



Annual Report
July 2022 - June 2023





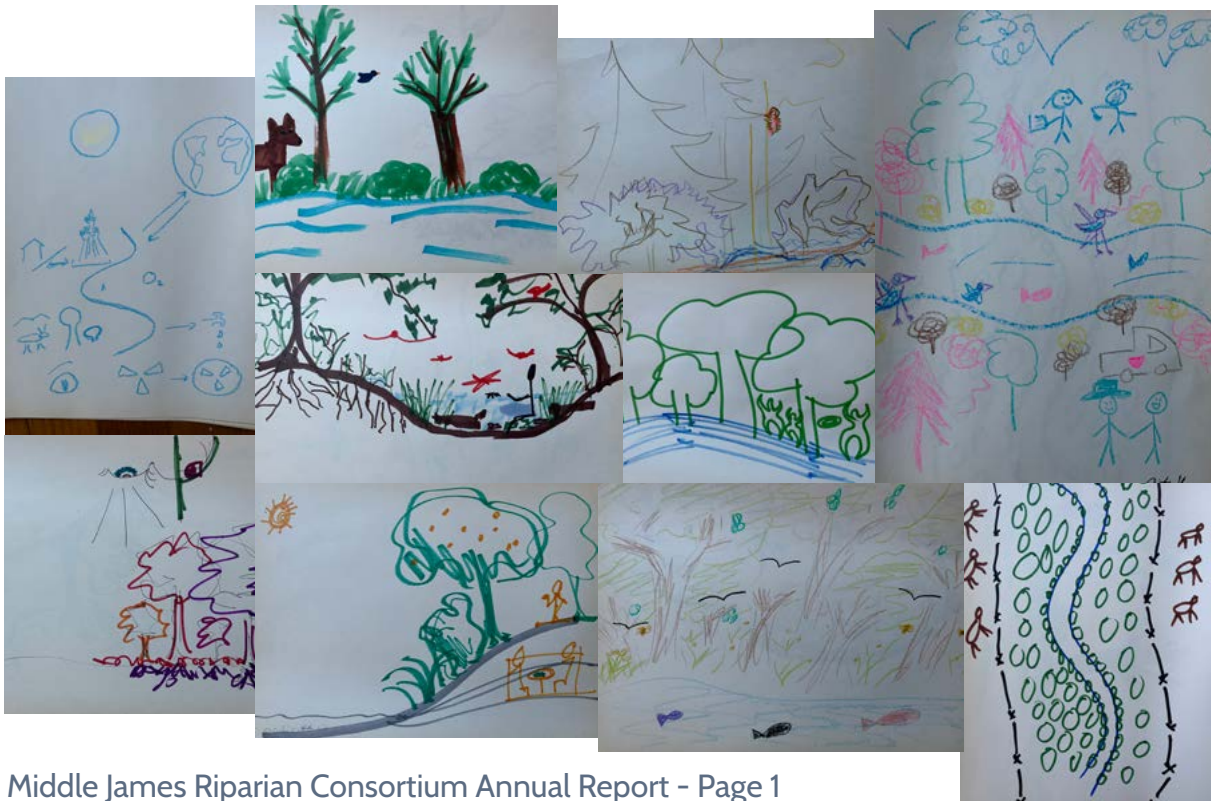
A Letter From The Convener

Riparian forest buffers are my favorite place to spend time in, whether its going for a walk or sitting on the banks of a stream or river. I love them because they are filled with so much life! So many of us get into this field of work because of our love of the water, land, and all the critters that call our watershed home. There are times that I can get caught up in the grants, spreadsheets, and reports of restoration work – I have to remind myself to pause and remember the “why” to stay connected and focus my efforts where it will truly make a difference.

The shared vision of the Consortium is “Growing partnerships to create healthy streamside ecosystems for clean water in the James River today and tomorrow.” What does this fully realized vision look like for you? At our September 2022 Steering Committee, we brought crayons and asked our Steering Committee to draw what that looks like for them. I hope you enjoy this fun gallery as much as we had fun drawing.

Thank you for all you do! I'm excited to work alongside each of you to make our shared vision a reality. It'll take each one of us doing the part we do best and finding ways to collaborate so we can tackle the big stuff together. Please reach out if you ever want to share your vision and explore how you can be a part of the Consortium.

Amber Ellis
Restoration Director, James River Association (JRA)
Consortium Convener

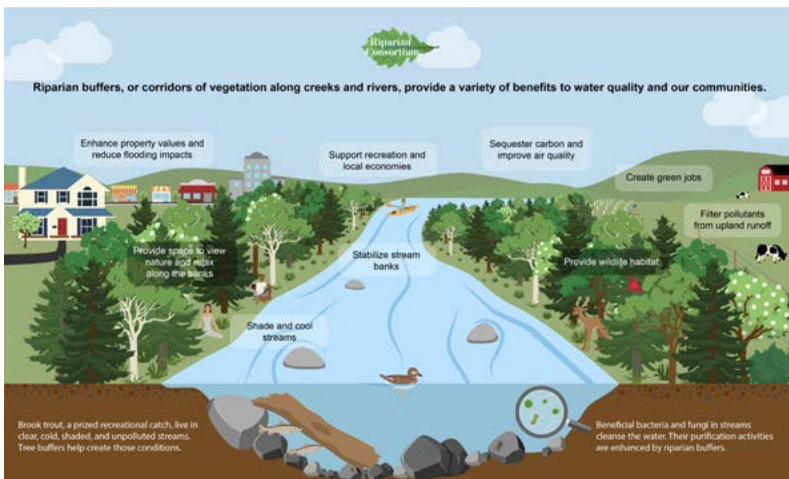
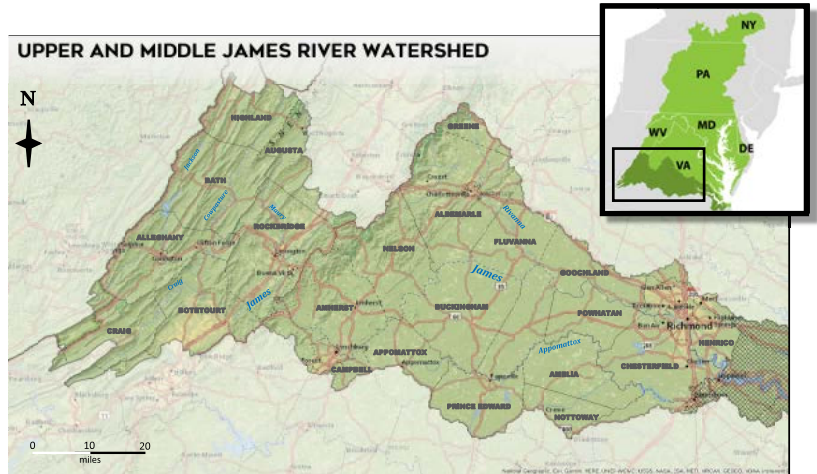




Mission, Vision, and Values

Mission

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.



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.

Planning Team

Leads: Amber Ellis (JRA); Christine Gyovai and Philippa Belsches (Dialogue + Design)

Goal: Increase collaboration and strengthen partnerships through developing an effective network of Riparian Consortium members.



September 2022 Consortium Meeting at Catawba Sustainability Center

The Planning Team engaged 198 partners across six Consortium meetings and events. The 4th Annual Buffer Summit was held at Wildrock in Crozet, VA in October 2022. Other events included a meeting at Virginia Tech's Catawba Sustainability Center in the Upper James to share different approaches to establishing forest buffers, virtual meetings focused on best practices for outreach to landowners and another on urban buffers, and a field visit to learn about stream dynamics followed by a paddle in Lynchburg.



450+ Consortium members

Targeting & Outreach Team

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

Goal: Build awareness of the importance of riparian areas and deliver outreach based on identified partner priorities, landowner interests, and restoration opportunity areas to increase strategic riparian investments.

The Targeting and Outreach team held two buffer maintenance workshops in Fall 2022, including one focused on tree shelter maintenance, mowing, and invasive management, and a second workshop focused more in depth on how to develop an invasive species management plan for a riparian buffer. The development of the Riparian Plant Guide was kicked off in fall 2022 and will be complete by fall 2023. With the help of the Consortium to select plants and collect photos, over a dozen partners gathered information on selected species and helped Green Fin to develop each page. A Buffer Funding webinar was also hosted in June 2023 where the public heard from partners about programs available to help with financial and technical assistance to restore buffers on their property.



Fall 2022 Invasive Species Management Workshop with Blue Ridge PRISM



60 event attendees

Knowledge Network Team

Leads: Shereen Hughes (Wetlands Watch and Chesapeake Bay Landscape Professional (CBLP)); Beth Ginter (Chesapeake Conservation Landscaping Council)

Goal: Build knowledge and capacity about best practices and innovation to ensure the use of the best researched methods for the greatest success of riparian restoration.



Fall 2022 CBLP-Buffers Certification field training

In December 2022, the State Farm Task Force was awarded the “Chesapeake Bay Watershed Implementation Plan Collaboration Award” for their efforts of integrating the Chesapeake Bay Landscape Professional-Buffers Certification into the conservation work at the Virginia Department of Corrections State Farm facility in Powhatan and Goochland counties. This Team hosted two Roundtables including one by Stroud Water Research Center that connects buffer experts across the Chesapeake Bay, and one by the CBLP Program on the Business of Buffers to discuss ideas for landscape professionals and new businesses to get trained and certified.



83 individuals trained

Implementation Team

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

Goal: Coordinate implementation and fill funding gaps to support a holistic approach to riparian restoration projects that leverage partner resources and expertise.

The Implementation Team completed year one of the James River Stewardship Program! Two Seasonal Stewardship Assistants visited 29 sites and assessed over 216 acres during the summer of 2022. The Assistants worked out of the Lexington NRCS office, covering Rockbridge, Bath, and Allegheny counties. 23 sites received maintenance, including over 40 acres of invasive species management and more than 2,000 trees replanted by the Appalachian Conservation Corps. Year two kicked off in May 2023 with four Assistants. The James River Association, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, and the Virginia Department of Forestry installed 250 acres through the James River Buffer Program this year. This program covers 100% of the costs for design, site preparation, installation, and three years of establishment support.



JRA and DOF training Appalachian Conservation Corps members on replanting methods



250

acres of riparian forest buffer installed through JRBP

James River Stewardship Program

Stewardship of riparian forest buffers and staff capacity are priorities for Consortium Partners. In 2022, JRA, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Farm Service Agency (FSA), Virginia Department of Forestry (DOF), along with input from over a dozen Consortium partners, created the James River Stewardship Program (JRSP). In its first year, JRSP assessed 216 acres across 29 sites and completed maintenance on 182 acres across 23 sites.

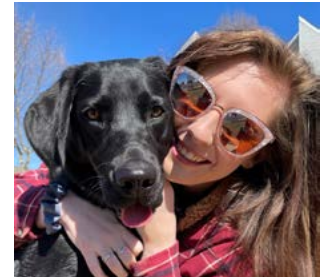
How does it work? Partners send in potential buffer sites to be assessed and regions are selected. JRA hosts two Seasonal Stewardship Assistants (SSA) per region for a 12-week period from late May to mid August. Each pair of SSAs assesses and develops recommendation reports for 200 acres of riparian forest buffer previously installed through a partner program (i.e. CREP, James River Buffer Program, Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share Program, etc.). The pilot began in summer 2022 with two SSAs located within the Lexington NRCS Service Area, covering Rockbridge, Bath, and Allegheny Counties. In Summer 2023, JRSP expanded to four assistants across two regions, including the Lexington NRCS Service Area, Louisa NRCS Service Area, and Thomas Jefferson Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) covering Fluvanna, Albemarle, and Nelson Counties, with a combined goal of assessing 400 acres. Assessed sites were prioritized based on maintenance needs with a goal of performing invasive species management and/or replanting on half of the assessed acres.

Maintenance was completed by contractors and a partnership with the Appalachian Conservation Corps (ACC) in the following winter and spring. Invasive species management is performed by contractors from November to February, and replanting and tree shelter maintenance is performed by ACC in March and April. JRA covers the full cost of maintenance with no out of pocket expenses for the landowner.

The JRSP is a golden example of a program that integrates the four values of the Consortium: Collaboration, Initiative, Stewardship, and Holistic. It leverages the strength of partnerships including NGOs, private groups, and state and federal agencies, to innovate and get more done. The assistants were employed by JRA, they worked out of the NRCS office, state agencies provided input on assessment protocols, private companies and conservation crews performed maintenance. The program also benefits the conservation community by introducing young professionals to the field through both the SSA positions and the ACC program.

This program has been funded through a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation-Innovative Nutrient and Sediment Reduction (NFWF-INSR) grant awarded to JRA.

Seasonal Stewardship Assistants



Jordan Bennett - Summer 2022



Daniel Mitchell - Summer 2022



Mary Hays Scott - Summer 2023



Matalin Collins - Summer 2023



Lyndsey Weeks - Summer 2023



Lauria McShane - Summer 2023



Watershed Implementation Plan Phase III Progress

Riparian forest buffers, both in agricultural and in more developed urban areas, 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 2025 Watershed Implementation Plan Phase III (WIP III) buffer goal within the James River Basin. 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 Riparian Forest Buffer Progress



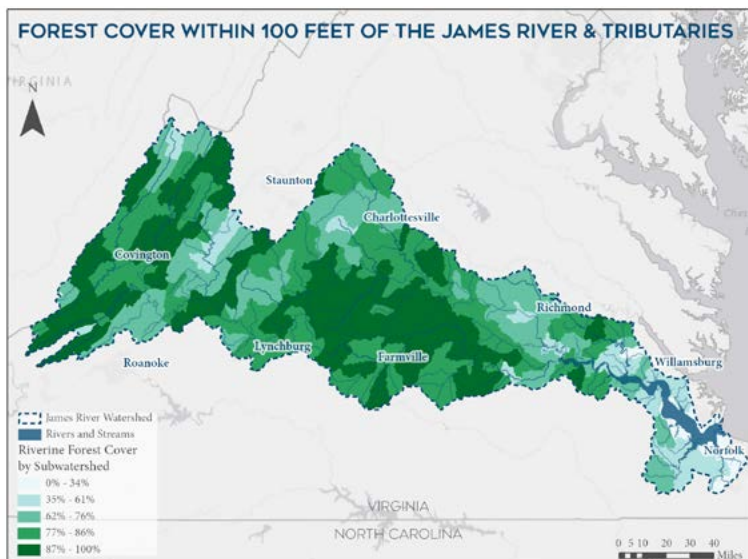
Agricultural Riparian Forest Buffer Goal Progress



Urban Riparian Forest 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 2023 across the James River Basin.



% 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.

Eri, HERE, Garmin, USGS, EPA, NPS

Source: Chesapeake Conservancy



Steering Committee and Funders

Steering Committee

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

Stroud Water Research Center
 Thomas Jefferson SWCD
 Trout Unlimited
 Virginia Department of Forestry
 Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources
 Virginia Tech
 Wetlands Watch
 Dialogue + Design Associates (as facilitator)

Thank you to our funders!

A special thank you goes to the investments by funders who have supported riparian restoration efforts in the Upper and Middle James Watersheds between July 2022 and June 2023. Funding highlights include:



Virginia Environmental Endowment - James River Water Quality Improvement Program (VEEJRWQIP): 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. During this period, VEE awarded \$1,152,830 to Chesapeake Bay Foundation to continue its work with partners to deliver the James River Buffer Program in the Upper James. The James River Association and the Virginia Department of Forestry continued to get buffers on the ground through the James River Buffer Program, and Trout Unlimited continued their Home Rivers Initiative in the Upper James through 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 (INSR) Grant Program, Small Watershed Grants Program, and the Chesapeake WILD Grants Program. Over the past year, NFWF has awarded at least \$2,169,800 to support work related to riparian forest buffers to the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, James River Association, NDPonics, Rivanna Conservation Alliance. The James River Association continued supporting Consortium efforts through an existing NFWF-INSR grant.

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 period for this funding 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.



Riparian Consortium



jamesriverconsortium.org