Retaining Existing Riparian Buffers

What You Can Do With the Vegetation In Your Riparian Buffer

Subject to local government approval, vegetation may be removed from the 100-foot buffer for the following reasons:

1) To provide reasonable water views, provided that any vegetation removed is replaced with vegetation that provides equivalent water quality protection.

2) To create a water access path, as long as it doesn't cause erosion.

3) To remove dead, dying or diseased trees and shrubs, and to remove noxious weeds or invasive exotic plants.

4) To provide for shoreline erosion control, provided that the buffer is replanted with native, woody vegetation.

Call before you Cut!

Just as you call Miss Utility before you dig, call your local planning/public works department before you start cutting.

It is easier and cheaper to leave existing buffers than to plant new ones.

Tidewater Virginia Localities have designated Resource Protection Areas (RPAs); land clearing activities within RPAs are limited.

If you do not know who to call locally, contact CBLAD at 1 (800) CHES-BAY
1 (800) 243-7229

What You Can't Do In The Buffer

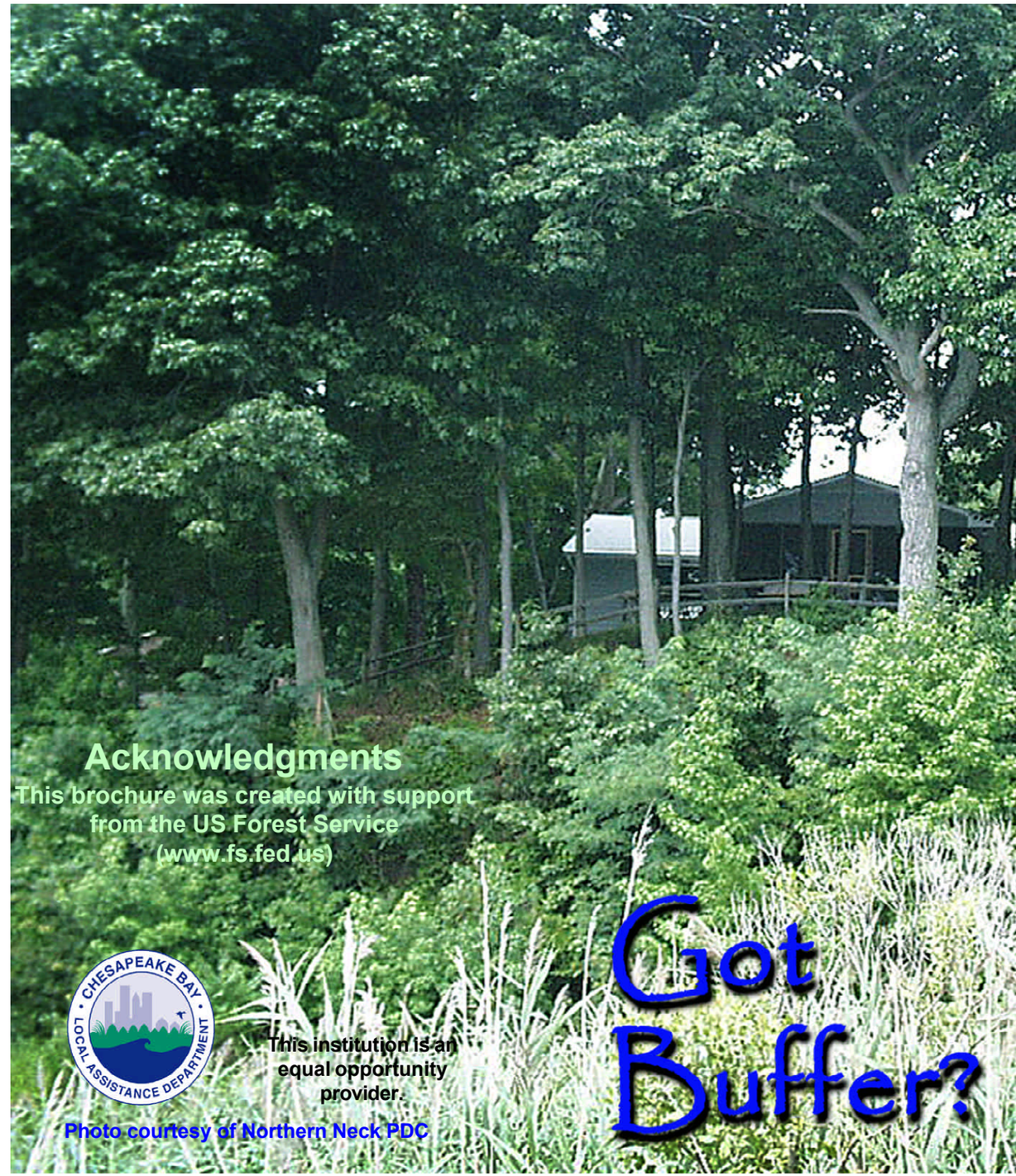
1) Development is not permitted if there is sufficient buildable area outside the 100-foot buffer OR if the property was subdivided after the local government adopted its local Bay Act program (generally 1989-1991).

2) Accessory structures like sheds, gazebos, pools, or detached garages may not be located within the 100-foot buffer.

3) Clear-cutting of vegetation is not permitted.

4) Filling or grading land within the buffer is not allowed.

5) Applying pesticides and fertilizer is discouraged.



Acknowledgments

This brochure was created with support from the US Forest Service (www.fs.fed.us)

CHESAPEAKE BAY LOCAL ASSISTANCE DEPARTMENT

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Photo courtesy of Northern Neck PDC

Got Buffer?

What Are Riparian Buffers and why are they important?

Riparian buffers are vegetated areas adjacent to water bodies such as streams, lakes, rivers, marshes, and shorelines. Buffers are often described as the "last line of defense" for the protection of water quality.

These vegetated areas stabilize shorelines and stream banks, filter pollutants from stormwater runoff, and provide critical habitat for aquatic species and wildlife. All of these functions are crucial to protecting water quality in our rivers and the Chesapeake Bay. Despite protective regulations, many of these buffer areas are being impacted by shoreline development and improper management of buffer vegetation. At greatest risk are buffers in parts of the state that have rapidly growing urban and suburban areas.

Buffers and The Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act

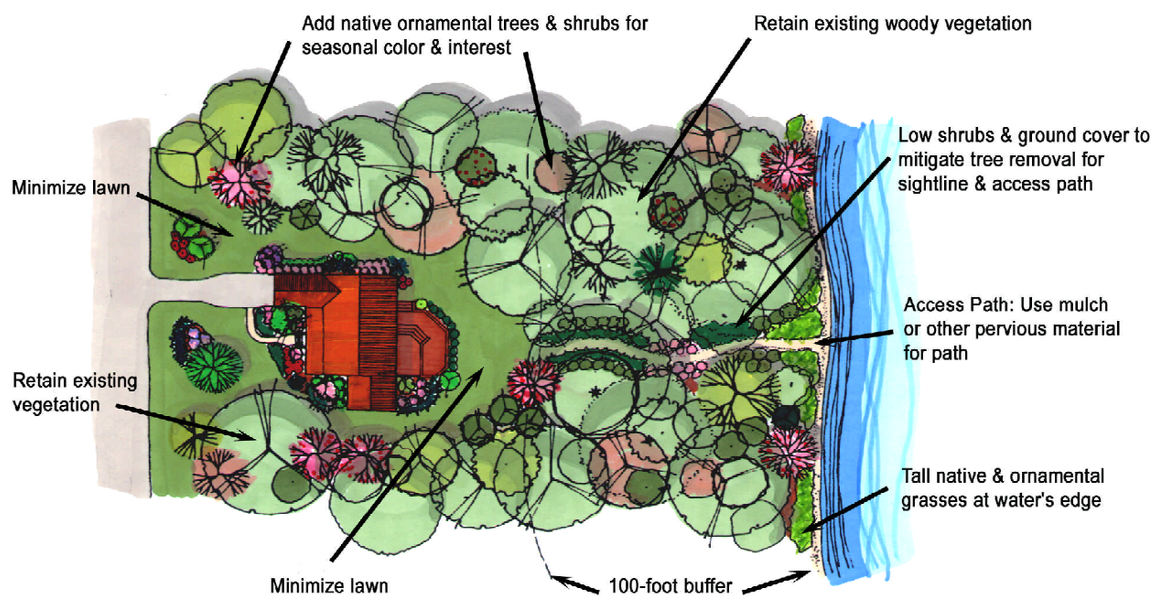
In 1988, the Virginia General Assembly passed the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act to protect and improve the water quality of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. The "Bay Act" applies in all 84 cities, counties, and towns in Tidewater Virginia; generally the areas of the state east of Interstate 95.

Riparian buffers are included as Resource Protection Areas (RPAs) under the Bay Act. This means that they are protected under state law and local ordinances. Generally, no development, land disturbance, or vegetation removal is allowed within 100-feet of the water.

Benefits of Buffers

In addition to improving water quality, riparian buffers that contain native, woody vegetation can provide many benefits to the waterfront property owner. These benefits include...

- **Increased property values -** Buffers can increase property values by as much as 20% from improved landscaping.
- **Reduced erosion -** Plants and their roots reduce runoff and stabilize soil.
- **Noise reduction -** Trees and shrubs can muffle urban noises.
- **Air quality improvement -** Trees and shrubs absorb airborne pollutants and return oxygen to the atmosphere for our use.
- **Decreased heating and cooling costs -** Trees can provide summer shade and evergreens can act as winter windbreaks.
- **Increased shoreline stability -** Shrubs and groundcover can hold the soil on banks in place.
- **Wildlife habitat and viewing -** Bay wildlife depends upon mixed woodlands for food, habitat and travel corridors.
- **Groundwater recharge -** Buffers absorb excess water increasing groundwater recharge and reducing flood volume.



Do your part to restore water quality by restoring the buffer!

Here are some things to consider:

Plant a mix of trees, shrubs, and groundcover to mimic a natural forest.

Minimize lawn area by retaining woods and adding mulched planting beds.

Plant tall native grasses near the water to filter stormwater runoff.

Use larger trees and shrubs to provide screening and privacy.