

## Riparian Forest Buffer Action Team

### **Decision Document for Management Board—9/19/19**

**Background:** Riparian Forest Buffers are a cornerstone BMP of the Chesapeake Bay Program partnership. We have been restoring RFB for over 20 years. While progress has greatly slowed, recent innovations and momentum show promise for future advances in implementation.

The Riparian Forest Buffer Action Team was formed by the MB during the Strategic Review of the RFB outcome. The purpose of the Action Team was to suggest a leadership course of action to the PSC. The RFB Action Team went before the PSC in October 2018 at which time the PSC asked they return with a more specific proposal.

#### **Presentation to MB:**

As decided upon by the RFB Action Team, co-leads Matt Keefer and Sally Claggett will present 1) background information about the value of RFB in the Chesapeake, 2) examples of specific operational challenges to reaching RFB goals, and 3) suggestions on how to proceed. MB will decide if this is ready for PSC purview, and what materials they need to best prepare their PSC rep.

The Action Team has these three suggestions for action by the PSC:

#### **1) Leadership and Communications – what can happen now**

**WHY:** 1) RFB crosses sectors and jurisdictions and breaks silos as a forestry, agriculture and storm water practice— it is all of these--- and should be administered in an overarching and integrated fashion. The riparian area is both vital to ecosystems and finite: it should be proactively managed. There has been confusion on priorities and programs among landowners and the many partners responsible for getting trees in the ground. There should be no doubt about the preferred practice for the riparian land base.

**HOW:** Leaders strategize together on potential solutions to shared challenges. Leaders participate by attending planting events with media, communicate more about RFB to Congress, state legislatures, target audiences and the public. Leaders prioritize buffers when making decisions on resource allocation in both urban and agricultural sectors. Leaders ensure that buffers are incorporated in resolutions and other high-level documents and communications. Leaders foster local and private sector champions to help them share messages with their peers and others on the importance of buffers.

#### **2) Work with USDA (i.e., FSA, NRCS) to maximize existing programs**

**WHY:** USDA programs, especially CREP (a state-federal program) have garnered past success. These programs still have great potential for deployment in the watershed, and the 2018 Farm Bill language could have a positive effect.

**HOW:** PSC members (or other appointed group) could engage at a high-level with USDA to 1), specially prioritize RFBs as a priority practice within the agency, 2) address state-identified improvements to CREP, and 3) communicate and incentivize RFBs to the benefit of landowners, technical service providers, and the watershed.

#### **3) Develop and oversee a new flexible buffer program** (simple, per-acre funding, include planting and maintenance) through formation of an Innovative Board (or similar).

**WHY:** Even if existing federal programs are maximized, substantial resources are needed to reach our RFB goals. This Board could address policy innovation needs.

**HOW:** Recent innovations along with existing state, regional and local programs can be adjusted, ramped up, and adopted by Bay states. Economies of scale combined with help from local, trusted sources will benefit all.