

# Watershed Program – IFRIS User Guide



## Reporting Riparian Buffer Establishment

### Contents

Riparian Buffer Reporting Overview .....	1
Where can buffers be installed? .....	2
How do you measure buffer width? .....	2
Rural vs. Urban Buffers .....	2
Buffer Mapping Examples .....	3
Mapping a Buffer with Multiple Streams Example .....	3
Mapping a Buffer Around a Pond Example .....	3
Mapping a Buffer Expansion Example .....	4
Entering a Point-Based Accomplishment .....	5
Buffer Reporting Examples .....	7
Special Situations .....	8
Urban Buffer Guidance .....	8
Urban vs. Rural Planting .....	9
Reporting Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program Re-Enrollment Projects .....	10
Watershed Team Contacts .....	11

### Riparian Buffer Reporting Overview

- ◆ Buffers may be established around a variety of water features, including streams, ponds, ditches, etc. (*see Where can buffers be installed?*)
- ◆ Report all buffers in IFRIS as both a **Riparian Buffer Establishment** and **Tree Planting**.
- ◆ When recording linear feet, if both sides of the creek or stream were planted, count both sides in your total linear feet reported (e.g., if a creek 50 feet long is planted on both sides, record 100 linear feet).
- ◆ If you complete and submit a *Riparian Buffer Landowner Outreach Survey* or provide some general guidance to a landowner, cooperator or partner, report this as a **Technical Assist – Riparian Buffer Consultation** in IFRIS.
- ◆ **Report all new buffers that you find, even if DOF did not provide technical assistance to the project.**
- ◆ Establishment may include planted and/or naturally regenerating buffers.
- ◆ Buffers must be a **minimum of 35 feet wide and a maximum of 300 feet wide**. The maximum width may vary by site but generally should include all planted or naturally regenerated land with a slope that drains into the water feature.
- ◆ Expanding existing buffers is considered buffer establishment. Report the expanded buffer acreage (up to a maximum of 300 feet from the stream bank.)
- ◆ It may make sense to plant a buffer that exceeds 300 feet in width but to be consistent with state and federal cost-share programs and the Riparian Buffer Tax Credit Program, only the first 300 feet are reportable.
- ◆ Your buffer accomplishment may also be a **Coastal Resilience** accomplishment, an Urban and Community Forestry accomplishment, etc. Be sure to report every appropriate accomplishment related to the planting.
- ◆ Only new buffers on previously non-forested land should be reported.
  - Do not report a buffer left during a harvest (SMZ) as a **Riparian Buffer Establishment**.

- Do not report a streamside area that was cleared and then replanted as a buffer.
- Do not report a streamside area that was cleared and left to regenerate naturally as a buffer.

## Where can buffers be installed?

Buffers can be established on the following bodies of water:

- ◆ Streams, rivers
- ◆ Lakes, ponds, reservoirs/municipal water supplies
- ◆ Seeps and springs
- ◆ Sinkholes and cave entrances
- ◆ Sloughs
- ◆ Wetlands
  - Water features within wetlands
  - Fresh and saltwater marshes
- ◆ Ditches and canals, and other man-made water features

Note: The body of water does not necessarily have to be on a topographic map to have a buffer.

As with anything, there could be exceptions to the rule. If you think you have a situation that merits a buffer and is not found here, please contact the Watershed Team.

## How do you measure buffer width?

- ◆ In most cases, buffer width should be measured from the top of the bank. If the stream channel is adjacent to a freshwater or saltwater marsh, as is common in Eastern Virginia, begin measuring at the edge of the marsh.
- ◆ In areas where ghost forests are forming or marsh migration is occurring, begin measuring where dead/dying trees begin to transition to live healthy trees OR the land is dry enough to support trees.
- ◆ If you are extending an existing buffer, create a new stand and map only the newly planted trees. Do not include the existing buffer. Small numbers of existing trees that you determine do not effectively buffer the body of water can be included in the new stand.

## Rural vs. Urban Buffers

- ◆ As of March 2023, rural and urban buffers can now be reported through the same accomplishment codes.
  - To report a **rural buffer**:
    - Submit a **Riparian Buffer Establishment** accomplishment and select **Rural** from the area type attribute list.
    - Also submit a **Tree Planting** accomplishment and select **Rural** from the area type attribute list.
  - To report an **urban buffer**:
    - Submit a **Riparian Buffer Establishment** accomplishment and select **Urban** from the area type attribute list.
    - Also submit a **Tree Planting** accomplishment and select **Urban** from the area type attribute list.
  - For **small urban buffers** that cannot easily be mapped with a polygon:
    - Go to the **Points** Mapping page in IFRIS and add a new point at the location of the planting.
    - Add a new accomplishment for the point and select **Tree Planting - Urban**.
    - This accomplishment type requires the number of trees planted.
    - See Pages 5 and 6 for step-by-step instructions.
- ◆ If you are not sure if a particular project should be classified as urban or rural, see the Urban vs. Rural Planting Determination Flow Chart.

## Buffer Mapping Examples

### Mapping a Buffer with Multiple Streams Example

In this example, the landowner planted both fields labeled Parcel A.

- ◆ Using the measure tool, the forester determined that the areas indicated in green are 300 feet from the stream channels and will record those areas as buffer acres.
- ◆ For mapping purposes, the stand is mapped as a single stand because it will be managed as a single stand unit.
- ◆ For the larger field, the tree planting acreage is 11.1 and the riparian buffer establishment acres recorded is 6 with 1,500 linear feet (counting both creeks).



### Mapping a Buffer Around a Pond Example

In this example, the landowner planted a buffer around a pond.

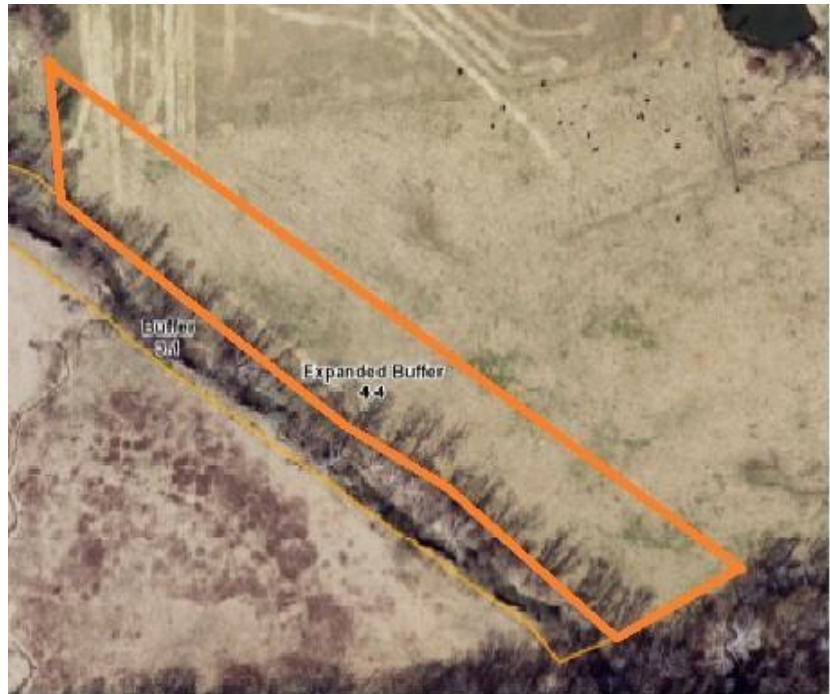
- ◆ For buffers established around a pond, use the edge of the pond to determine the linear feet of the buffer and deduct the acreage of the pond to determine the buffer establishment and tree planting acreage.
- ◆ The buffer acreage is 2.5 with 1,698 linear feet.



## Mapping a Buffer Expansion Example

In this example, the initial buffer was established, and the landowner added more trees to widen it.

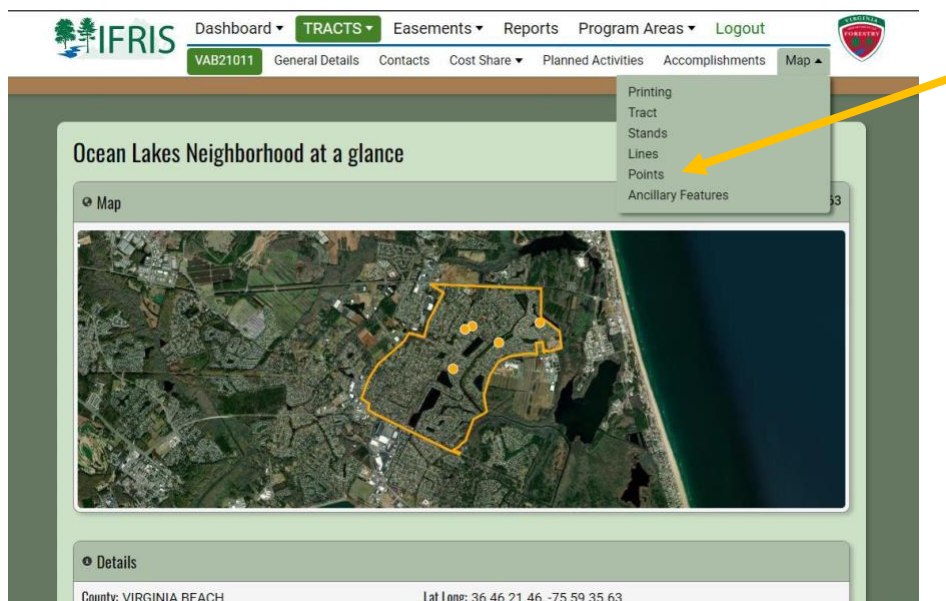
- ◆ The expanded buffer acreage is 4.4 acres.



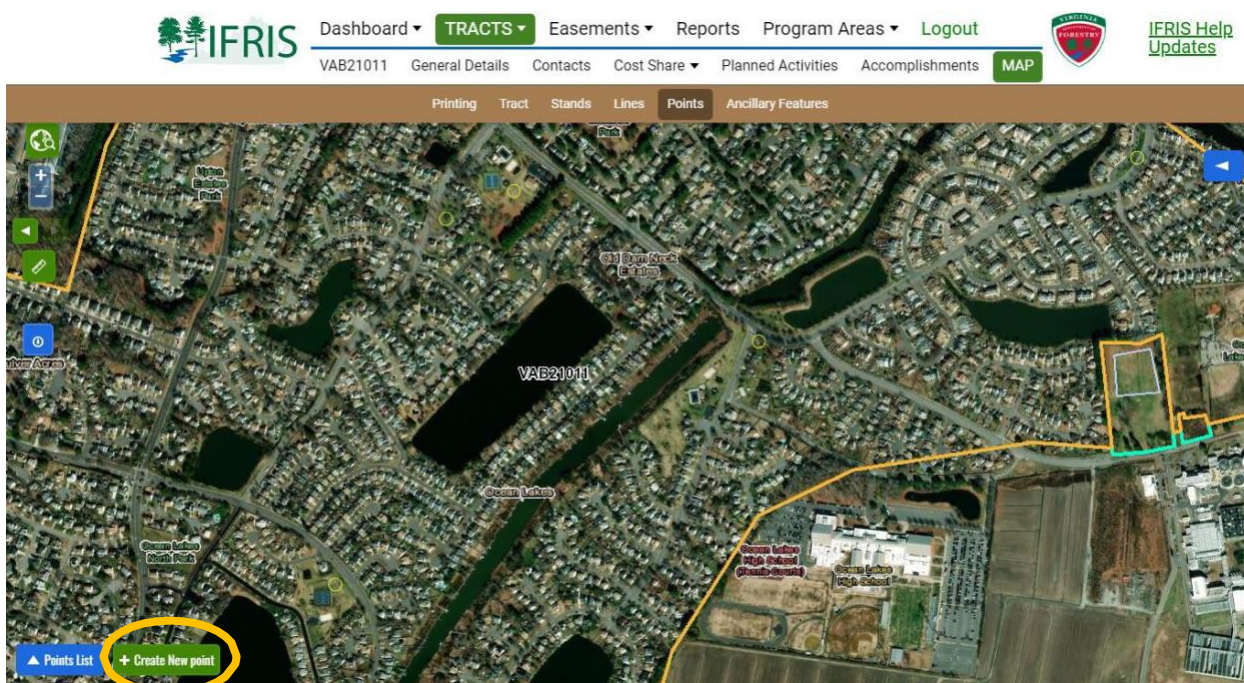


## Entering a Point-Based Accomplishment

1. From the Tract page, select **Map** and click on **Points**.

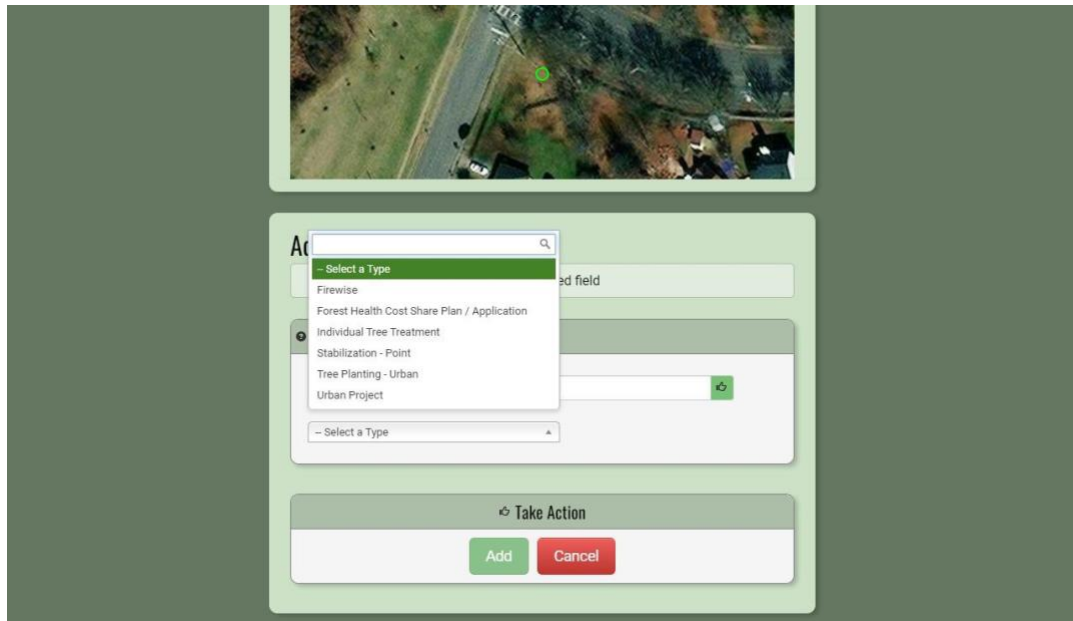
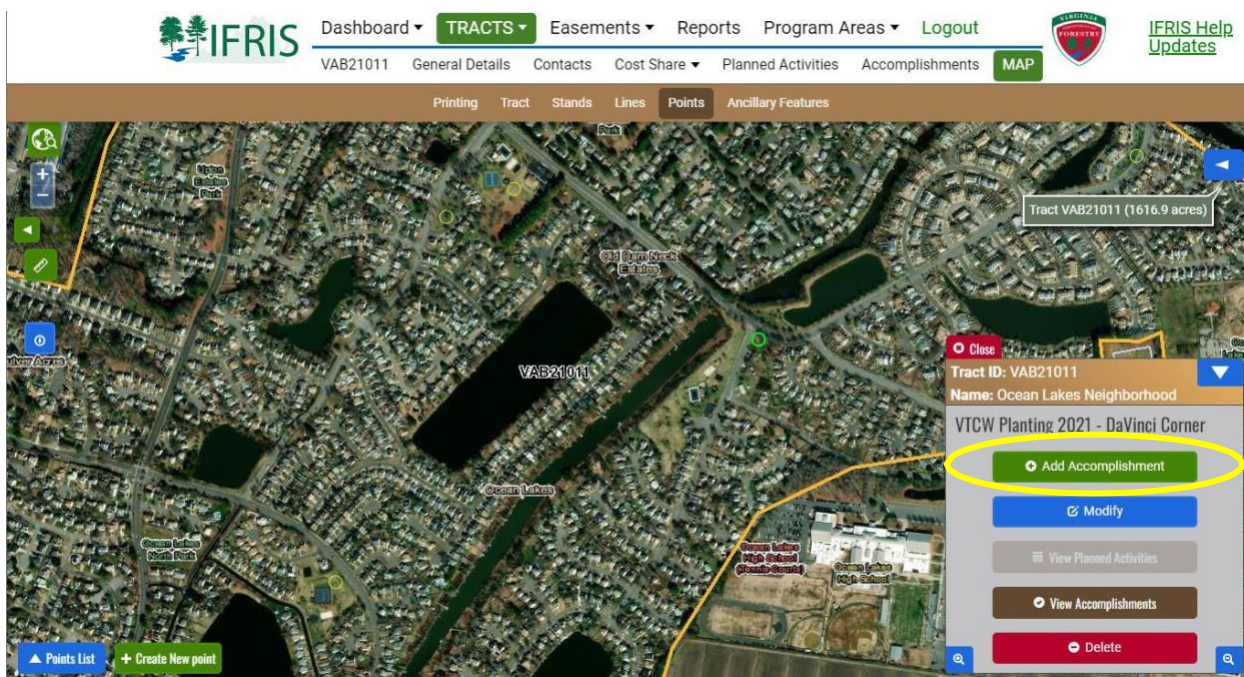


2. Select **Create New Point**. Place the point at your desired location and provide it with a name as you would map a stand.



**Entering a Point-Based Accomplishment, continued**

- Once you have created your points, you can add accomplishments just as you would with a stand. Click on the point and select **Add Accomplishment**.





## Buffer Reporting Examples

---

**Scenario 1:** You work with your local SWCD to get a landowner a buffer through the FR-3 Cost-Share Program.

- Report as both a **Riparian Buffer Establishment: Rural** and **Tree Planting: Rural**.

**Scenario 2:** You notice that a landowner installed their own buffer without using any cost-share.

- Report as both a **Riparian Buffer Establishment: Rural or Urban** and **Tree Planting: Rural or Urban**.

**Scenario 3:** You see a buffer is naturally regenerating along the side of a road.

- Report as both a **Riparian Buffer Establishment: Rural or Urban** and **Natural Regeneration: Open Land**.

**Scenario 4:** You notice that a volunteer group installed a buffer in a public park.

- Report as a **Riparian Buffer Establishment: Urban** and **Tree Planting: Urban**.

**Scenario 5:** A landowner already has a 35-foot buffer but decides to expand it to 100 feet.

- Report the additional 65 feet as both a **Riparian Buffer Establishment: Rural or Urban** and **Tree Planting: Rural or Urban**.

**Scenario 6:** A landowner leaves an SMZ after a timber harvest.

- **Do not report** this as a new **Riparian Buffer Establishment**.

**Scenario 7:** A harvest site is naturally regenerating along a stream.

- **Do not report** this as a **Riparian Buffer Establishment**.

**Scenario 8:** You plant a new buffer that is less than 35 feet wide.

- Report this as a **Riparian Buffer Establishment: Rural or Urban** and report the true width in the comments section.

When in doubt, report it as a buffer and leave a note in the comments section.

## Special Situations

If planting trees will improve water quality and prevent sediment and other pollutants from moving downstream, the planting can be counted as a buffer. Specific scenarios that may require additional consideration are:

**Scenario 1:** If a tree planting has occurred on the opposite side of a road from a body of water, but is still within 300 feet of the water, should it be considered a buffer?

- Use your judgment. Will the road impede water from reaching the stream or other body of water in question, causing the water to drain to a different body of water? If so, then it should not count as a buffer. If the water will still drain to the body of water (e.g., if there is a culvert beneath the road), then yes, it can be counted as a buffer.

**Scenario 2:** If the trees are planted within 300 feet of a stream but will not drain to the stream due to topography, should it be considered a buffer?

- No. The planting will not affect the water quality of that stream so it should not be considered a buffer.

**Scenario 3:** If the buffer is planted by other organizations, should it be reported?

- Yes. Report these as both a tree planting and riparian buffer establishment. In the comments section, include the organization's name and the year planted. If you do not know the year it was planted, your best guess is fine.

**Scenario 4:** If the buffer is an older buffer, should it be reported?

- Report buffers (either planted or naturally regenerated) that appear 15 years old or younger. As of 2023, the Chesapeake Bay Model only tracks buffers that are 15 years old or younger.

## Urban Buffer Guidance

**Is there a width and TPA requirement?**

- For all buffers (both Urban and Rural), a 35-foot-width minimum is required. If the buffer is wider than 35 feet in some places and narrower in others, an average of 35 feet wide will still qualify as a buffer.
- For urban buffers, a 12 x 12 spacing is recommended, with a maximum allowable planting density of 10 x 10 or 435 trees per acre.

**What about buffers under 35 feet wide?**

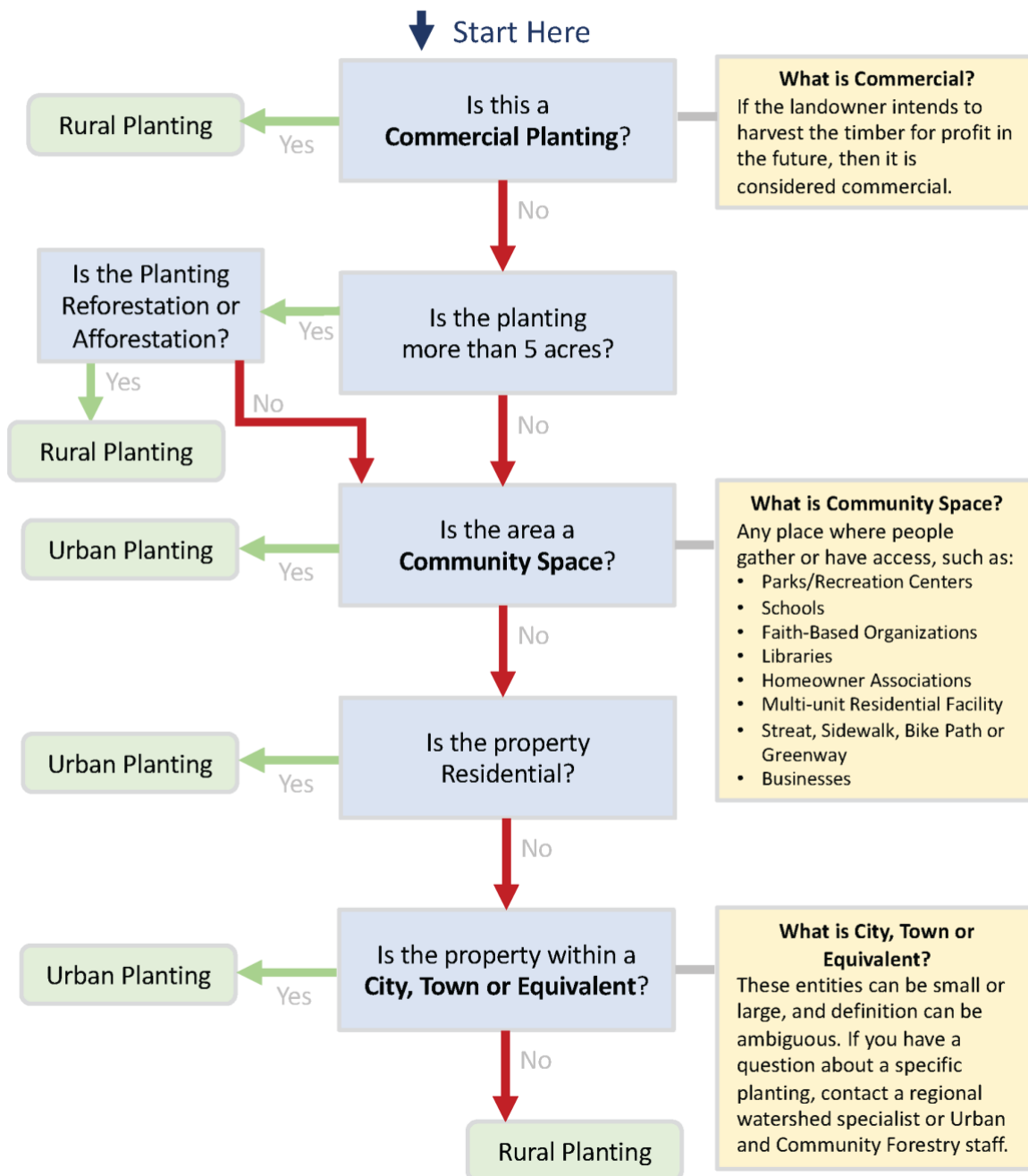
- For buffers that do not meet the 35-foot-width requirement, still report them as a Riparian Forest Buffer **but include the actual width in the comments.**



## Urban vs. Rural Planting

Use the following flowchart to decide whether a particular planting should be classified as a Rural or Urban project. Download this flow chart from the Watershed program page of the Intranet.

### Urban vs. Rural Planting Determination Flow Chart



Created by the Watershed Program Team

10/19/2023

## Reporting Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program Re-Enrollment Projects

**Scenario 1:** It is a Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) project that was never previously recorded or mapped in IFRIS.

- Map the tract and stand and record in IFRIS.
- **Accomplishment Type:** Rural Tree Planting and Riparian Buffer Establishment
- **Remarks:** CREP Re-enrollment – Planted in “year planted”

**Scenario 2:** It is a CREP project that has been mapped in IFRIS and is eligible for re-enrollment with no needed management activities (i.e., can be re-enrolled “as is”).

- **Accomplishment Type:** Seedling Survival Exam (Re-inspection)
- **Remarks:** CREP Re-enrollment – Planted in “year planted”

**Scenario 3:** It is a CREP project that has been mapped in IFRIS and requires some management work to re-enroll (e.g., may require invasive species treatment, additional tree planting or other management work.)

- **Accomplishment Type:** Seedling Survival Exam (Re-inspection)
- **Remarks:** CREP Re-enrollment – planted in “year planted” Partial Planting Needed

If the landowner decides to plant additional trees to re-enroll:

- Develop a planting plan for the area.
- **Accomplishment Type:** Open Field Planting Exam
- **Remarks:** CREP Re-enrollment – Partial Planting Needed

Once the site has been planted, enter:

- **Accomplishment Type:** Rural Tree Planting and Riparian Buffer Establishment
- **Remarks:** CREP Re-enrollment, Portion Replanted

\*Record any additional management work that is completed in the CREP area, such as site preparation, invasive species management, etc.

**Scenario 4:** It is a CREP project that has been mapped in IFRIS and is eligible for re-enrollment; the landowner decides not to re-enroll but will keep the existing buffer and fences in place.

- **Accomplishment Type:** Seedling Survival Exam (Re-inspection)
- **Remarks:** CREP – planted in “year planted”, will not re-enroll, buffer will remain in place

**Scenario 5:** It is a CREP project that has been mapped in IFRIS and is not eligible for re-enrollment, and the landowner decides not to re-enroll.

- **Accomplishment Type:** Seedling Survival Exam (Re-inspection)
- **Remarks:** CREP – planted in “year planted,” ineligible to re-enroll

**Scenario 6:** It is a CREP project that has been mapped and a portion of the total area is eligible for re-enrollment. The landowner may have the option to enroll the eligible acres (partial re-enrollment)

- **Accomplishment Type:** Seedling Survival Exam (Re-inspection)
- **Remarks:** CREP – planted in “year planted,” partial re-enrollment

For additional buffer reporting and establishment guidance, please refer to Policy and Procedure 7-4 Rural Forestry Technical Procedures located in the employee section of the DOF website at: [https://dof.virginia.gov/wp-content/uploads/PP\\_07-004\\_rural-forestry-technical-procedures.pdf](https://dof.virginia.gov/wp-content/uploads/PP_07-004_rural-forestry-technical-procedures.pdf)

## Watershed Team Contacts

---

For additional assistance with reporting buffers, contact your respective Watershed Specialist.

**Western Region:** Bill Sweeney, [bill.sweeney@virginia.dof.gov](mailto:bill.sweeney@virginia.dof.gov), 540-529-8549

**Central Region:** Patti Nylander, [patricia.nylander@virginia.dof.gov](mailto:patricia.nylander@virginia.dof.gov), 434-962-8172

**Eastern Region:** Meghan Mulroy-Goldman, [meghan.mulroy@virginia.dof.gov](mailto:meghan.mulroy@virginia.dof.gov), 434-422-6503

**Watershed Program Manager:** Caitlin Verdu, [caitlin.verdu@dof.virginia.gov](mailto:caitlin.verdu@dof.virginia.gov), 434 987-2940