

No new development, land disturbance, or removal of plants is allowed in RPAs without prior county approval.

Fairfax County enacted the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance in 1993 to protect local streams as well as the Potomac River and Chesapeake Bay. RPAs in Fairfax County protect all streams with perennial flow (in which water always flows except in periods of drought) and contiguous wetlands. In 2014, Virginia and other partners recommitted to watershed protection and restoration efforts by signing the Chesapeake Watershed Agreement.



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RPAs may include private property as well as stream valley parks. Check the Fairfax County Watersheds and RPAs map at tinyurl.com/FairfaxRPA to see if your property is in an RPA

What can you do in a riparian buffer?

Property owners may plant trees and other native plants in their riparian buffers. Removal of vegetation from an RPA, even on private property, always requires prior approval. In most cases, removed vegetation must be replaced with native plants that provide equivalent water quality protection.

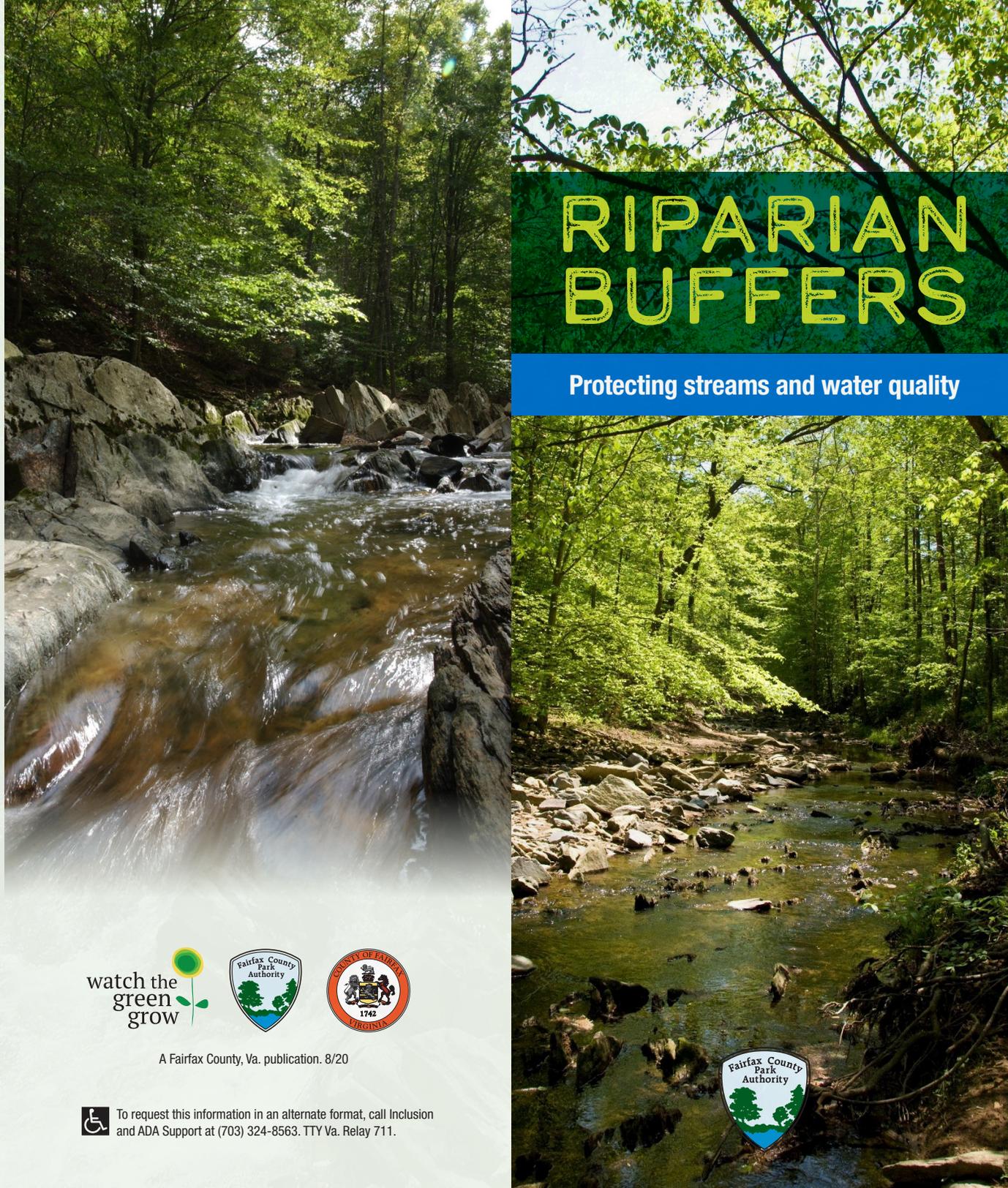
Subject to local government approval, vegetation within the RPA vegetated buffer limits may be removed for the following reasons:

1. To provide reasonable water views.
2. To create a water access path if it will not cause erosion.
3. To remove dead, dying, or diseased trees and shrubs.
4. To remove invasive nonnative plants or noxious weeds.
5. To provide for shoreline erosion control, provided that the buffer is replanted with native trees or shrubs.



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For more information about the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance and to find forms related to RPAs, go to www.fairfaxcounty.gov/landdevelopment/chesapeake-bay-preservation-ordinance



RIPARIAN BUFFERS

Protecting streams and water quality

What are riparian buffers and why are they important?

Riparian buffers are natural areas (usually forested) bordering streams or other bodies of water. Buffers are the last line of defense for protecting water quality.

Stormwater runoff picks up litter, soil, fertilizer, pesticides, oil, road salt, and other contaminants from paved surfaces and carries them into streams. These pollutants are carried downstream to the Potomac River and Chesapeake Bay, impacting our drinking water as well as aquatic plants and animals.

Riparian buffers reduce stormwater runoff, filter pollutants from stormwater, and protect critical habitat for freshwater animals. These forested areas also stabilize stream banks and shorelines. These functions are vital for clean and healthy water in all our water bodies including the Potomac River and the Chesapeake Bay. Resource Protection Areas, or RPAs, safeguard these vital buffer areas from development.

The Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act and Resource Protection Areas

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 established Resource Protection Areas (RPAs) within 100 feet of bodies of water in the Tidewater region of Virginia bordering the Chesapeake Bay and Eastern Shore. RPAs are protected under state law and local ordinances.



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To request this information in an alternate format, call Inclusion and ADA Support at (703) 324-8563. TTY Va. Relay 711.

What can't you do in the riparian buffer?

1. Development in the buffer is not permitted when there is sufficient buildable area outside the buffer area.
2. Accessory structures like sheds, pools, or detached garages, may not be built unless an exception has been approved.
3. Clear-cutting of vegetation is not permitted, and plants may not be removed to create lawns.
4. Filling or grading land within the buffer is not allowed.
5. Pesticide and fertilizer applications are discouraged.

Benefits of riparian buffers

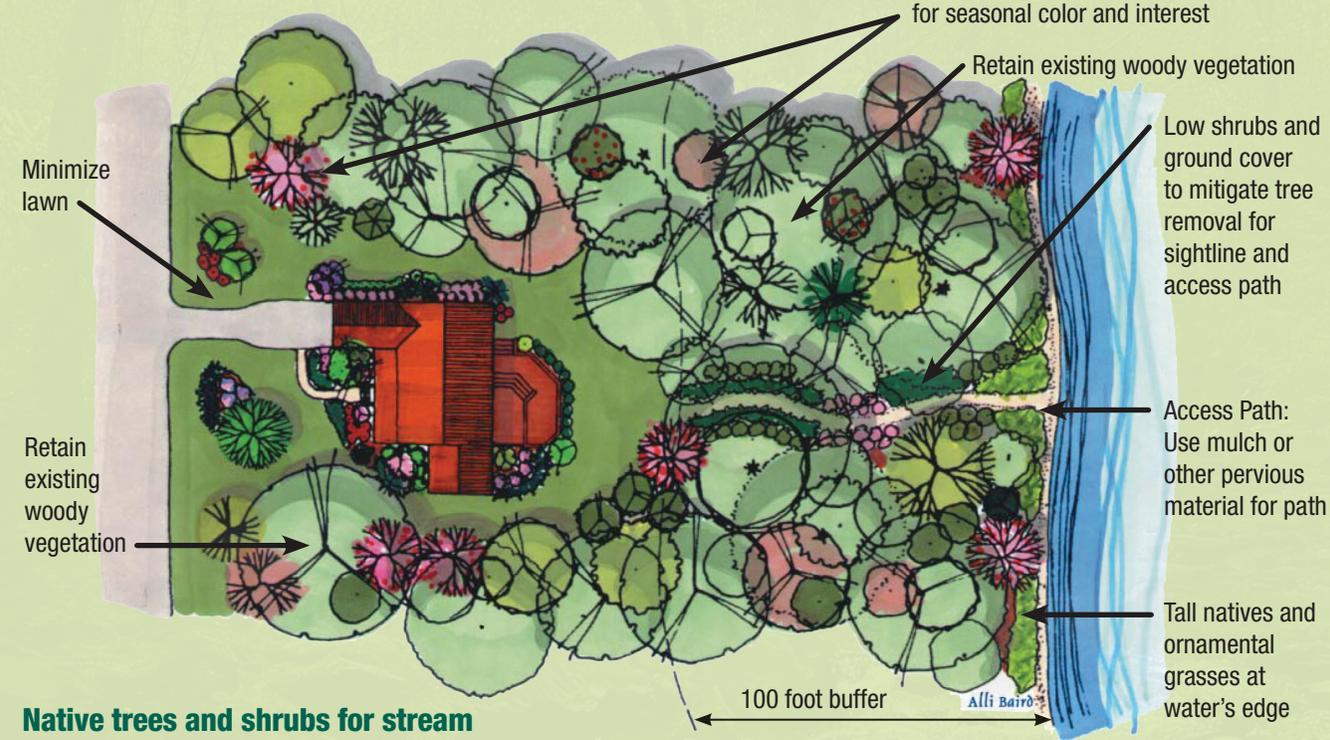
Riparian buffers that contain a dense combination of native ground cover, shrubs, and trees can provide many benefits for waterfront property owners and park neighbors. These benefits include:

- **Improved water quality** – Buffers filter pollutants from water runoff.
- **Reduced erosion** – Plants and their roots reduce erosion and stabilize streambanks.
- **Flood control** – Riparian buffers absorb excess water and reduce flood volume.
- **Decreased heating and cooling costs** – Trees provide shade in summer and act as windbreaks in winter.
- **Noise reduction** – Trees and shrubs muffle urban noises.
- **Wildlife habitat and viewing** – Wildlife depend upon forested streambanks for habitat and travel corridors.
- **Air quality improvement** – Trees filter ultrafine particles from the air and reduce air pollution.

Restore the buffer on your property

- Plant a mix of native trees, shrubs, and groundcover to mimic a natural forest.
- Minimize lawn area by retaining woods and adding native plant garden beds.
- Plant tall native grasses and shrubs near the water to filter stormwater runoff and reduce shoreline erosion.
- Use trees and shrubs to provide screening and privacy.
- Minimize usage of fertilizer and pesticides.

A HEALTHY RIPARIAN BUFFER



Native trees and shrubs for stream buffer restoration

These are some of the native trees and shrubs that may be planted in an RPA to restore the buffer.

Overstory trees

- White Oak (*Quercus alba*)
- Willow Oak (*Quercus phellos*)
- Red Maple (*Acer rubrum*)
- Sweet Gum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*)
- Tulip Tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*)
- Sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*)

Understory trees

- Serviceberry (*Amelanchier canadensis*)
- American Hornbeam (*Carpinus caroliniana*)
- Sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*)
- Eastern Redbud (*Cercis canadensis*)

- Flowering Dogwood (*Cornus florida*)
- American Holly (*Ilex opaca*)

Shrubs

- Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*)
- Inkberry Holly (*Ilex glabra*)
- Arrowwood (*Viburnum dentatum*)
- Buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*)
- Paw Paw (*Asimina triloba*)
- Witch Hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*)



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See more recommended native tree and shrub species for restoring RPAs at <https://tinyurl.com/treesRPA>

Get permission before you cut!

Removal of any vegetation (including diseased or invasive plants) from an RPA requires prior approval. Go to www.fairfaxcounty.gov/landdevelopment/chesapeake-bay-preservation-ordinance to see the interactive RPA map and find forms including the application for removal of vegetation in an RPA. Or call the Site Development and Inspections Division at (703) 324-1720, TTY Va. Relay 711.

Non-compliance with the RPA restrictions is a violation of the county's Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance. Violators will be required to restore the RPA in accordance with county guidelines. Suspected RPA violations can be reported to the Department of Code Compliance at (703) 324-1300, TTY Va. Relay 711 or online via the community complaint form at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/fido/complaints/comp_submit.aspx.

It is cheaper to leave existing buffers than to plant new ones!



Protect the buffer on parkland

Natural stream valley parks provide watershed protection as well as trail opportunities. Residents bordering stream valley parks can help protect the buffer:

- Do not cut or remove vegetation from parkland. Mow only inside your property lines.
- To repair past encroachment on parkland, simply stop mowing buffer areas and let the area regrow.
- Do not dump yard waste in parkland. Dumped waste smothers native plants, spreads invasive plants, and clogs streams.

Suspected park encroachment can be reported to the Park Operations Division at (703) 324-8594, TTY Va. Relay 711 or email parkmail@fairfaxcounty.gov.



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Visit the Watch the Green Grow webpage to learn how to protect water quality and wildlife habitat through green yard care practices.

Did you plant trees or native plants? Did you protect the buffer on your property? Record your green actions on the Watch the Green Grow map. Together our green actions have a visible impact.

www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/nature-history/watch-green-grow



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The Plant NOVA Natives native plant finder app provides information about plants native to Northern Virginia that can help with plant selection. www.plantnovanatives.org/plant-finder-app