



****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****

June 28, 2024

\$1.57 Million Grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to Advance Climate-Smart Conservation

[FREDERICKSBURG, VA] – Friends of the Rappahannock is thrilled to announce that the Rappahannock River Roundtable and York River Steward have been awarded \$1,573,102.05 from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF). This Innovative Nutrient and Sediment Reduction grant funding comes from the Chesapeake Bay Stewardship Fund which is a partnership of the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Chesapeake Bay Program.

The Rappahannock River Roundtable was established to accelerate the pace and scale of land and water conservation across the Rappahannock River watershed. From the Blue Ridge Mountains to the Chesapeake Bay. This new grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) will not only build significant and lasting capacity to continue our regional conservation partnership but will also provide essential funding and resources to our multiple conservation partners who implement high-priority projects on our working landscapes across the region.

This funding will be utilized to scale up climate-smart conservation Best Management Practices (BMPs) to protect and restore water quality by expanding the capacity of the partners and programs of the Rappahannock River Roundtable and York River Steward. Working with regional conservation partners, this project will build and deliver a suite of financial incentives to landowners and agricultural producers to complement existing cost-share programs in the region. This will include the development of a pilot program to incentivize a “Trees for Shade” silvopasture program, accelerate the adoption of riparian buffer and afforestation practices, and adoption of additional conservation BMPs on working farmland and rural landscapes.

“This grant is a testament to the incredible partnerships here in the Rappahannock River watershed.” Daria Christian, Executive Director with Friends of the Rappahannock. “Advancing climate-smart conservation opportunities is essential to achieving our water quality goals and ensuring our watershed has healthy and sustainable farms, forests, and fisheries.”

The Virginia Phase III Watershed Implementation Plan (WIP) was created in 2018 and lays out a framework for achieving the pollution reductions needed to meet water quality standards in the Chesapeake Bay portion of Virginia. This framework includes sub-watershed-specific targets for different types of Best Management Practices (BMPs) that address excess problematic pollutants nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediments that enter our rivers and streams and cause significant problems for fish, wildlife, public health, and our economy.

The Rappahannock and York Rivers have dedicated chapters outlining specific targets for BMPs, including multiple types of tree-planting projects across our landscapes. The WIP calls for over 7 million trees to be planted across our communities and working landscapes.

To find innovative opportunities to expand tree planting opportunities and advance climate-smart projects, we are excited to work alongside American Farmland Trust and the Virginia Cooperative Extension to pilot a new “Trees for Shade” silvopasture program which helps agricultural producers who graze livestock, establish new shade for their herds as well as optimize rotational grazing opportunities. This will include financial incentives, landowner and producer workshops, and will establish 50+ acres of new silvopasture.

“Silvopasture is a real opportunity to meet multiple objectives from myriad perspectives,” said Adam Downing Extension Forester with the Virginia Cooperative Extension. “From livestock farmers looking for ways to mitigate heat stress to those who know Silvopasture systems exponentially increase habitat and carbon sequestration, thus mitigating environmental stressors. We look forward to collaborating on this project.”

Working with the Virginia Department of Forestry (DOF), Soil and Water Conservation Districts, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Piedmont Environmental Council, contractors, and volunteers, this project will plant over 100,000 trees including 150 acres of riparian buffers and 150 acres of afforestation.

“It is wonderful to see this energy and new resources coming to much-needed riparian forest buffers and tree planting efforts,” said Caitlin Verdu, Watershed Program Manager for the Virginia Department of Forestry. “Trees are the answer to cleaner water for Virginians, and we are excited to continue to partner to support this tremendous work.”

Working with our land conservation partners, this project will pilot a revolving incentives fund to support high-priority land conservation in the Rappahannock River watershed. These projects will focus on the protection of properties with riparian corridors and wetlands to maximize conservation values. This project aims to prioritize and protect over 1300 acres of conservation easements.

"We are excited to advance the collaborative approach of the Rappahannock River Roundtable," said Chris Miller, President of The Piedmont Environmental Council. "As an organization with decades of experience working with landowners and managing complex

conservation projects, we will leverage our expertise to support the riparian conservation incentives provided by this grant and accelerate land conservation in the upper Rappahannock watershed."

The project will kick off following the 2024 Rappahannock River Symposium which is scheduled for October 16, 2024, in Fredericksburg, Virginia. Hosted by the Roundtable, this is the premier event for Rappahannock River conservation partners to hear updates on the health of the Rappahannock River, showcase new opportunities, share case studies and new research, and foster partnerships from all those who collaborate to further regional conservation efforts.

Interested in planting trees on your property? The multiple partners of Rappahannock River Roundtable and York River Steward currently have resources available to plant trees in your local community, on your residential lot, at your school and local parks, on your farm, and more. For more information, please contact info@rappahannockroundtable.org

Interested in learning how your organization can get involved with this project? Please contact shernita@rappahannockroundtable.org

About Friends of the Rappahannock

Friends of the Rappahannock is a non-profit organization dedicated to the protection and restoration of the Rappahannock River and its watershed. Through education, advocacy, and hands-on conservation, they work to preserve this vital natural resource for future generations.

Contact Information

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