



# Upper & Middle James Riparian Consortium

## Meeting Summary

Thursday, May 23, 2024



### Meeting Overview

The [Upper & Middle James Riparian Consortium](#) (Consortium) held its first general meeting of the year on Thursday, May 23rd, 2024 at the [Moton Museum](#) in Farmville, VA. It was a great event connecting with Consortium members, learning and sharing about riparian buffers in the Farmville area, and exploring the Moton Museum. There were a number of new and long-time Consortium partners that joined the event; a list of [participants](#) is at the end of the document.

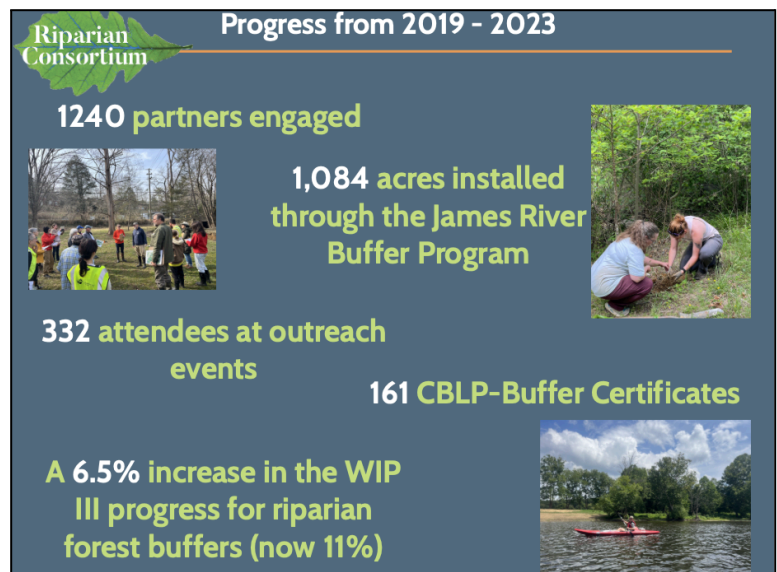
Thank you to the Moton Museum for welcoming us and to the Consortium Steering Committee and the team at the Piedmont Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) for your planning and support in making the day a success. The Consortium extends its appreciation to Kevin Dunn, Piedmont SWCD; Jay Wilkerson, Town of Farmville; Miller Adams, Department of Forestry (DOF); and Caitlin Verdu, DOF for their thoughtful and engaging meeting presentations. A sincere thanks to Deya Ramsden, DOF; Jay Wilkerson, Town of Farmville; and Deanna Fehrer and Charlie Wootton with Piedmont SWCD for organizing and leading the field visits.

### General Meeting - Riparian Buffers in Farmville and Surround Areas

The May 23rd General Meeting 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](http://www.jamesriverconsortium.org).



Thank you to Cainan Townsend, Executive Director of the Moton Museum for your opening words and sharing about the history of the museum in the civil rights movement in Virginia and the nation.

**Panel: Riparian Buffers in Farmville and the Surrounding Region – Kevin Dunn, Piedmont SWCD, Jay Wilkerson, Town of Farmville, and Miller Adams, DOF**

Kevin Dunn, BMP Conservation Specialist with Piedmont SWCD, Jay Wilkerson, Horticulturist with the Town of Farmville, and Miller Adams, DOF Charlotte County Forester, participated in a panel discussion to reflect and share on riparian buffers in Farmville and the surrounding region. Thank you to Kevin, Jay, and Miller for sharing your time and expertise.

Kevin discussed the types of buffer projects the Piedmont SWCD is involved in and some of the lessons they have learned over the years. Since 2009, Piedmont SWCD has installed 450 acres of buffers through programs like the [Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share Program](#) (VACS) by utilizing the Woodland Buffer Filter Area practice with (FR-3), and the [Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program](#) (CREP).

Kevin reflected on the importance of communicating the incentives and the benefits of buffers to farmers, particularly as related to cost.

Jay Wilkerson, Horticulturist, Town of Farmville, described tree planting efforts and buffer projects in Farmville, including a successful town memorial tree program, efforts to secure funding for additional trees around river banks and creeks to slow erosion, a Farmville buffer project in collaboration with the



DOF, and a heat island data project with Longwood University to identify priority areas in town for tree planting. Jay shared that this fall, Farmville will add trees to a town parking lot. This project is facilitated by DOF and the Inflation Reduction Act.



Miller Adams discussed his work as the DOF Charlotte County Forester and approaches to riparian buffers and tree planting efforts in the region. In addition to his role with DOF, Miller owns a farm with his family. Silvopasture is a focus area in Miller's work, and he shared his experiences and some best practices for providing tree shelter to animals, including a photo presentation of the evolution of a silvopasture project. Miller noted the challenges of pine regeneration.

Participants had an opportunity to ask questions of the panelists, included below.

*What does this region want and need to see with buffers and riparian corridors, or how can partnership be built to improve buffers and corridors, in the next 2-5 years?*

- Jay emphasized the importance of advocating and building awareness about buffers. He also noted the importance of making the process of riparian buffer installation and maintenance as easy as possible for landowners.
- Miller shared that educating and reaching out to future generations of farmers about the benefits of buffers will help with continued buffer implementation efforts.
- Kevin noted that collaboration and working together is key to the work.

*As Miller noted issues with pine, a participant asked if he had considered using other trees?*

- Miller responded that when possible, he tries to promote a variety of hardwood trees for regeneration at the site.

*What is the impact of solar farms on buffers?*

- Miller noted that Charlotte County has approved more solar farms than anywhere else in the state. The solar farms follow the recommendations for buffers in their implementation and state guidelines for implementation, but there could be more opportunities to explore mixed use with solar and additional potential uses on the sites.

*How has the field changed over the last 20 to 30 years of your careers?*

- Miller noted that when he was in school, professors encouraged continuous grazing. However, now rotational grazing is encouraged.
- Kevin remarked on the differences in buffer management between counties.
- Jay noted the differences in managing wear and tear and unfavorable soil conditions in an urban environment as opposed to in the private sector.

*There are a lot of players in the riparian area. What is the best way for all the key players to cooperate instead of competing?*

- Kevin encouraged collaboration through field visits, communication, and working together.
- Miller encourages landowners to speak with the different groups to see what will work the best for the site.
- Jay emphasized communication as a means to encourage collaboration and recognizing the shared goal of implementing buffers.
- Amber noted the list of various funding programs on the [Consortium website](#). This site is currently being revamped and updated.

## State Buffer Action Plan – Caitlin Verdu, Virginia Department of Forestry

Caitlin Verdu, Watershed Program Manager, with the DOF shared an overview of the statewide Buffer Action Plan. As Caitlin noted in her presentation, *“Trees are the Answer! Riparian Forest Buffers are key to improving the health of the Chesapeake Bay and Southern Rivers”*. The “nearly complete” statewide Buffer Action Plan is developed by stakeholder groups from around the state to support communities in buffer installation. Groups participating in the action plan development include federal agencies, state agencies, local governments, and nonprofits. The Action Plan represents the start of an ongoing conversation. Caitlin’s presentation on the statewide Buffer Action Plan is available [here](#).



Challenges and solutions are identified for four main categories within the plan: 1) outreach and site identification, 2) buffer establishment, 3) maintenance, and 4) reporting. The details of which are included within Caitlin’s [presentation](#).

To increase **outreach**, determining how to incentivize those who don’t have buffers is a challenge. Noted solutions include a Buffer Ambassador program, regional Buffer Summits, increased multi-agency cross-training, a statewide outreach campaign, establishing a centralized clearing house for buffers, and an investment in GIS tools. Caitlin celebrated that 2023 was the best year for buffer implementation in Virginia since 2012, with 1,148 acres of buffers reported within the Chesapeake Bay watershed in Virginia (*BMP Warehouse, 2024*).

Caitlin outlined solutions to increase **buffer establishment** including cost-share programs, expanded workforce development programs, expanded seed collection efforts, statewide volunteer corps, and a best practices manual. **Maintenance** can be addressed by including funding for maintenance in cost-share programs, expanding buffer maintenance training, creating “streamlined opportunities for pesticide applicator certifications”, and creating “paid and/or volunteer buffer stewardship teams”.

A number of challenges and solutions associated with **reporting** will be outlined in the Action Plan. Caitlin noted reporting challenges, particularly in the Southern Rivers watershed, and encouraged reporting buffers to the Department of Environmental Quality. Caitlin emphasized that buffer tracking and reporting is very complicated. It is important to show that the work is making a difference.

Following Caitlin's presentation, participants had a chance to ask questions.

*What is the difference between the new DOF Riparian Forests for Landowners (RFFL) program and the James River Buffer Program (JRBP)?*

- RFFL covers the whole state of Virginia and covers installation and one year of maintenance. DOF is working with service providers across Virginia, including JRA in the Middle James. JRA will be using funds from RFFL to support implementation through the James River Buffer Program. Nothing changes with JRBP.



*How do we track if the statewide buffer action plan is successful?*

- The Virginia DOF will be a leader in this effort, however stakeholders and communities will play a key role in the implementation and determining how to accomplish the goals.

*Are there areas of the statewide buffer action plan that could be tested within the Consortium?*

- The Consortium is a case study for engagement and bringing groups together. Additionally, the Consortium Buffer Summit will offer an opportunity to learn more about how to engage around the statewide buffer action plan.

### **Field Visits - Town of Farmville Urban Buffers & Agricultural Buffer at a Century Farm**

Following the General Meeting, attendees had the opportunity to visit either a series of recent urban buffer projects on private and public land within Farmville, or at a well-established agricultural buffer at a beautiful farm just outside of the town.

Urban Buffers with Jay Wilkerson, City of Farmville, Deanna Fehrer, Piedmont SWCD, and Deya Ramsden, Virginia DOF:

Three buffers in Farmville were highlighted in the afternoon field visits. Two properties were located on private property, and one on public land along the edge of a soccer field at the Appomattox River. Deya Ramsden with the Virginia DOF worked with Jay Wilkerson and the Town of Farmville to implement the public buffer as part of the JRBP. The buffer is small, but a good example of an urban buffer. Deya's presentation on the Farmville buffers,



including an overview of DOF's [Riparian Forests for Landowners \(RFFL\)](#) program. The RFFL Program “program provides flexible, no-cost riparian forest buffer installation and one year of maintenance to landowners.”

#### Agricultural Buffer with Charlie Wootton, Piedmont SWCD:

Participants visited a well established, 15 year old buffers around a pond and along a stream outflowing from the pond, at a century farm, a farm within the same family for over 100 years, just outside of Farmville. Previously a tobacco farm, it transitioned to beef cattle during the tobacco buyouts. This was typical of many farms in Southside Virginia The buffers were installed through several cost share programs, including the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program ([CREP](#)).



Thank you to Charlie, Deya, Deanna, and Jay for organizing and leading these field visits!



### Upcoming Events



**Streambank Learning Journey**

- June 5 Roundtable
- June 18 Project visits

**Consortium Meeting on September 17 along the Cowpasture River**

**Buffer Summit on October 23**

Action Planning this summer!

#### **Next Steps**

Please save the dates for the September 17th meeting in Bath County - [RSVP at this link](#), and the October 23rd Buffer Summit, which will be held at Maymont in Richmond. For more information on the Consortium visit: [www.jamesriverconsortium.org](http://www.jamesriverconsortium.org).

*Thank you to all who participated in the May 23rd Consortium Meeting and Field Visits in Farmville!*

#### **Meeting Participants**

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. AJ Austin, USDA Farm Service Agency</li> <li>2. Alanna Ostrowski, Virginia Department of Forestry</li> <li>3. Amber Ellis, James River Association</li> <li>4. Anne Marie Roberts, James River Association</li> <li>5. Barbara Teeple, Peter Francisco SWCD</li> <li>6. Bill Sweeney, Virginia Department of Forestry</li> <li>7. Blythe Brewster, James River Association</li> <li>8. Caitlin Verdu, Virginia Department of Forestry</li> <li>9. Charlie Wootton, Piedmont Soil &amp; Water Conservation District</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10. Charlie Simmons, USDA NRCS</li> <li>11. Christine Gyovai, Dialogue + Design Associates</li> <li>12. Chuck Arnason, Piedmont SWCD</li> <li>13. Cristy Cook, USDA - Farm Service Agency</li> <li>14. Daniel Ronald Brooks, Virginia Department of Forestry</li> <li>15. David Wise, Stroud Water Research Center</li> <li>16. Deanna Fehrer, Piedmont SWCD</li> <li>17. Deya Ramsden, Virginia Department of Forestry</li> <li>18. Dick Hall-Sizemore, James River Association; Virginia Native Plant Society</li> </ol> |
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19. J. Miller Adams, Virginia Department of Forestry
20. James Royall, James River Association
21. Jameson Hinkle, Longwood University
22. Jamie Brunkow, James River Association
23. Jay Wilkerson, Town of Farmville
24. Jeremy Evans, USDA-NRCS
25. Joey Shelton, James River Association
26. Jordan Bennett, James River Association
27. Justine Aycott, James River Association
28. Kelly Snoddy, Peter Francisco SWCD
29. Kevin Dunn, Piedmont SWCD
30. Kim Biasioli, Piedmont Environmental Council
31. Lauren Jones, Commonwealth Regional Council
32. Lindsay Spotts, Chesapeake Bay Foundation
33. Luke Longanecker, TJSWCD

34. Madison Whitehurst, VA Department of Environmental Quality
35. Marcus Bullock, USDA Farm Service Agency
36. Oliver Hite, James River Association
37. Patti Nylander, Virginia Department of Forestry
38. Philippa Belsches, Dialogue + Design Associates
39. Pierce Harding, James River Association
40. Rachel Bensink, James River Association
41. Robert Hazlegrove, USDA-NRCS
42. Rosemary, Valley Conservation Council
43. Sammy Vest, Trout Unlimited
44. Sandy Mikesel, VMN Pocahontas Chapter
45. Shereen Hughes, Wetlands Watch and CBLP
46. Tim Miller, Mountain Castles SWCD
47. Tyler Smith, Piedmont SWCD

