

FAQs: DCNR Riparian Forest Buffer Grant Program

Funding Limitations and Match

Is there a maximum grant amount?

The minimum grant amount is \$50,000, but there is NOT a maximum grant amount. However, the total amount of grant funding available for this pilot program is \$500,000.

What is the total amount of funding available for this pilot program?

The total amount of grant funding available for this pilot program is \$500,000.

Is this Pilot Program expected to be offered in the future?

DCNR anticipates offering a Riparian Forest Buffer program as part of its annual Community Conservation Partnership Program (C2P2) beginning in 2017. The C2P2 program has an annual open application period from January –mid-April.

Can DEP Growing Greener funding match this DCNR funding program?

Yes. Growing Greener funding can match this DCNR funding. The Growing Greener funding can be secured for a specific project / purpose (e.g. riparian buffer plantings) or to fund staff time that directly relates to the DCNR grant scope of work.

Can DCNR's Treevitalize Program be used as match?

YES. At this time, the Treevitalize Program and the Riparian Forest Buffer Program are funded from different state sources so the Treevitalize Program can be used as match. However, applications that show local commitment by providing at least some match from local sources will be most competitive.

Application Selection and Contracting

Is an applicant as either Lead or Team member, precluded from pursuing or receiving funding assistance from multiple grant awards through this program?

No. There is no restriction on the number of applications an entity can submit nor the number of grants a particularly entity receives. However, each individual project can only be undertaken by one grantee—there cannot be funding from multiple grantees supporting a single project. To simplify grant management costs and time, DCNR would encourage applicants to put together ONE application identifying their total funding need to support all of their proposed projects.

Does DCNR have priority watersheds and/or watershed setting conditions established for this Program?

No. This program is a statewide program with all watersheds eligible. DCNR is currently finalizing scoring criteria, which MAY include additional weight for projects within specific river basins but that decision has not yet been made.

Approximately when do you anticipate announcing grant awards and when could grant-sponsored actions commence?

Grantees for the pilot Riparian Forest Buffer Grant Program will be announced in late 2016. Typically grant-funded activities need to occur within the grant period which will begin January 1, 2017.

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How long is the grant contract?

The grant contract is for a 4-year term with a start date of January 1, 2017 (end date of December 31, 2020). All eligible project costs that a grantee would like to pay for using DCNR funding or their match (cash or non-cash) must be incurred during the 4-year grant period.

Eligible Activities and Expenses

Can the funding be used to add acreage to current buffers or is this program only for establishing buffers where they do not currently exist?

Yes, adding acreage to current buffers is an eligible expense. However, grant program applications proposing additional acreage of conventional buffers will not be as competitive as projects proposing additional acreage of multifunctional buffers or new buffers where none currently exist.

Would a project still be eligible if there is an existing trail within the buffer?

Yes. DCNR would consider a project including a trail nestled into the buffer area. However, we would be interested in additional details about the trail use, materials and maintenance plan to ensure that water quality benefits could still be effectively realized and there would not be significant impacts to the operation of the buffer as a result of the trail.

Is there funding for maintenance / staff time after the planting?

Expenses related to standard maintenance of the buffer(s) are eligible expenses for reimbursement. Because the grant contract extends for 4 years, the number of years that maintenance will be covered depends on when the buffer was planted. For example, if the buffer was planted in year one of the grant contract, the grantee would have 3 years of potential maintenance but if the buffer was planted in year 3 of the grant period then the grantee would only have one year of potential maintenance costs covered. Make sure you consider the estimated maintenance costs in your budget and funding request.

Similarly, can funding through this grant support maintenance of existing buffers?

By legislation this funding cannot be used for maintenance activities, so NO, this funding cannot be used to maintain existing buffers. However, as noted in the question above, DCNR views post-planting establishment (PPE) needs as part of establishing a viable buffer rather than "maintenance". Therefore, activities typically accepted as immediate PPE needs for the NEW buffers planted with this grant funding would be eligible for DCNR funding. Also noted above, all project costs must be incurred within the 4-year grant contract period. Therefore, a planting timeline is important if you plan to include the planting of buffers and PPE in the grant scope of work.

Can we use this funding for materials other than tree/ shrub species such as deer protection, mulching, weed mat etc?

Grant funds, as well as match funding/donations, can be used for any materials or services required for the actual buffer as well as for the buffers' survival/maintenance. Items such as those listed in the question would be eligible, within reason, since they are necessary for the buffers' survival. DCNR may have concerns about surrounding an entire property with a deer fence but if a grantee proposes to add fencing to the buffer area only, that would be an eligible expense. Basically if it's a buffer material or a commonly accepted material at a reasonable scale used to establish/ maintain the buffer, the cost is eligible. Please feel free to ask about specific items if you are not sure about their eligibility.

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Would the purchase of equipment (e.g. DR field, brush mower etc) for site preparation and long term management to maintain the buffer be considered a “material” and therefore an eligible expense?

No. For this pilot program, equipment purchases are not eligible expenses.

Can grant funds be used to purchase herbicide material to address noxious weeds that may be present and/or problematic in a riparian buffer that would impact long term establishment?

Yes. The cost of herbicides and their application, when used sparingly and strategically to assist in buffer establishment, is an expense eligible for DCNR funds and/or match.

Could we request funding for educational signs to go with schools/community park type project sites?

Considering that education about buffers and their proper maintenance provides an opportunity to build a stewardship ethic among citizens, educational signs would be considered an eligible expense for this grant program. However, the primary goal of this program is to add buffer acreage, so the portion of the budget dedicated to signage should be minimal to ensure that it is a competitive application.

Can this funding, or our local match, be used for education and outreach or training events/programs/materials?

The vast majority of the project scope and budget should directly relate to the planting and establishment of riparian forest buffer acres. If landowner and community outreach, education, and engagement is necessary to achieve the goal of acres in the ground, and those costs are a minor portion budget, then YES, those tasks would be eligible for DCNR funding /local match. However, grant applications proposing general buffer education, workshops etc. would not be competitive because they would not significantly contribute to the primary focus of this program --adding riparian forest buffer acres to the landscape.

Project Design

Do you anticipate most grantees using consultants for design, installation, and maintenance?

We anticipate that each grantee will complete their buffer projects differently. Some will use consultants for some or all elements of the project and some will rely solely on their own staff and/or volunteers. We hope to learn more about the most efficient methods of buffer design, installation, and maintenance from our grantees through this pilot program.

Does DCNR have an approved list of species for the buffers?

DCNR does not have an official species list for this program. The [DCNR grant program webpage](#) includes links to common tree and plant species for use in both conventional and multifunctional buffer applications. DEP also provides information about riparian buffer species, methodology, maintenance etc. in its [guidance manual](#). For additional technical assistance, please contact your local [DCNR service forester](#).

Is there a requirement for native plants?

No. Grantees are encouraged to use plant species native to Pennsylvania as much as possible, however, several non-native species will also be accepted. Grantees should plan to review their plant species selection with DCNR prior to purchasing materials.

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Is fertilizer use permitted in any zone of the buffer?

As a rule-of-thumb fertilizer should not be used in any of the 3 zones. In limited cases it could be permitted in zone 2 and/or 3 if it is determined to not compromise the efficacy of the buffer; fertilization in zone 1 is not permitted.

For example:

- If soil testing determines that fertilizer is needed for seedling establishment--a one-time application would be permitted.
- If soil testing determines that fertilizer is needed to support growth in zones 2 or 3 on a very limited basis, and considers upland loading to not compromise the efficacy of the buffer—limited applications would be permitted.
- If soil testing determines that annual fertilization is needed in zones 2 or 3--this is not permitted and alternative species should be considered.

Will flash grazing be allowed in zones 2 and/or 3?

Yes, flash grazing could be permitted if the operator is committed to intensive rotational grazing. The applicant/grantee would have to submit to DCNR a written plan for how this would be accomplished, including details on tree species and size to ensure damage to trees is avoided.

Are orchard species allowed in Zones 2 and/or 3?

Yes, assuming no fertilizer use and limited disturbance from harvesting equipment.

Is the growing of nursery stock in Zones 2 and/or 3 allowed?

Possibly, in zone 3 only. The applicant/grantee would need to submit to DCNR a plan for how this would be designed and managed. Two significant parameters include the amount of soil disturbance and the amount of canopy cover retained over time. Perhaps a pot-in-pot system could be used to limit disturbance. Large gaps in canopy cover should be avoided.

Landowner Agreements

Can the funding be used on public and private property?

Buffers can be placed on land owned by both public and private entities. If the grantee does not own the land themselves, they need proper landowner agreements between themselves and the landowner to ensure the grantee's ability to install and maintain the buffer AND obtain the landowner's agreement that the buffer will remain on the property for at least 25 years. A sample landowner agreement is available [here](#) and also within the online grant application portal. Grantees can also use their own landowner agreement but would need to send a copy to DCNR for approval prior to executing the agreement.

Does the grantee need to have all landowner agreements signed and submitted with the application?

No. Specific project locations can be identified after the grant is awarded. The applicant should provide as much detail as possible related to the target location of the buffer acreage (watershed, county, land use zone etc.) in the application, but the exact properties can be finalized at any point during the 4 year grant period. Prior to approving the use of DCNR funds or grantee match for a buffer, the grantee will need to submit an executed landowner agreement to DCNR for approval. A sample landowner agreement is available [here](#) or a grantee can use their own agreement template upon approval by DCNR.

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Would it be smoother if the landowner agreement was submitted with the grant application like fee simple grants?

Yes. It would be easier for DCNR grant managers to assess and track projects if landowner agreements were submitted with the application. Where that is possible, DCNR welcomes applicants to submit such documentation. However, we understand that the short timeframe of this grant application period does not allow enough time for many potential applicants to have executed agreements ready to go by the mid-September application deadline. Therefore, DCNR is offering this more flexible option for this pilot program to allow applicants more time to pull together the necessary agreements.

Why require a landowner agreement for 25 years and not a recorded easement?

A recorded easement would be acceptable, and actually preferred. However, to allow for maximum flexibility, we are accepting a simpler landowner agreement. The results of this pilot program will help DCNR determine if easements will be required in the future or if we will continue to consider multiple forms of agreements.

Could the landowner agreement be revised to provide more clear maintenance responsibilities and enforcement?

Yes. The landowner agreement template provided is a sample that can be adjusted as necessary to meet the needs of the grantee and landowner. DCNR requires that grantees submit a copy of the final agreement to their DCNR grant project manager prior to executing the agreement for DCNR review and approval.

What are the maintenance and other requirements that will be placed on the landowner?

DCNR grantees will be required to execute a landowner agreement between themselves and the landowner that allows for the installation, monitoring, and maintenance of the buffer for at least 25 years. It is up to the grantee and landowner how those duties and roles are distributed, but that plan should be detailed in the landowner agreement, and provided to DCNR for review and approval. In some instances the landowner may not be responsible to DO anything but will be required to allow the grantee on their property to install the buffer, monitor it at agreed upon intervals, and provide basic maintenance duties on a regular basis—the timing and extent of which will be detailed in the agreement. In other instances the grantee might ask for permission to install the buffer and then require the landowner to complete basic and regular maintenance which will be detailed in the agreement. Its really up to the two parties how all the details work out, but DCNR aims to ensure the long term existence of the buffer via whatever terms are laid out in the landowner agreement. A sample agreement is available [here](#), but can be altered to fit your needs.

Since the term of maintenance/monitoring is 25 years could it be structured to leave a reserve in the grant for the grantee?

No. Legislation requires that funds are expended within the grant period, which is 4 years. Any maintenance /monitoring that will be paid for by DCNR funds or grantee match must be completed during the 4 year grant contract period.