

On March 23<sup>rd</sup> an expanded riparian buffer, covering 1 and  $\frac{3}{4}$  acres, along the Rockfish Valley Trail in Nelson County was installed through the James River Buffer Program, with matching funds from the Virginia Trees for Clean Program. The project was completed with help from employees of the Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOF), Deya Ramsden, James River Buffer Program Coordinator, and area Foresters, Martha Warring and B.J. Butler. Conservation Services Incorporated (CSI) was contracted to provide the plant stock and install the seedlings, along with tree shelters and provide follow up maintenance. The goal of the buffer is to provide better protection of the Rockfish River from sediment and pollutants, increase shading of the river, and also diversifying the plant species composition within the buffer. A combination of 570 native shrubs and trees was planted along the river. Six different species of shrubs were planted including buttonbush, hazel-alder, red osier dogwood and silky dogwood, false indigo and southern arrowwood. Eight different tree species were planted including persimmon, paw paw, red mulberry, redbud, river birch, yellow poplar, sycamore, and pin oak.

Shelters, or “tubes”, protect the one year old seedlings from trampling, deer browse, vole damage and aid in maintenance. The shelter also provides a favorable growing environment, free from wind and drastic temperature changes, giving the seedling time to focus on getting tall. Shelters are removed once the tree extends 3 inches out of the top of the tube. CSI will return in late spring to apply herbicide in order to reduce weed competition around the seedlings and target invasive species along the trail. The first three years is a crucial time period for young seedlings and maintenance is required to allow seedlings to gain growth and out compete the weeds. Not many people realize that fescue, the most common pasture grass, is a non-native, aggressive species that is a strong competitor for moisture and nutrients with seedlings. If grass is not controlled around the seedlings, the buffer may not survive at a level that results in a future forest. During planting, a small area is scalped to remove the grass, but follow up maintenance with herbicide, mowing or weed-whacking is needed to control grass as the seedlings gets established. Foresters will offer yearly inspections of the buffer to assess its progress and adjust maintenance requirements over the next three years.

Future plans through the Buffer Program on the trail include addressing some areas on the trail where compaction is causing concentrated flow of sediment to reach the river. There are several best management practices (BMPs) that can be utilized to mitigate concentrated flow. Some access points may be blocked off temporary to give them time to “rest”.

### *About the James River Buffer Program*

The James River Buffer Program began in 2019 and is funded through a grant from the Virginia Environmental Endowment. The program is carried out through partnering organizations, the Virginia Department of Forestry and the James River Association (JRA). These partners draw on their expertise and community connections to help landowners install buffers on their land. This is a turn-key program, not a cost-share, offering installation of seedlings, materials and three years of follow-up maintenance and guidance free of cost. This flexible program is open to any landowner in need of a buffer. Through the Va. Department of Forestry rural, residential, commercial and county or city owned are eligible for enrollment, while JRA focuses on rural lands with the highest priority of buffer need. The application process is simple. Please visit <https://www.jamesriverbuffers.org/> to find out more and sign up for a consultation. You may also reach out to your local Forester for more information (see directory at <https://www.dof.virginia.gov/locations/index.htm>).

### *More about the Virginia Trees for Clean Water Program (VTCW)*

Through funds from the USFS Chesapeake Watershed Forestry Program, Virginia Water Quality Improvement Funds, Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) CB Rapp, Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOF) has developed the Virginia Trees for Clean Water program. The program is designed to improve water quality across the Commonwealth through on-the-ground efforts to plant trees where they are needed most. Our goals are to expand tree canopy, positively impact water quality, increase energy conservation practices, advance community health and grow recreation and educational opportunities. The VTCW provides matching funds to the James River Buffer Program for projects that meet the program criteria. In a typical year, VTCW accepts proposals and awards grants of up to \$14,000 per a project, with an aim of a 50/50 match for the project. Contact Lara Johnson for more information [lara.johnson@dof.virginia.gov](mailto:lara.johnson@dof.virginia.gov).