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**Riparian forest buffers for trout habitat improvement**

**Financial assistance opportunities  
for riparian forest buffers**

**Gary Wyatt and Phyllis Bongard<sup>1</sup>**



**Introduction**

Financial assistance for landowners adopting conservation practices is very important. Without financial incentives and cost share programs, many conservation practices would not be implemented. The main sources of financial and cost share assistance for riparian forest buffers come from state and federal government agencies.

The federal agencies offering assistance include the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA): Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Farm Service Agency (FSA). The Minnesota state agencies which offer assistance include mainly the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) working through the local or county offices of the Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD). The Minnesota Department of Agriculture has an excellent website which reviews many possible funding programs for riparian forest buffers.

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## **Federal agencies**

### **Farm Service Agency**

#### **Conservation Reserve Program**

Forested Riparian Buffers (CP22) are one of the conservation reserve programs (CRP) offered by USDA through FSA offices. The payment consists of several parts: A land rental payment plus an additional 20% rental rate incentive payment is received annually for the 10-15 year life of the contract. (In 2008, CRP rental rates for this practice in Minnesota ranged from \$45.48 to \$187.06 per acre.) A one-time cost-share payment covers 50% of the cost of eligible products and services necessary to establish and maintain the practice, such as seeding/plant purchase and site preparation. Two one-time special incentive payments are received up front: a Signup Incentive Payment of \$10 per acre per year enrolled (up to 10 years) and a Practice Incentive Payment equal to 40% of the total eligible cost of establishing the practice. A mid-contract maintenance payment defrays the cost of required management activities. Contact your local USDA Farm Service Agency office for further details.

### **Natural Resources Conservation Service**

#### **Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP2)**

CSP2 encourages land stewards to improve their conservation performance by installing and adopting additional activities, and improving, maintaining and managing existing activities on agricultural land and nonindustrial private forest land. CSP is a voluntary program available nationwide on a continuous application basis. This is a whole farm comprehensive program that requires a five-year commitment. Payments are based on the amount of conservation performance for the types of practices or enhancements chosen and acres under contract. Riparian forest buffers are a cost-shareable practice under this program.

#### **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)**

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a voluntary program and is the premier environmental conservation program that supports production agriculture and environmental quality as compatible goals. Through EQIP, landowners may receive financial and technical help with structural and management conservation practices on agricultural land. Riparian forest buffer is a water resource protection practice and is cost-shared according to the current payment schedule.

#### **Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)**

WHIP is a program designed to develop and improve wildlife habitat on private land. Under WHIP, the landowner and USDA/NRCS enter into a 5- to 10-year agreement that pays the landowner up to 75% of the cost to establish wildlife habitat practices. WHIP provides financial incentives to develop, enhance or restore habitat for fish and wildlife on private lands.

#### **Stewardship Incentive Program (SIP)**

The Stewardship Incentive Program (SIP) provides technical and financial assistance to encourage non-industrial private forest landowners to keep their lands and natural resources productive and healthy. Qualifying land includes rural lands with existing tree cover or land suitable for growing trees and which is owned by a private individual, group, association, corporation, Indian tribe or other legal private entity. Eligible landowners must have an approved Forest Stewardship Plan and own 1,000 or fewer acres of qualifying land.

Contact your local USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service office for more information on any of these programs.

## State agencies

### Board of Soil and Water Resources

Many conservation cost share programs are administered through BWSR which is offered through the Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) in each county in Minnesota.

**Forested Riparian Buffer Payment:** A one-time **cost share payment** covering up to 75% of the eligible costs for establishing a riparian buffer as a component of forestry conservation. Local SWCDs may set a payment rate lower than the statewide maximum of 75%. Higher cost share percentages may be targeted at areas identified with high priority erosion and water quality problems. Contact your local Soil and Water Conservation District office for details.

### Local organizations

Special financial incentives are sometimes offered to landowners in a particular county or watershed for selected conservation practices for a limited time—usually as part of a special initiative funded by a federal or state grant. To find out if any special conservation incentives are offered in your area at this time, contact your local Soil and Water Conservation District, watershed organization, county, NRCS – Resource Conservation and Development office or other local contacts.

Many local conservation or wildlife organizations may also have funds available to help landowners cost share with plantings, or help with establishment or even maintenance of the conservation practice which improves wildlife habitat.

## Ecosystem services

The USDA is developing policies and a structure through which landowners can receive payments for conservation methods and practices which preserve and protect our natural resources, including soil, water, air and wildlife.

Healthy ecosystems are ecological life-support systems that provide a full suite of goods and services that are vital to human health and livelihood, natural assets we call ecosystem services.

Many of these goods and services are traditionally viewed as free benefits to society, or “public goods”—wildlife habitat and diversity, watershed services, carbon storage and scenic landscapes, for example. Lacking a formal market, these natural assets are traditionally absent from society’s balance sheet; their critical contributions are often overlooked in public, corporate and individual decision-making.

USDA – Ecosystem Services is exploring national opportunities to advance markets and payments for ecosystem services. With help from partners and others, broader thinking and collaboration that stimulates market-based conservation and stewardship.

Carbon credit markets are being developed. Most forest riparian buffers are eligible for forestry offset carbon credits from the Farmers Union Carbon Credit Program. Payments fluctuate based on the market price of carbon dioxide; see the Chicago Climate Exchange for the current price.

## For more information

Other publications in this series:

- Benefits of riparian forest buffers
- Design of riparian forest buffers
- Establishment of riparian forest buffers
- Maintenance of riparian forest buffers

Find the full series as well as additional resources at the University of Minnesota Extension website, [extension.umn.edu/buffers](http://extension.umn.edu/buffers).

National Agroforestry Center  
[unl.edu/nac](http://unl.edu/nac)

Riparian Forest Buffer publications  
[unl.edu/na/riparianforestbuffers.htm](http://unl.edu/na/riparianforestbuffers.htm)

USDA – Ecosystem Services and Marketing  
[www.fs.fed.us/ecosystemservices/](http://www.fs.fed.us/ecosystemservices/)

## Carbon credit markets

Farmers Union Carbon Credit Program  
[carboncredit.ndfu.org](http://carboncredit.ndfu.org)

Chicago Climate Exchange  
[chicagoclimatex.com](http://chicagoclimatex.com)

## Federal

USDA – Farm Service Agency – United States and Minnesota  
[fsa.usda.gov](http://fsa.usda.gov)

Minnesota Farm Service Agency  
[fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=mn&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing](http://fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=mn&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing)

USDA – Natural Resources Conservation Service – United States and Minnesota  
[nrcs.usda.gov](http://nrcs.usda.gov)

Minnesota Natural Resources Conservation Service  
[www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov)

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP2)  
[www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp2](http://www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp2)

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)  
[www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip/eqip2010.html](http://www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip/eqip2010.html)

## State and local

Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources  
[www.bwsr.state.mn.us](http://www.bwsr.state.mn.us)

Easements, grants, resource management and planning, conservation implementation, wetlands

Minnesota Department of Agriculture– Conservation Funding Guide List of Contacts:  
[www.mda.state.mn.us/protecting/conservation/contacts.aspx#SWCD](http://www.mda.state.mn.us/protecting/conservation/contacts.aspx#SWCD)

This is not a comprehensive or complete directory of conservation organizations but provides info on many conservation organizations. Local or county organizations are not listed but can be contacted for possible cost-sharing opportunities.

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