



News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 4, 2012

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Decline in Incentives, Higher Commodity Prices Means Downward Trend in Forest Buffer Restoration

240 Miles of Forest Buffers Restored in 2011

Annapolis, MD – Experts in forestry at the Chesapeake Bay Program say restoration of forested areas along creeks and streams, known as riparian forest buffers, has mostly declined since its peak of 815 miles restored in 2005. In 2011, only 240 miles of forest buffers were restored in all the Bay jurisdictions – one-third to one-quarter of what was done just six years ago.

In 1996, Maryland, Virginia and Pennsylvania and the District of Columbia signed an agreement to restore 2,010 miles of forests along streams by 2010 in order to protect them from polluted runoff. Restoration efforts surged in the next six years and by 2002 the states had met their ten year goal. In the mid-2000's combined reporting from the three big Bay states showed an average of 756 miles between 2003 and 2006. Since 2007, all the Bay jurisdictions have been working toward a goal of restoring forest buffers at a rate of 900 miles per year. This same restoration rate was used in the federal Executive Order strategy which strives for 14,400 additional miles to be restored by 2025.

Forest Buffer Restoration by the numbers

1996-2002	2,311 miles	} PA MD VA
2003	726 miles	
2004	754 miles	
2005	815 miles	
2006	729 miles	
2007	385 miles	
2008	449 miles	
2009	721 miles	} All states
2010	337 miles	
2011	240 miles	
Total	7,479 miles	

Since 1996, agricultural landowners have created most forest buffers so that excess nutrients in runoff could be absorbed by the trees and kept out of local waters. Although trees have substantial value to a healthy ecosystem, higher agriculture commodity prices in recent years have meant it is more lucrative for farmers to keep buffer areas in crops. This, combined with an emphasis and additional funding for other conservation practices such as cover crops, has meant fewer riparian forest buffers planted each year. Fortunately, farm bill programs, such as the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, continue to provide an attractive financial incentive to agricultural landowners to create these buffers.

Historically, the Bay region was 95 percent forested. Forested lands play a key role in the health of streams, lands and large parts of the Bay itself since the landscape has evolved to function on the benefits they provide. Large tracts of trees act as an enormous sponge, filtering and using up excess nitrogen and phosphorus from rainwater runoff and removing any pollutants from the air. Those forested lands along streams or creeks are especially important since they shade the waters and maintain cooler

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water temperatures in summer heat, an important factor for the iconic brook trout and other fish that are sensitive to water conditions. In autumn, trees drop leaves into streams and creeks, providing important, specific nutrients to the local ecosystem and its creatures. Finally, strong root systems of a forest hold stream banks in place thereby reducing erosion and sedimentation of the waters.

With the establishment of the Chesapeake Executive Order and local plans to build healthy waters throughout the region, there is renewed interest in maintaining healthy forests and restoring riparian forest buffers. The [Chesapeake Forest Restoration Strategy](#), now out in draft form, outlines the importance of forests and the actions needed to restore them.

Other resources

CBP Images available at: chesapeakebay.net/photos

Map: [Riparian Forest Buffer Restoration \(2011\)](#)

Related videos:

- [Bay 101: Healthy Forests](#)
- [Take Action: Maryland CREP Partnership](#)
- [Celebrate Forests: The International Year of the Forests 2011](#)

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The Chesapeake Bay Program is a regional partnership that has coordinated and conducted the restoration of the Chesapeake Bay since 1983. Partners include the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, representing the federal government; the U.S. Department of Agriculture; the states of Delaware, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia; the District of Columbia; the Chesapeake Bay Commission, a tri-state legislative body; and advisory groups of citizens, scientists and local government officials. For more information, visit www.chesapeakebay.net.