Ecosystem-Based Management Pilot

Jefferson County Soil and Water Conservation District

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Sandy Creek Conservation Buffer Systems

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Sandy Creeks Demonstration Project Area

The Sandy Creeks watershed geographic area is made up of four drainage areas on the eastern shore of Lake Ontario in northern New York State. These include: Stony Creek, Sandy Creek, South Sandy Creek and Little Sandy Creek. The upper reaches of the watershed include the forested landscapes of the Tug Hill Plateau and then transition to lowland fields, which support numerous dairy farms, and eventually drain to one of the most significant freshwater marshes in the Eastern Great Lakes. The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) considers this area to be "one of the most intact landscapes in the state with thousands of miles of rivers and streams, complex drainage patterns, and a regionally important sole source aquifer."

The Sandy Creeks watershed has been identified as a priority area by the Jefferson County Soil and Water Conservation District since 1997. The Jefferson County portion of this watershed has over 200 farms, 12 of them being large farms regulated under the CAFO permit program. The NYSDEC has listed the lower portion of the Sandy Creeks watershed on their Priority Waterbodies List as being impacted from nutrients and sediments. This list targets agriculture as a source of these impairments.

The Priority Waterbodies List has classified both the Sandy Creek and Stony Creek as "stressed" waterbodies. Nutrients, silt and sediment are suspected pollutants of the waterbody. Rapid thermal changes due to the lack of streambank vegetation are also a possible reason the waterbody is considered stressed. Agriculture, streambank erosion, and municipal treatment plants are also suspected sources. All of these negatively impact the large fish population living and breeding within the steam corridor.

The Sandy Creeks Pilot Project seeks to improve the water quality in the headwaters by installing preventative measures. This project provides funding for riparian buffers which will reduce streambank erosion, shade the channel (leading to lower water temperatures), filter any field runoff, and remove animal traffic from this area.

Pilot Project Objectives

Conservation buffers are a core conservation practice recognized under the New York State AEM (Agricultural Environmental Management) program and several USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) Farm Bill Programs. Buffers help to filter pollutants, provide fish and wildlife habitat, improve water quality and contribute to a healthy watershed. Buffers are most effective when planned and implemented as part of a comprehensive conservation system or a CNMP (Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan).

The Ecosystem Based Management (EBM) approach in cooperation with the NYS AEM Program will result in planned systems that will advance buffers on cropland and pastureland to maximize potential environmental benefits. This process will demonstrate that Soil and Water Conservation Districts and the AEM program are effective methods of delivering the Ecosystem Based Management program. It is important to state that AEM is a voluntary, incentive-based program that helps farmers operate environmentally sound and economically viable businesses. Farmers utilize AEM to address water quality concerns originating from agricultural activity by planning, implementing and evaluating conservation systems. The approach is divided into five tiers and currently over 12,000 farms in NYS are engaged in the AEM program.

New York State has an agreement with the United States Department of Agriculture providing Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) funding to install conservation buffers on farms in environmentally sensitive watersheds within 12 major basins in New York State. The program provides 50 percent cost-sharing for buffer installation, which is a deterrent to large contiguous farm participation in the program. An ancillary goal of this project is to utilize CREP in combination with the planned Sandy Creek Conservation Buffer System Project. This partnership could maximize our opportunity to advance the water quality goals of the Sandy Creek watershed by offering increased cost sharing and the combination of NYS and federal funding sources.

Examples of conservation practices that serve as buffers include filter strips, riparian (streamside) forest buffers, contour buffer strips and grassed waterways. In pastures, for example, livestock will be excluded from buffers and streams by installing permanent fencing, provided an alternative water supply and granted limited access with stabilized stream crossings.

In addition to integrating riparian buffers into a comprehensive conservation plan for individual farms, this pilot will also provide an inventory and evaluation of existing buffers in the watershed. This baseline information will help guide the efforts of this pilot, as well as those of all future riparian protection efforts. Prior to the execution of this project, there was little documentation on the existence and quality of stream bank protection within the watershed. An assessment and mapping of the stream corridors will identify areas that would benefit from stream bank buffer implementation. This information will be used to target farm participation for the goals of this project.

Outline of Objectives and Tasks

Objective 1: Watershed Buffer Inventory and Evaluation

Tasks:

a. Inventory watershed streams and identify impairments. Utilize partners in the watershed and existing data.

b. Evaluate existing buffers— natural and implemented.

c. Prioritize impacted stream segments.

d. Develop a watershed map that prioritizes where implementation efforts should be targeted.

Objective 2: Utilize Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) process to deliver Ecosystem Based Management program

Task:

a. Demonstrate the AEM program as an effective tool to deliver an ecosystem based management approach on farms and identify changes in AEM that may be needed.

Objective 3: Implement Conservation Buffer Systems on Farms

Tasks:

a. Develop an AEM Tier 3a Resource Management Plan for each participating farm
b. Install conservation buffer systems and integrate new techniques, such as root propagation method (RPM), to enhance survivability of riparian forest buffers on 50% of the implemented acres.
c. Maximize funding support for implementation of buffers by combining USDA Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) dollars and EBM funding.
d. Install upland conservation treatments where appropriate to maintain buffer integrity.
e. Install practices consistent with USDA Standards and Specifications.

Objective 4: Assess Economic Impacts of Riparian Buffers to Agriculture

Task:

a. Partner with Cornell Cooperative Extension to study economic impacts.

Objective 5: Education and Outreach

Tasks:

a. Identify barriers to implementing buffers and methods to overcome barriers
b. Promote the benefits of conservation buffers to farmers
c. Garner local partner support
d. Increase public understanding and support
e. Link conservation buffer promotion with ongoing AEM efforts

Summary of Work Completed

Objective 1: Watershed Buffer Inventory and Evaluation

The Jefferson County Soil and Water Conservation District in cooperation with the New York State Tug Hill Commission entered in to a contractual agreement with the Upper Susquehanna Coalition (USC) as part of the ongoing efforts to gather empirical data on the Sandy Creek Watershed. The purpose of the study was to conduct a geomorphic inventory and evaluation of the stream and attempt to differentiate between natural processes in action and accelerated levels of human caused erosion in the 20-mile target area of the stream channel.

As a result of this study, the USC inventoried a total of 20 stream miles and identified 28 eroding stream sites. Details of each site were mapped and inventoried, including 13 sites on Sandy Creek and fifteen on North Sandy Creek. Although approximately the same number of eroding sites were recorded for both Sandy Creek and North Sandy Creek, the study determined that North Sandy Creek had a much higher rate of erosion based on sediment loading. However, sediment loading in the upper reaches was determined to be from natural causes associated with the steep valley walls and minimal development in the area. In the lower reaches, the study found a lack of woody vegetation along the stream reach. This is most likely the result of intensive farming in the past. In addition, the soil texture and layering found in the North Sandy Creek area allow for more erosion to occur.

A further study of the stream reaches and farm records showed that prior to this pilot there were no existing implemented buffers on farms in the watershed. While some areas did have natural buffers in place, farms had yet to adopt riparian buffers as a conservation practice. As expected, this presented a significant need for on-farm implementation. The Conservation District then partnered with other local farm support agencies in the County to develop a list of priority factors to assist in the selection process. The methodology for site selection was as follows:

- Areas where there is a visible water quality impairment
- Areas in close proximity to agricultural facilities or residential structures
- Areas that would create contiguous buffers or wildlife corridors
- Areas in close proximity to transportation structures
- Suspected areas of high nutrient loading
- Suspected areas of high soil loss

Based on this criteria and the empirical data collected from farm records, the Jefferson County Conservation District targeted six high priority farms where riparian buffers would provide stream protection, public recognition and enhance existing environmental protection efforts by advancing a system approach to on-farm stream protection.

Objective 2: Utilize Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) process to deliver Ecosystem Based Management program

Jefferson County Conservation District has been utilizing the AEM process since 1997. Over this time period the AEM process has become essential to the daily operations at the Conservation District. New farms are inventoried and assessed under Tier 1 and Tier 2 and current conservation practices are documented. If concerns are noticed on the farm during the initial assessment they are documented and prioritized so that both the producer, as well as, the Conservation District has a list for future projects. From there a detailed plan can be developed, if the participant is willing, and conservation measures can be taken.

When EBM funds for riparian buffers were made available, the Jefferson County District already had a list of farms within the Sandy Creek watershed where stream bank erosion was noted as a concern. Using this list and the priority areas determined by the USC Stream Team, along with an interdisciplinary team of the Conservation District, the Natural Resource Conservation Service and Farm Service Agency, project participants were selected. Several were already AEM participants, having completed Tier IV implementation projects in the past, and were interested in participating in additional environmental improvement projects. All farms completed the Tier 2 Streambank Assessment as part of this project. Centerdale Farm was new to the AEM process and therefore completed the Tier 1 inventory and Tier 2 assessments for the entire farm, in addition to the Stream Bank Assessment worksheet. The information gathered from each farm was then used to develop individual Tier 3 conservation plans for riparian forest buffers. A Tier 3 plan addresses the resource concern by looking at all the related factors. For instance, when planning a buffer several factors need to be examined, including existing vegetation, the situation of adjacent upland fields, livestock access, etc. This information will determine the size and location need to effectively buffer a stream. It also addresses additional practices that may be needed to complement a buffer. For instance, if there is a high level of erosion occurring on adjacent upland fields, this may overwhelm the buffer unless additional soil conserving practices are implemented on the upland fields.

The AEM process helped to target the efficient use of EBM funds by providing a comprehensive approach to riparian concerns. The AEM process not only identified areas that would benefit from conservation buffers, but also identified related practices that, if left unimplemented, could compromise the lasting benefits of the buffer. In addition to installing riparian buffers, this project also promoted the continued implementation of conservation practices. Each farm that received aide through this program can now move on and prepare to tackle the next pollution concern on its list.

Objective 3: Implement Conservation Buffer Systems on Farms

The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) has been available to targeted watersheds on a statewide basis in New York since 2003. Originally, this program aimed to implement 40,000 acres of conservation buffers on agricultural land over a 10 year period. However, at the halfway point of the program, the acreage enrolled was far below the anticipated level of participation. Surveys of local partners identified several factors as contributors to the lack of interest by farmers. These included practice installation caps (aimed at 50% of practice cost) that were set far below true practice costs, inflexible program guidelines which often made installation of buffers a hindrance to farm operations and the overall complexity of the program.

The Sandy Creeks Conservation Buffer Systems pilot proposed to go beyond the traditional boundaries of existing riparian buffer programs by focusing on complete systems, offering financial assistance comparable to those in the New York City and Skaneateles Lake watersheds (where the CREP program offers 100 percent

cost-share) and financial assistance for complementary practices necessary to adapt conservation buffers into the operational plan for each farm. In addition, the Conservation District served as a facilitator to assist farmers in understanding the opportunities and limitations of all funding sources available. As a result, six farms each received individualized assistance that helped them implement a riparian buffer system into their current farm operational plan.

As an additional part of this pilot, the Conservation District received approval from the USDA Farm Service Agency and Natural Resource Conservation Service to use RPM trees for buffer implementation. Prior to this pilot, the Farm Service Agency only allowed for tree seedlings to be used. Using tree seedlings is labor intensive, as standards require a planting rate of 436 seedlings per acre to take into account the 60% survivability rate of this young stock. The RPM trees were approved for use for this pilot at a planting rate of 50 trees per acre, with a survivability rate expected at 90% and evaluation following the first year after planting.

Summary of Individual Farm Implementation:

Ber-Bon Farm is a dairy farm that incorporated a stream buffer into a portion of their pasture. As part of this pilot, livestock was excluded free access to the stream to reduce pathogens. Fencing was installed, as well as, a cattle crossing which is designed to allow cows to cross to adjacent pasture area, but does not allow them to congregate in the stream. Since free access was eliminated, a watering facility was implemented as an alternative to cows drinking directly from the stream. Two buffer areas were created totaling 18.4 acres.

This was the first farm implemented. The riparian buffer was planted with 800 RPM trees and 1400 tree seedlings. The RPM trees had a survivability rate of near 100%, while the seedlings did very poor by comparison. As a result of this outstanding success, the NYS Farm Service State Committee approved RPM trees for all CREP projects in the Sandy Creeks watershed.

The total cost of the Ber-Bon Farm conservation buffer system was $50,851.25. Reimbursement from federal funding through the Farm Service Agency was $14,360.25. All practices on the Ber-Bon Farm were CREP eligible, therefore the CREP reimbursement rate reinforces claims that the federal program averages fall far below (less than 30%) the targeted 50% reimbursement rate for CREP eligible practices.

Centerdale Farm (Hawthorne) is a beef operation with a stream area that borders a small area of the pasture, located along State Highway 126. This farm was considered a high priority for this pilot due to the close proximity of the livestock to the stream. Significant time was needed to develop a buffer conservation plan with Mr. Hawthorne that would be compatible with his pasture management plan. Centerdale Farm was eligible to enroll in the CREP program but required an additional laneway that was not eligible under CREP to allow his cows access to additional pasture areas once the fencing was installed. Without funding for this additional practice, the farm would not have been willing to implement the buffer system.

Similar to Ber-Bon Farm, Centerdale installed fencing to exclude cattle free access to the stream. Centerdale Farm also installed an alternative water supply system to provide fresh water to livestock once the fencing was installed. Due to the layout of the property, a stream crossing was not required, however a laneway was needed to create a new access path to upper pasture areas.

The actual buffer area needed for Centerdale Farm was only 1.4 acres. Following the new guidelines of the Farm Service Agency, strictly RPM trees were used for the buffer establishment. The buffer required 144 trees to be planted, and 600 feet of fencing to exclude livestock from the stream. The total project cost for this farm was $55,126.00.

Although the buffer area needed on Centerdale Farm was small, this area was heavily used by livestock. Fencing the cattle out of the buffer area not only improved water quality, but a follow-up evaluation of the system revealed that removing the livestock from this naturally wet area improved hoof conditions and udder health. The owner also believes that there was an accelerated increase in total body mass as animals now have better access to clean water in the pasture and as a result are spending more time feeding, providing an economic gain for the farm.

Porterdale Farm is a large dairy operation that was willing to go beyond the minimum requirements of their Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO) permit to protect water quality. As an active participant and recognized environmental steward (Jefferson County Conservation District's Farm of the Year recipient) the Porterdale Farm was willing to set aside cropland, as well as, pasture to establish a contiguous riparian buffer along their stream reach. Cropland contributes a much greater level of sediment loading to streams due to tillage practices that leave the soil exposed. Buffers between cropland and streams are highly desired environmentally, however, many farms are reluctant to convert cropland due to the economic value of the crops.

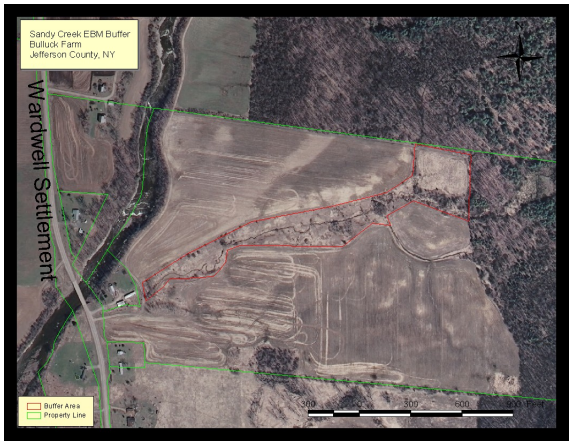
A total of 3.3 acres of cropland was converted to buffers on this farm. In addition, Porterdale also established another 4.8 acres of buffers along pasture land which will help reduce nutrient loading to the stream. Contiguous buffers, such as the one created on Porterdale Farm are a goal of the CREP and all State buffer initiatives. Contiguous buffers not only protect water quality but they also create wildlife habitat and corridors. Once mature, the trees planted will help to keep water temperatures cool and improve aquatic habitat as well.

A total of 484 RPM trees were planted on Porterdale Farm. Fencing and alternative water supplies were not needed on this farm. The total project cost for this farm was $14,786.00.

Toad Hollow Farm is a dairy operation that provided an opportunity to pilot CREP along with stream bank stabilization. A severely eroding stream bank made this farm ineligible for the CREP program. This situation is one of the pitfalls of the federal program as only areas with stable stream banks are eligible. Too often, stream bank stabilization and buffer installation are addressed as separate issues. This eliminates the most critical areas of sediment loading from the CREP program. The funding from this EBM pilot was able to demonstrate the success that can be achieved when these two concerns are addressed as part of one system.

Prior to buffer installation, the unstable stream bank was repaired. Fencing was then installed to exclude livestock access to the stream. Removing the livestock from the stream will help protect the stream banks from future erosion that the cows hooves create when climbing in and out of the stream. Since only a small portion of pasture was impacted by this problem, only 0.6 acres of buffer were needed to protect the newly renovated stream bank. In addition to the stream stabilization work, 1,700 feet of fencing was installed and 82 RPM trees were planted. The total project cost for this farm was $8,333.00. Funding from the CREP program was not available for this farm and therefore no cost-share or annual rental payments are available to the farmer.

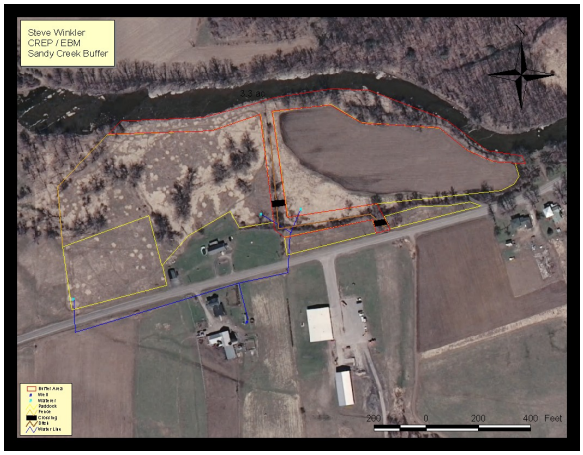
The Bullock Farm is a beef operation that is located outside the CREP eligible area, but is still within the Sandy Creeks watershed as defined by the EBM program. Although they were eligible for the Conservation Reserve Program, the rental payments provided by this program are considerably less than those provided by CREP, which makes buffer practices less attractive to farms. Despite the reduced long-term rental payments, the additional cost-share funding from the EBM program was enough of an incentive for the Bullock Farm to participate.



Similar to Toad Hollow Farm, the Bullock Farm did not require fencing to exclude livestock from the stream. The buffer was established on 9.5 acres using RPM trees. A total of 560 trees were planted along the stream bank on both sides of the stream, creating a complete buffer in this area. The total project cost was $16,720.00 with $7,900.00 being contributed from the CRP program. This farm provided a better understanding of the incentives needed to encourage buffer installation on farms. It indicates that higher implementation cost-share is more important than rental payments over the long-term.

The final farm to join this pilot was the **Winkler Farm**, a "Certified Natural" farm that raises a variety of livestock, including cows, hogs and chickens. In order to accommodate a conservation buffer system into their operational plan, several practices were needed. Fencing was needed to exclude the livestock from the stream

area, a stream crossing was necessary to allow livestock to access pasture areas on both sides of the stream and an alternative watering supply was necessary to provide a water source for the animals. In addition, a diversion was needed to direct upland water flows away from the livestock area. Fencing was needed to keep livestock out of the diversion area as well. The total buffer area established on this farm was 3.2 acres, however, it demonstrated the multiple practices that are often needed to create a conservation system that factors in the farm operation needs.



This buffer system required 5,500 feet of fencing to exclude livestock from the stream and diversion areas and 100 RPM trees to establish the riparian buffer. The total project cost associated with this buffer system was $49,830.00.

Objective 4: Assess Economic Impacts of Riparian Buffers to Agriculture

To determine the economic impact of installing conservation buffers on farms, the Conservation District partnered with Jefferson County Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE). This report examined both the direct and indirect value conservation buffers provide and adds a cost value to those benefits.

Using the calculations from this study and the payment schedule from the federal CREP program, it can be estimated that the total land value of the acres converted to buffers is $83,400.00. The annual rental payments for the duration of each farm participating in CREP/CRP total $33,183.50. For cropland, the value of the crop (corn silage) can be calculated at 18 tons/acre (average yield) with an average market value of $22.50. For farms such as Porterdale, this would equate to $1,336.50 of crops lost each year. Based on these figures alone, it is obvious that the federal rental payments are not adequately compensating farmers for the loss of their land. However, it further emphasizes that practice implementation cost-share is of greater concern than annual rental payments. Even with practice costs being fully funded, it is still economically disadvantageous for farmers to give up this land. As this pilot demonstrated, cost is not the only concern farmers have. Their awareness of environmental concerns and desire to be good stewards exceeds the monetary gains of federal programs. During these difficult economic times it is understandable that farmers are reluctant to pay for expensive conservation practices, particularly when they provide minimal economic gain to the farm. However, with financial assistance to fully cover installation costs, farmers are willing to enroll in buffer programs, but it can be concluded that long-term land rental payments to maintain the practices are not the selling feature.

The report form CCE also examines the environmental benefits of buffers. Water quality benefits from sediment and nutrient reductions are a direct benefit, but also improved flood control, wildlife habitat, and aesthetics can be attributed to stream buffers. While many of these are difficult to quantify, co-efficients developed for the CREP program can be used to quantify sediment and nutrient reductions for the pilot project. The NRCS National Resources Inventory estimates that the average annual sheet and rill erosion from cultivated cropland in New York is 3.9 tons/acre/year and from pasture and permanent hay land is 0.3 tons/acre/year. Excluding the upland areas addressed in this pilot, it can be estimated that the buffered areas alone will reduce sediment by 24.90 tons/year. Based on these figures and the CREP co-efficient, it can also be estimated that these pilot farms will reduce nitrogen from entering the streams by approximately 10 lbs/year and phosphorus by nearly 20 lbs/year. In addition, there are both nutrient and pathogen reductions from removing the livestock from the streams in pasture areas.

Objective 5: Education and Outreach

The Jefferson County Conservation District strives to engage all farming operations in the AEM process. The AEM process contains the tools needed to assess and plan riparian areas for their conservation needs. Although most of the farms in the Sandy Creeks Watershed were already participants in AEM, this pilot provided the opportunity to revisit a number of farms to update their Stream Assessment Worksheet. Completion of a Tier 2 worksheet is done in the field in partnership with the farm owner or operator. This provides an excellent opportunity to have a one-on-one discussion about buffers and their benefits to the farm and environment.

As the farms progressed from the assessment to planning stage, the Conservation District was able to work with the farmers to discuss the available cost-share programs that could help meet their financial needs. Although CREP is recognized as the State's riparian buffer program, there are other programs that also offer assistance. As with Toad Hollow Farm, CREP is not always available to farmers and it is important that conservation partners be aware of the alternatives and the respective program benefits.

A large portion of the education efforts needed for this pilot focused on explaining the benefits and limitations of the federal cost-share programs, particularly CREP. While CREP is an excellent program that provides many benefits, understanding acreage and practice eligibility, funding caps and NRCS standards and specifications becomes quite complicated. Having the Conservation District actively engaged in the field helped both the farmers and contractors to understand the program requirements. At the current time, the CREP does not provide technical assistance funding to partner agencies for providing this service and therefore, it often becomes a hindrance to program delivery.

Jefferson County Conservation District and Cornell Cooperative Extension both spent considerable time educating farmers as to the environmental benefits provided by conservation buffers. However, the greatest lessons learned may have come from the education provided by the farmers to the conservation District as to the barriers they see in implementing buffers. For instance, the CREP program has used the enhanced rental payments offered by the program as their main selling point. Discussions with the farmers in this pilot have taught us that fully funded practice installation is a much higher priority than rental payments that are not truly adequate to compensate for production value.

When buffers are visible to the public, such as on Centerdale Farm, they provide excellent education and public outreach opportunities. Newly planted trees are usually covered with a tree tube to protect them from wildlife during establishment. As simple as it sounds, the sight of these tubes in an open area seems to generate the most interest from the public. Once they learn their purpose and the conservation efforts being implemented by the farmer, public awareness and appreciation grows.

Summary and Lessons Learned

The EBM pilot demonstrated that installing "complete" buffer systems is a key to both resource protection and marketability. In order to achieve maximum environmental benefits, buffer programs must remain flexible to farm operational needs. Allowing for complementary practices, particularly in upland areas is necessary. To be successful, buffer systems need to be incorporated into the farms operational plan, rather than approached as a set-aside program. This pilot also proved that visible buffers provide a positive public image for farms. The Centerdale buffer system is located along a public road and this has resulted in a more positive public perception of the farm.

<u>The key lessons learned are as follows:</u>

- The AEM process is an effective tool for implementing EBM principles on agricultural land. Having a comprehensive tool which is consistent from one farm to another is critical to achieving the highest level of environmental benefits from limited financial resources.

- In the current economic climate, the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) needs to offer 100 percent cost shared practices in order to get producers to participate, unless there will be sufficient Best Management Practices that allow for a greater efficiency in some type of on farming activity. Examples of this would be increased grazing capacity or access to additional grazing areas, proven soil loss of cropped acres, or some other tangible product.

- CREP cost-share limits are often low. Providing up to $1,500 for a stream crossing that costs $8,000 is not attractive to the producer. Even though rental payments act as an incentive over time, it is not justifiable for a farmer to spend those dollars unless there is an economic benefit somewhere in the equation.

- Tree planting and fencing are not enough to make CREP a viable option for most agricultural operations. Riparian area restoration should be a key component of the CREP program. Too often the desired goal cannot be achieved without providing some type of stabilization or restoration activity in advance of tree planting and fencing. If the banks are not stabilized, the fencing and trees may be easily lost by erosion. Under the current CREP program, areas with unstable stream banks are ineligible for CREP funding. Often, these are areas where buffers could provide the most environmental benefit.

- RPM trees worked very well. Spending more on a better tree than in the protection of a seedling is better in the long run. Larger growing stock already taller than competitive plants will succeed at a higher percentage and require less in the form of protection of bare root seedlings.

- Combining AEM efforts with FSA's existing contracts worked very well. Additional efforts should be investigated in New York to combine CREP dollars with existing programs to make CREP goals achievable.

- Conservation buffers are an excellent tool to enhance neighbor relations.

- When the nonfarm public is informed about CREP, they really appreciate the program and the participants. It is an excellent public relations tool for dealing with local issues, officials, sporting groups, etc.