Powers, James River Soil and Water Conservation District
19. Jamie Brunkow, James River Association
20. Jeff DeHoff, Friends of Pocahontas State Park
21. Joey Shelton, James River Association
22. Joey Thompson, Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation
23. Jordan Bennett, James River Association
24. Judy Okay, Contractor with Virginia Department of Forestry
25. Julia Toos, Virginia Master Naturalist
26. Kathy Fell, Plant Virginia Natives, Virginia Master Naturalists
27. Kaycie Lassiter, Chesapeake Bay Landscape Professional
28. Keith Burgess, Monacan Soil and Water Conservation District
29. Keith Yeargin, James River Association
30. Kelly Snoddy, Peter Francisco Soil and Water Conservation District
31. Kevin McLean, Virginia Department of Environmental Quality
32. Kim Biasiulli, Piedmont Environmental Council
33. Laurel Williamson, County of Albemarle
34. Lauren Huey, Green Fin Studio
35. Lindsay Spotts, Chesapeake Bay Foundation
36. Lucas Manweilder, Virginia Coastal Zone Management
37. Lucy Deignan, James River Association
38. Luke Longanecker, Thomas Jefferson Soil and Water Conservation District
39. Mary Camp, Virginia Master Naturalist - Pocahontas Chapter
40. Meghan Sobott, Thomas Jefferson Soil and Water Conservation District
41. Melody Persinger
42. Mike Lyden, James River Association
43. Patti Nylander, Virginia Department of Forestry
44. Philippa Belsches, Dialogue + Design
45. Rich Reuse, Virginia Department of Forestry
46. Rosalind Reilly, James River Master Naturalists
47. Rosemary Pacuilla, James River Association
48. Roz Stein, Virginia Master Naturalist
49. Sandra Mikesell, Pocahontas Master Naturalist
50. Sarah Vollbrecht, Conservation Legacy
51. Shereen Hughes, Wetlands Watch & Chesapeake Bay Landscape Professional Certification Program
52. Stephanie Saccone, Webbones
53. Steve Living
54. Susan Martin, Webbones
55. William Shanabruch, Reedy Creek Environmental

