

**New York City Department of Environmental Protection
Bureau of Water Supply**

**Stream Management Program
Proposed Metrics for Evaluation of the Delaware County
CSBI/CREP Pilot Program**

November 2018

*Prepared in accordance with Section 4.6 of the NYSDOH
2017 Filtration Avoidance Determination*



Prepared by: DEP, Bureau of Water Supply

Introduction

This report provides a status of the Delaware County CREP/CSBI Pilot Program administered by the Delaware County Soil and Water Conservation District (DCSWCD) and the Watershed Agricultural Council (WAC) and proposes an initial set of Evaluation Metrics for the pilot program that will provide the basis for evaluation in November 2019, as required by the 2017 Filtration Avoidance Determination (FAD). The Evaluation Metrics have been developed by an interagency committee comprising representatives from DCSWCD, WAC, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA), NYSDOH, USEPA, and DEP. The NYSDEC was also invited to participate in this process.

Background

This new pilot program began in November 2017 following extensive discussions with watershed stakeholders and FAD regulators; it is intended to evaluate the potential for merging the federal Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) and the City-funded Catskill Streams Buffer Initiative (CSBI) on fallow agricultural riparian properties in Delaware County.

The CSBI was originally developed in 2009 under the auspices of DEP's Stream Management Program (SMP) to provide a CREP-like program for non-agricultural properties and thereby address an identified gap in riparian buffer enhancement programming. A New York State FSA policy amendment in 2016 enabled fallow agricultural properties to participate in the CREP if they meet eligibility criteria. Following this rule change, DCSWCD and WAC proposed a pilot program to merge the complementary elements of the CREP and CSBI. In this merger, the CREP provides rental payments to landowners and the CSBI provides the local cost share for participation in the CREP; the CREP funds initial plant materials, and the CSBI provides additional plant materials enabling wider buffers and/or a greater planting density. The CREP/CSBI Pilot Program is a requirement of the 2017 FAD and further defined in the 2017 FAD Stakeholder Agreement.

Status

DCSWCD and WAC entered into a memorandum of agreement (MOA) in November 2017 that formalized joint administration of the pilot program and defines the roles and responsibilities of both parties, as well as DEP. The MOA enabled DCSWCD to provide City funding from its SMP contract (DEL-406) to WAC for the purpose of hiring a planner for the duration of the pilot program. WAC hired this planner in autumn 2017.

Also in autumn 2017, DCSWCD and WAC identified an initial set of landowners for inclusion in the pilot based on the characteristics of their riparian properties and their common location within one tributary (the East Brook in Walton). Five landowners were invited to participate and four signed contracts with the FSA. Planting plans have been developed for these properties, and they will be implemented in spring 2018. (Future contracts are contingent on Congressional reauthorization of the federal Farm Bill, which funds the CREP.)

In winter 2018, the WAC distributed a survey to watershed landowners in Delaware County who own land between active farming operations to introduce the pilot program and identify level of interest. The survey was mailed to 489 landowners and returned by 187, for a participant response rate of 38%. Key findings of the survey include:

- Eighty-four percent of respondents (135 landowners) were either interested in the program or stated that they needed more information before making a decision.
- The survey results suggest a revised estimate of 762 acres available to enroll in the Delaware County CREP/CSBI Pilot Program based upon the number of properties with streams, un-forested streambanks, and interest in the program.

Evaluation Metrics

Beginning in spring of 2018, DEP convened an interagency committee of watershed partners and FAD regulators to collaboratively develop proposed metrics for evaluating the Delaware County CREP/CSBI Pilot Program pursuant to the requirements of the 2017 FAD. The interagency committee met several times throughout the summer and established two broad goals that the evaluation will attempt to achieve:

- Determine the level of landowner interest in CREP/CSBI partnership projects and the characteristics of parcels of interested landowners.
- Determine the process for CREP/CSBI collaboration.

The resulting Evaluation Metrics are proposed below for review and approval by the FAD regulators; these proposed metrics identify the information that will be collected and tracked in the coming year by WAC and DCSWCD to achieve the goals established for the pilot program evaluation and to enable possible improvements if the CREP/CSBI partnership is extended beyond the pilot program and/or beyond Delaware County.

CREP/CSBI Pilot Program Proposed Evaluation Metrics

Goal 1: Determine the level of landowner interest in CREP/CSBI partnership projects and characteristics of parcels of interested landowners.

Metrics:

- 1) Based on remote sensing, the estimated number of potentially eligible acres.
- 2) Based on remote sensing and the landowner survey, the estimated number and range of acres of interested landowners.
- 3) Prioritize and select potential areas based on sub-basin, proximity to current/legacy farms, soil loss/erosion potential, etc., as identified from landowner survey.
- 4) For the landowners selected in high priority areas, the estimated area or linear feet of instability and invasive species present.

- 5) For responders of the initial survey who submitted their contact information, a second in-depth survey will be sent out with specific information pertaining to the program. The survey will have a goal of reaching a 45% response rate (approximately 55 individuals). Their responses will be tracked for the purpose of better understanding the obstacles to participation.

- 6) Based on the prioritizing of sub-basins and second survey results, one-to-one contact will be made with at least (15) individuals within the prioritized sub-basins. Different types of outreach can be used depending on the preference of the landowner (phone, email, face-to-face). If there are insufficient landowners in the priority areas, landowners from the survey outside the priority areas can also be contacted. This will track landowners' ultimate decisions on how, or if, they will participate in the program (enroll in CREP-CSBI, CSBI, or not enroll). Information collected from this more in-depth survey, and from subsequent one-on-one conversations will be used to improve future outreach.

Goal 2: Determine the process for CREP/CSBI collaboration.

Metrics:

- 1) Components of CREP and CSBI programs that were or will be implemented. Of the projects that were completed or are in design, how many project have or will have:
 - a. Riparian Corridor Management Plans (RCMPs)
 - b. Increased planting densities through CSBI
 - c. Increased buffer width/size through CSBI
 - d. Ongoing invasive species mitigation through CSBI
 - e. Each type of maintenance and why
 - f. What plant sizes are used, and from what sources
 - g. Feet of instability addressed

In a narrative summary, potentially with case studies, qualitatively assess which program components worked well together versus which did not.

- 2) List of program constraints/limiting factors (e.g., time necessary for each administrative step in process, landowner indecision).

- 3) Funds contributed from the federal government; funds contributed from DEP via CSBI.

- 4) Number of acres and/or linear feet planted. Number of acres of invasive species receiving treatment. Linear feet stabilized if part of pilot.

- 5) Where used, herbicide use is tracked and reported:

- a. Begin to monitor efficacy of maintenance options (i.e., herbicide versus mowing, versus weed mats, etc.).
 - b. Track the number of landowners who elect for each type of maintenance and why (i.e., herbicide, mowing, weed mats, etc.).
- 6) Estimated number of contracts a planner can implement per year, with details on the nature of contracts (e.g., planting only versus planting and invasive species or bank instability work).
- 7) Number of landowners following Operations and Maintenance Agreements for the length of the Pilot Program.