

## **Holistic Approach to Water Quality Improvements and Landscape-Scale Conservation**

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*Sometimes it's helpful to take a look at examples of how other orgs have crafted their proposals.*

*The Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley and the Piedmont Environmental Council are not single-issue organizations, nor are they thought of as traditional water quality-focused organizations. Both organizations have used water quality, however, as a unifier to build partnership to accelerate landscape scale conservation goals, from easements to public access. Both organizations have also used fairly "traditional" funding tools to accelerate their work.*

*Here are examples of grant narratives for water quality-focused funding sources that achieve multiple conservation purposes.*

### **Funder: Chesapeake Bay Funders Network & Land Trust Alliance**

*Organization: Shenandoah Forum (Alliance legacy group)*

*Funding amount: \$30,000*

*Project: Shenandoah Valley Conservation Collaborative*

The Shenandoah Valley Conservation Collaborative brings together eight local organizations in the Shenandoah Valley to accelerate conservation and restoration of lands most important for water quality, prime farm soils and historic battlefields. In 2017, the Collaborative used Land and Water Initiative funding to identify and prioritize their top ten properties for conservation and restoration in two Valley counties. In the coming year, they will pursue conservation actions on these properties where land protection will best maintain good/very good/pristine water quality or where restoration will measurably improve impaired/poor/very poor water quality.

### **Funder: National Fish and Wildlife Foundation - Innovative Nutrient and Sediment Reduction Grant. (2018)**

*Organization: Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley*

*Funding amount: \$ 996,620.00*

*Project: Scaling Up Agricultural Best Practices Through the Shenandoah Valley Conservation Collaborative*

The Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley will recruit 90 landowners and implement a combined 106 miles of livestock exclusion fencing and 490 acres of riparian buffers. Project will leverage a regional backbone organization, existing partnerships, local government, and enhanced coordination with technical assistance professionals to accelerate the scale of best management practice implementation. Water quality cost-share practices in the

Shenandoah Valley are delivered primarily through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Soil and Water Conservation District (Districts). Currently, local NRCS field offices do not have enough capacity to support landowners who are ready to install water quality practices. Additionally, local Districts do not have structured outreach to recruit new landowners. Project will 1) conduct strategic outreach to landowners to secure land protection on lands with the highest potential impact to protect and restore water quality in six counties; 2) develop a revolving loan fund program to cover landowners transaction costs; 3) recruit an estimated 90 new landowners for participation; and 4) close the gap between 75% to 90% costs of a practice covered. Additionally, partnership with local NRCS offices will increase capacity to make greater NRCS staff assistance possible in training new District hires.

**Funder: National Fish and Wildlife Foundation - Innovative Nutrient and Sediment Reduction Grant. (2022)**

*Organization: Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley*

*Funding amount: \$ \$ 999,987.57*

*Project: Smith Creek Watershed Partnership: a Targeted Approach in a Showcase Watershed*

The ultimate goal of the Smith Creek Watershed Partnership is to delist Smith Creek from Virginia DEQ's list of impaired waters. This project will build on 11 years of partnership between federal and state agencies, local and regional nonprofits, and citizen stakeholders to expand the prevalence, stewardship, and effectiveness of water quality best management practices.

Demonstration farms in the Smith Creek watershed will exemplify best management practices and recruit advocates, mentors, and new adopters of practices within the agricultural community. Efforts to restore riparian areas and address bacterial and macroinvertebrate impairments will be combined with an innovative focus on upland management practices to retain and filter nutrients in response to a 2016 report by the United States Geological Survey that identified groundwater springs as the primary sources of nitrogen in Smith Creek. We will maximize water quality benefit per dollar invested by targeting our efforts using data from a decade of intensive water quality monitoring in the watershed. In addition, we will evaluate opportunities to replicate this highly focused and collaborative approach elsewhere in our region. This project will improve the outcomes of several NFWF-funded initiatives, where partners are working to strengthen place-based collaboration in the Shenandoah Valley, develop innovative conservation finance strategies, and build healthy soils and resilient farms.

**Program: USDA Regional Conservation Partnership Program (2022)**

Increasing Landscape Resiliency in Virginia's Top Producing Agricultural Region

Lead Partner: Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley

Award: \$4,596,125

The goal of the Increasing Landscape Resiliency in Virginia's Top Producing Agricultural Region project is to preserve working family farms and increase climate resiliency in one of our nation's most iconic landscapes. In Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, only 60 miles from the Capital Beltway, pressure to convert farmland to residential and commercial development is constant. Project partners plan to use the results of a rigorous modeling effort to target conservation easement funding to parcels with the highest conservation value. The partnership includes the Black Family Land Trust, an entity uniquely equipped to help secure the participation of historically underserved landowners.

**Funder: Chesapeake Bay Funders Network - Land & Water Initiative (2017)**

*Organization:* Piedmont Environmental Council (PEC)

*Funding amount:* \$18,000 - project specific

*Project:* Gap Financing for Water Quality Improvements in Goose Creek Watershed

PEC requested funding to develop a revolving loan program to encourage and accelerate adoption of Agriculture Best Management Practices (BMPs) in the Upper Goose Creek watershed. The focus was on expediting fencing and riparian buffer projects that will deliver significant nutrient and sediment reduction benefits. The Soil & Water Conservation District is working with several landowners for whom the up-front costs for BMPs pose a financial hardship. Funding supported the development of mechanisms and a prioritization system for a revolving loan program to overcome this obstacle.

**Funder: National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) - Small Watershed Grant (2021)**

*Organization:* PEC

*Funding amount:* - project specific funding and staff funding support

*Project:* Integrating Conservation Easements for Clean Water and Enhanced Habitat in the Upper Rappahannock and Potomac Watersheds in Virginia

The project will focus on creating and restoring riparian buffers and implementing agricultural BMPs such as livestock exclusion fencing through organizing headwater stream tree plantings, facilitating new and updated conservation easements with riparian buffers, and providing gap funding to fully cover landowners' cost for BMPs.

Specific deliverables include planting 80 acres of riparian buffers in two watersheds with partners; 10 new conservation easements with riparian buffers of a minimum of 35' width; update 2 existing easements with poor/non-existent riparian buffer language; gap-funding to expedite agricultural BMPs; and outreach, education, and volunteer participation.

**Funder: Private foundation (2021)**

*Organization:* PEC

*Funding amount:* \$21,250 - staff funding

*Project:* Restoring Riparian Buffers in the Upper Potomac Watershed in Virginia

Project will restore riparian buffers and expand private land conservation on rural lands with water resources in three counties in the Potomac River watershed through collaboration with partners.

Specific deliverables include co-creation of a tree planting initiative in the watershed with a variety of partners; restore 35'+ riparian buffers on 6 acres through streamside plantings; restore 35'+ riparian buffers on 4 acres through completing new and updated conservation easements with riparian buffer protections; and monitor riparian buffer planting sites before/after project and report results.