

Name of Practice: RIPARIAN FORESTED BUFFER MAINTENANCE
VACS Program Specifications for No. FR-3M

This document specifies terms and conditions for the Virginia Agricultural Best Management Practices Cost-Share Program's Riparian Forested Buffer Maintenance best management practice which are applicable to all contracts entered into with respect to that practice.

A. Description and Purpose

This practice encourages the successful establishment of riparian forested buffers within their first three years by offering cost-share for management activities that help ensure tree survival. This includes the replacement of dead saplings/planted trees when necessary. Research and experience show that forest buffers that receive proper care and management during the first few years after planting have a higher success rate for establishment and land conversion to wooded habitat.

Buffer trees will benefit from reduced competition with surrounding vegetation, protection from damage, and removal and control of invasive species. Proper maintenance of riparian forest buffers will accelerate the ability of the buffer to protect water quality by filtering and removing pollutants like sediment and nutrients, as well as promote ecosystem services of the buffer and stream itself.

B. Policies and Specifications

1. This practice is intended to provide maintenance funding for riparian buffer plantings established either voluntarily, through private funding or through partnering with non-profit organizations. However, this practice may not be approved for maintenance of riparian buffers that are under a state or federal contract requiring buffer maintenance (e.g. VACS, EQIP, CSP, CREP). For example, state FR-3 contracts *require* the riparian buffer be maintained by the participant for a 10 or 15 year lifespan and offers additional financial assistance for replanting when necessary. Since maintenance is required within the FR-3, participants are not allowed to enroll in the FR-3M.
2. Participants that enroll in the FR-3M practice agree that their riparian forest buffer will also be enrolled in the VFR-3 practice if the buffer has not been reported to the Chesapeake Bay Program through another means.
3. A Virginia Department of Forestry (DOF) forester will complete DOF Form 84 to review the state of the existing buffer and provide management recommendations.
4. Eligible maintenance activities include:
 - i. Mowing between trees;

- ii. Herbicide treatment of area around trees;
 - iii. Trimming/weeding around trees;
 - iv. Monitoring and removal of invasive plants;
 - v. Checking and maintaining tree shelters and stakes, includes survival checks;
 - vi. Removing bird nets from tree tubes;
 - vii. Replanting to replace dead trees;
 - viii. Establishment of ground cover (only if not required/paid for during tree planting);
 - ix. Additional activities included in an approved plan.
5. The riparian forest buffer being managed through this practice must have been planted within the current program year or previous three calendar years.
 6. Gullied or eroded areas shall be stabilized with a temporary or suitably durable ground cover until trees are established if not required in the planting plan. Pure stands of fescue are discouraged due to tree establishment competition.
 7. Grazing of livestock in the buffer area is not permitted.
 8. Cost-share payments are not authorized for commercial tree or tree product production. Forestland being replanted following timber harvest is also not eligible.
 9. This practice is intended to maintain trees at the density specified in the buffer management plan.
 10. The eligible buffer area will be limited to the area specified in the DOF Form 84.
 11. This is an annual practice that may only be enrolled on the same buffer three times (for a maximum of three years of maintenance after the initial tree planting).

C. Rate(s)

1. The VACS payment rate is \$350/acre toward maintenance activities as documented within the DOF Form 84. Payment will be issued only after the Virginia Department of Forestry certifies that the necessary management activities were conducted as prescribed.
2. Participants may conduct management activities themselves rather than contract for management services.
3. As set forth by Virginia Code, the Commonwealth currently provides a tax credit for

implementation of certain agricultural best management practices as discussed in the Tax Credit Guidelines of the VACS Manual.

4. If a participant receives cost-share, only the participant's eligible out-of-pocket share of the project cost will be used to determine the tax credit.

D. Technical Responsibility

Technical and administrative responsibility is assigned to qualified technical DCR and District staff in consultation, where appropriate and based on the controlling standard, with DCR, Virginia Certified Nutrient Management Planner(s), NRCS, DOF, and VCE. Individuals certifying technical need and technical practice installation shall have appropriate certifications as identified above and/or Engineering Job Approval Authority (EJAA) for the designed and installed component(s). All practices are subject to spot check procedures and any other quality control measures.

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