

# Catskill Streams Buffer Initiative Guidelines

## Description

The benefits of a Catskill Streams Buffer Initiative (CSBI) have been identified and recommended in a variety of settings, including in various Stream Management Plans, subsequent Action Plans, and by the regional Riparian Buffer Working Group (Group). Maintaining healthy and intact riparian areas is a high priority of DEP and this Group, as is improving the condition of degraded riparian buffers. Large, forested landscapes produce water of the highest natural quality, and riparian areas play a critical role in that ability. To this end, DEP and its partners have walked numerous streams in the Catskills and conducted detailed mapping of the vegetation within riparian corridors, documenting various stream conditions, need for supplemental vegetation, presence of invasive species, and other conditions impacting the health of the riparian area. While 75% of the West of Hudson Watershed is forested, it is apparent that some riparian areas lack this protective cover; see Figure 1 example below.

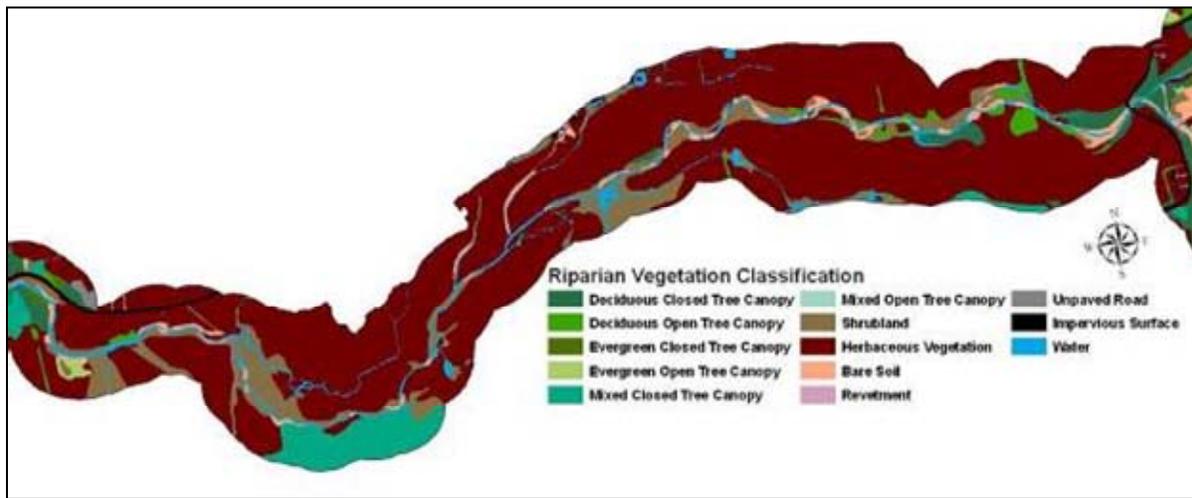


Figure 1. Riparian vegetation classification map based on aerial photography from 2006

The Plans and Group identified a gap in technical and financial assistance for landowners that are not eligible for existing partnership programs. For example, landowners with large, forested parcels qualify for the Watershed Agricultural Council's (WAC) Watershed Forestry Planning Program and most agricultural lands qualify for WAC's Whole Farm Planning and Conservation Reserve Enhancement Programs ([www.nycwatershed.org](http://www.nycwatershed.org)). DEP has helped multiple landowners over long stream reaches with stream stability restoration projects ([www.catskillstreams.org](http://www.catskillstreams.org)). To date, however, there has been no comprehensive, programmatic effort to assist the many streamside landowners who are not eligible for one of these existing programs. The data gathered as part of stream management planning in combination with additional, dedicated resources for riparian buffer protection and enhancement will allow for effective, well-planned execution of this new program to assist streamside landowners.

## **CSBI Goals**

The overall goal of the CSBI is to inform and assist landowners in better stewardship of their riparian (streamside) area through protection, enhancement, management, or restoration. DEP and its partners (County Soil & Water Conservation Districts and Cornell Cooperative Extension) will assist private, riparian landowners throughout the West of Hudson Watershed by providing:

- 1) Riparian Corridor Management Plans<sup>1</sup> to create awareness about riparian management issues specific to individual properties
- 2) Best management practice design and/or prescriptive measures and installation to encourage positive riparian stewardship and
- 3) Educational materials and activities as needed by landowners to understand the critical role of their buffer and how to maintain it in optimal functioning condition.

## **CSBI Partners**

The CSBI will be implemented by a core team of five CSBI Coordinators (Coordinators)—four working from County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) offices in the West of Hudson Watershed and led by one overall program manager from DEP in Kingston, New York. The CSBI is a functional unit of DEP Stream Management Program (SMP), and as such the five Coordinators will be supported by technical teams established through the SMP at each SWCD as part of their new five-year contracts to implement stream management plans. The core team will be guided and advised by the Riparian Buffers Working Group, as needed, and three subcommittees (Communications, Program Guidelines, and Plant Materials).

## **Additional Considerations**

It is expected that the program requirements may vary from county to county based on specific needs of each SWCD, and that the rate of implementation will vary based on the current status of overall program effort. While the primary purpose of the CSBI is to address properties that are not covered under existing programs, it is possible that the CSBI could provide supplemental assistance for elements not covered by other programs. For example, a landowner may participate in the Watershed Forestry Program's Management Assistance Program for riparian planting activities, but the property may need some minor bank stabilization with material other than plants alone. The CSBI could potentially address this need.

## **Eligibility**

Any watershed landowner with property within the mapped buffer area (see attachment A for an example map subset) can receive technical assistance and a Riparian Corridor Management Plan. Landowners should contact a CSBI Coordinator to find out if they own property within the

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<sup>1</sup> Riparian Corridor Management Plan = The Plan, completed by CSBI Coordinators, will document existing conditions, landowner goals, natural resource goals, assessments conducted and findings on parcel and make detailed recommendations for practices to address the findings and goals. While the Plan will have a focus on the riparian area, it will document and consider upland impacts to achieving a properly functioning riparian area. Where planning has been conducted through an existing watershed program (e.g. Watershed Forestry or Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program), the RCMP would be an addendum to the existing plan to summarize additional assessments conducted and make additional recommendations.

riparian area. Upon completion of a Plan, the landowner is eligible to apply to the CSBI for funding to implement plan recommendations. One caveat to eligibility for funding of practices is that each town must adopt Stream Management Plans that have been adopted within the town's boundary.

Interested landowners must complete an application which describes the work to be performed and the CSBI stewardship practices (practices) to be implemented. Those practices which are approved by the CSBI and specifically recommended in the Riparian Corridor Management Plan are eligible for funding. If an unforeseen management recommendation arises after plan development, the CSBI coordinator may write an addendum to the plan inserting that particular recommendation. Those practices which are scheduled to be implemented or completed through another watershed program (e.g. Watershed Forestry, CREP, CWC Stream Program, etc.) shall be considered ineligible for funding.

### **Procedures and Participation Requirements**

1. Applications are available online at [www.catskillstreams.org](http://www.catskillstreams.org) and at the SWCD websites and offices in Walton, Cairo, Phoenicia, Grahamsville and Cobleskill. Assistance is available for application development, draft review, and budget development. A complete application must be received at the SWCD office by the deadline posted.
2. Each year one grant round will be held, with a deadline of October 1. Applications will be selected from a competitive pool of eligible applicants using the applicant rating criteria listed below. Unfunded applications that display merit will be held and reconsidered during the next grant round, receiving notification of such within one month regarding the status of their application. All applicants will be promptly notified of their funding status (denied or approved) and all grant recipients will be given one year to complete their initial implementation work. Projects will be allowed a five-year adjustment period, during which time replanting, invasive species management or pest management may be necessary.
3. Participants may receive up to a maximum of \$50,000 in one application year towards the payment of certain stewardship practices (design and/or installation). Participants may apply in subsequent years with a maximum lifetime award of \$150,000.
4. Landowner participation is necessary, either monetarily or through in-kind services (i.e. assistance with practice installation, recruitment of volunteers, maintenance of practice, participation in training workshops, other volunteer activities, etc.). The greater commitment made by the applicant, the higher rating the application will receive.
5. Applicants must budget for and include plans for project maintenance at a level appropriate to the work being conducted. For example, invasive species eradication projects may require a larger maintenance budget than a simple native planting project.
6. An eligibility check will be conducted on each application. If a property is enrolled in another watershed program efforts will be made to ensure practices are allowable under that program's restrictions. The program's representatives will also be notified of all landowner funding and project approvals to avoid program duplication within the watershed region.
7. Upon application acceptance, the CSBI Coordinator will work with the landowner to implement the approved practice. The appropriate SWCD will assist with project bidding, permitting and/or installation as appropriate.

8. Once work is completed, CSBI staff will inspect the job for conformity to the plan recommendations and process all payments according to the person completing the work (landscaper, district staff, or subcontractor). Payments will be made by reimbursement to the party completing the work.
9. CSBI practices being applied for must be addressed in the applicant Riparian Corridor Management Plan or an addendum to the Plan prior to the submission of the application.
10. Given the limited availability of funding and the potentially large number of eligible applicants, all funding requests will be rated and prioritized by CSBI staff based on the practice rating criteria below.

### CSBI Application Rating Criteria

The following rating criteria (see below) were developed to assist in prioritizing the funding of projects to be implemented under the CSBI Program. Applications will only be evaluated against other applications from within the same reservoir basin.

Table Application rating criteria. The maximum score is 100 points.

Characteristic		Rating
1. Riparian functions to be addressed	(Maximum of 20 points)	
	a. Project addresses bank stability and at least three of the following buffer functions: improve water quality, create shade, provide detritus and large woody debris source, reduce excess nutrients and pesticides, increase carbon storage, provide aquatic and terrestrial habitat, shelter and food, and/or restore riparian plant communities	20
	b. Project addresses bank stability and at least two of the following buffer functions: improve water quality, create shade, provide detritus and large woody debris source, reduce excess nutrients and pesticides, increase carbon storage, provide aquatic and terrestrial habitat, shelter and food, and/or restore riparian plant communities	15
	c. Project addresses any two functions of riparian buffers	10
	d. Project addresses only one function of riparian buffers	5
2. Applicant contribution	(Maximum of 20)	
	a. Applicant is willing to sign a 10-yr temporary easement or greater, contribute at least 10% of total project budget, assist with practice installation, monitoring or maintenance, and attend training about topics relevant to the program	20
	b. Applicant is willing to sign a 5-yr license agreement, contribute at least 10% of total project budget, assist with practice installation, monitoring or maintenance, and attend training about topics relevant to the program	15
	c. Applicant is willing to sign a 10-yr temporary easement, assist with practice installation, monitoring or maintenance, and attend training about topics relevant to the program	10
	d. Applicant is willing to sign a 5-yr license agreement, assist with practice installation, monitoring or maintenance, and attend training about topics relevant to the program	5

3. Location	(Maximum of 20)	
See Figure below.	a. Parcel is adjacent to existing wetland or forested riparian or upland areas or another CSBI project and is adjacent to a stream.	20
	b. Parcel is <i>not</i> adjacent to existing wetland or forested riparian or upland areas or another CSBI project and is within the riparian area, but is adjacent to a stream.	15
	c. Parcel is adjacent to existing wetland or forested riparian or upland areas or another CSBI project and is within the riparian area, but is not adjacent to a stream.	10
	d. Parcel is <i>not</i> adjacent to existing wetland or forested riparian or upland areas or another CSBI project and is within the riparian area, but is not adjacent to a stream.	5
4. Program eligibility	(Maximum of 15)	
	a. Applicants that are not eligible for any other watershed programs and are new to CSBI	15
	b. Applicants that are not eligible for any other watershed programs and have participated in CSBI	10
	c. Applicants that are eligible for other watershed programs, but need a particular practice that cannot be addressed by any other programs	5
5. Presence of invasive species cover	(Maximum of 15)	
	a. 25 – 50% of the project area covered by invasives	15
	b. Less than 25% of the project area covered by invasives	10
6. Possible other considerations, such as basin restrictions, habitat enhancements, public access, recreation, projects design life and other site-specific considerations are applicable.		5
7. Project can be sustained after the granting period, or includes long-term maintenance, operation and /or stewardship provisions.		5
8. Application submitted with two or more proposals from adjacent parcels, allowing for neighborhood riparian enhancement.		10 bonus pts
Total Possible = 100		Total Received

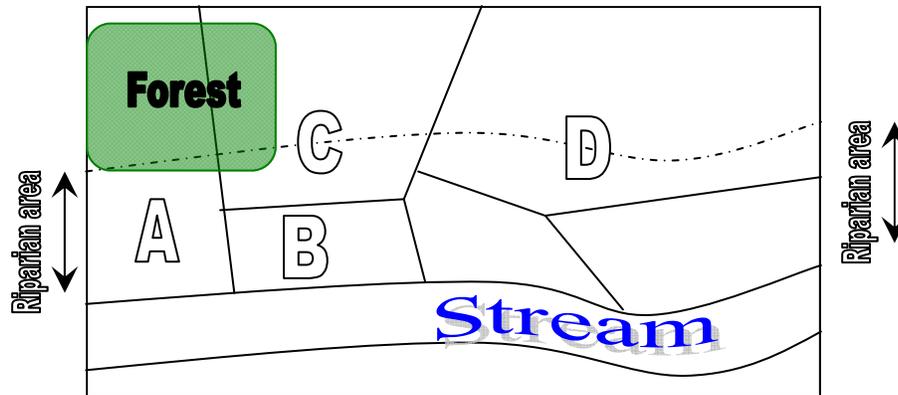


Figure: Example of location prioritization. a. Parcel is adjacent to existing wetland or forested riparian or upland areas or another CSBI project and is adjacent to a stream. b. Parcel is *not* adjacent to existing wetland or forested riparian or upland areas or another CSBI project and is within the riparian area, but is adjacent to a stream. c. Parcel is adjacent to existing wetland or forested riparian or upland areas or another CSBI project and is within the riparian area, but is not adjacent to a stream. d. Parcel is *not* adjacent to existing wetland or forested riparian or upland areas or another CSBI project and is within the riparian area, but is not adjacent to a stream.

*Ineligible properties/practices:*

- a. Properties without a Riparian Corridor Management Plan or practices that are not recommended in the RCMP.
- b. Properties in basins where stream management plans have been developed, but the town has not adopted the plan or signed an MOA with the appropriate SWCD.
- c. Landowner is not willing to sign 5-yr license agreement or has violated terms of previous license agreement.
- d. Parcels outside the mapped buffer eligible area.
- e. Applicants who have participated in other watershed programs, but have been delinquent in the terms agreed upon.
- f. Properties impacted by sewer line or other infrastructure crossing the stream.
- g. Practices could be covered in a timelier manner by another program.
- h. Parcels unlikely to allow for project establishment within 5 years (i.e. invasive species cover greater than 50% of the project area and are unlikely to be eradicated from site within 5 years).
- i. Applicants who have reached a “lifetime” assistance cap of \$150,000.
- j. Applicants receiving 50 points or less from above scoring criteria.

NOTE: Guidelines, procedures, participation requirements, criteria, and practices will be evaluated on an annual basis and are subject to change at that time.

**Glossary of Terms**

*Catskill native:* A species, subspecies, or ecotype that occurs and is adapted to conditions in the location of interest, either historically or presently, without direct or indirect human actions, according to the best available scientific and historic documentation.

*DEP*: New York City Department of Environmental Protection. DEP is one of the primary funding sources for the CSBI. Natural resource professionals help the CSBI to realize its mission and provide outreach and educational assistance to regional landowners.

*Lifetime assistance cap*: The maximum award a landowner may receive from the CSBI is \$150,000. This amount is in addition to any funding received through another watershed program.

*Non-native, invasive plants*: A plant that has populations that are *increasing* in density or spatial extent beyond their natural range. They are capable of causing harm to the environment and human health. They are usually introduced by human activities, either on purpose or accidentally.

*Riparian Buffer Working Group*: a consortium of partnering agencies and organizations that directly or indirectly manage riparian buffers in the Catskills

*Riparian Corridor Management Plan*: A Plan documenting existing conditions, landowner goals, natural resource goals, assessments conducted on parcel (ie. past surveys for stream management plans) and findings. The Plan makes detailed recommendations for practices to address the findings and goals, while describing how the parcel and its natural resources fit into larger ecosystem level interactions. While the Plan will have a focus on the riparian area, it will document and consider upland impacts to achieving a properly functioning riparian area. Where planning has been conducted through an existing watershed program (e.g. Watershed Forestry or Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program), the RCMP would be an addendum to the existing plan to summarize additional assessments conducted and make additional recommendations. The NYC DEP CSBI Manager will make final approvals of RCMPs.

*West of Hudson Watershed*: This Watershed spans portions of five upstate counties (Ulster, Greene, Delaware, Sullivan and Schoharie).

## **Contact Information**

*Delaware County SWCD*

Main office: 607-865-7161

*Greene County SWCD*

Main office: 518-622-3620

Project office: 518-589-6871

*Sullivan County SWCD*

Main office: 845-292-6552

Project office:

*Ulster County SWCD*

Main office: 845-883-7162 x5

Project office:

*NYC DEP:*  
Jenn Grieser  
845-340-7852  
[jgrieser@dep.nyc.gov](mailto:jgrieser@dep.nyc.gov)

**Planning and review conducted to establish guidelines**

CSBI development meeting on June 14, 2007

Interdistrict meeting on April 10, 2008

Communications Subcommittee meeting on April 30, 2008

Plant Materials Subcommittee meeting on May 15, 2008

Field visit with Guidelines Subcommittee on May 23, 2008

Riparian Buffer Working Group meeting on July 18, 2008

Comments received from Guidelines Subcommittee through meeting on November 12, 2008

Guidelines distributed to riparian buffer program managers in outside the Catskills on November 25, 2008

Comments received from Riparian Buffer Working Group meeting on December 10, 2008