

Buffer Options for the Bay

ACTION PLAN

(Actions prioritized by our Advisory Committee highlighted in yellow.)

Actions
<i>Website and associated products</i>
Create a photo gallery on the website that shows before and after buffer restoration pictures, that demonstrate what a healthy vs. degraded buffer look like, etc.
Create a success story section of the website that highlights different types of buffer protection, regulation, management or restoration projects that have happened in NH. Include major players and funders.
Create a robust case study section to the website: include local case studies of approved ordinances, case studies of failed ordinances, case studies that include assessment of if development is deterred by strict setback ordinances, etc.
Create a graphic or way of showing the range of options for dealing with buffers- a spectrum from conservative to reformist with associated benefits and or a "rating".
Create a graphic that compares NH buffer regulation with other NE states.
Consider if additional distillation of any of the reports would be valuable for public or municipal audiences (two page summaries, etc.).
Create a one-page pdf that summarizes key economic findings from the project.
<i>Mapping and spatial analysis</i>
Create a map that has specific community by community information about what water bodies and buffers are protected and how that relates to impaired waters, etc.
Work with modelers to create and visualize different buffer options and how they influence ecosystem services at the parcel or site level.
Use aerial maps to assess historical trends in buffers, enforcement of current regulations, and map trends moving forward.
Show build out analysis of GB communities under current regulation vs. stricter buffer regulation to assess impact on land owners and tax base.
Coordinate the maps and resources created for BOB with maps and resources used by DES in permitting decisions.
Create interactive map products that show how different buffer widths and/or variable widths and vegetative cover would influence water quality, influence taxable property, etc.

Science and Synthesis

Enhance the non-regulatory options explored in the project and explore more creative tax incentives, buy back or trading programs, how buffers relate to other zoning requirements, etc.

Create a tracking and accounting method for buffers that is equivalent to other storm water BMPs. Consider how buffers can help towns meet water quality targets and if buffer "trading" is possible in the watershed.

Advance local cost benefit analysis of buffer protection. Include indirect values associated with buffers, and could include localized comparison of grey vs. green infrastructure and cost avoidance.

Consider policy options for cumulative impacts of development or harmful practices within buffer areas.

Update model ordinances that can be used by municipalities to enhance buffer management.

Create a way to assess buffer integrity and apply that integrity index to buffers in the watershed, map the results, and use them to prioritize restoration and enforcement.

Conduct additional science or convene experts to advance local science related to assessing the impact of buffer width and cover on benefits (water quality, flood storage, wildlife benefits, etc.) for different types of water bodies or stream orders.

Conduct additional social science to understand factors that influence municipal ordinance success or failure (may include looking at demographics, community leaders, etc.).

Study the loss of business, agriculture and developable land due to flooding vs. due to buffer regulations. Quantify economic loss if possible.

Targeted assessment of attitudes, and information or resource needs for individual land owners, developers and realtors.

Conduct additional analysis of enforcement gaps and develop or encourage potential solutions (joint enforcement code staff, aerial monitoring, options for conservation commissions, highlighting capacity gaps, etc.).

Conduct additional economic analysis that is linked to specific policy options (tax incentives, etc.).

Investigate rates of permit application denial or local variances: work with permitting groups to understand criteria and see if there are ways BOB results can inform those.

Explore the monitoring needed to assess buffer effectiveness, think about how this relates to CWA requirements for communities.

Conduct science or literature review to determine what water-based influences are impacting buffers in the region (boat use, docks, moorings, other recreational uses, etc.)

Consider how relevant the BOB work would be to non-riparian, non-tidal water bodies like lakes or isolated wetland complexes.

Incorporate drinking water into the policy assessment, community assessment, physical and economic science literature reviews and add sections to those reports.

Analyze past efforts to establish a stronger state wide buffer policy for how it was done, what factors influenced it's success or failure, etc.

Explore focusing policy efforts on some types of wetlands or riparian areas (cold water streams, drinking water supplies, vernal pools, etc.) based on functional value.

Include Maine in aspects of this study (Community Assessment, Policy Analysis, etc.)

Outreach and Engagement

Create new or use existing teams that can directly assist communities in using the information that came out of BOB (and other relevant info) to adopt or improve local ordinances, enhance enforcement, apply for appropriate funding sources, and evaluate projects.

Integrate BOB results into ongoing efforts in the Watershed (Board Empowerment Series, Great Bay 2020, Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership, NROC outreach, etc.)

Conduct buffer workshops specifically for code enforcement officers and municipal board members.

Develop a comprehensive buffers outreach plan: determine audiences, key messages for each audience and how they will be reached.

Update PREPA information about buffers and link to this project.

Enhance public outreach efforts that highlight what a buffer is and why they are important.

Create resources explicitly for developers, realtors or landowners who are working in difficult corridors with extensive buffer areas.

Conduct outreach and technical assistance specifically around conservation and restoration priorities related to buffers.

Build awareness of economic benefits of open space, stewardship, restoration etc. with buffers as a piece of that outreach.

Link buffer project to drinking water efforts; outreach, mapping, messaging.

Conduct buffer workshops specifically for code enforcement officers and municipal board members.

Incorporate the concept of buffers into K-12 education opportunities or curriculum.

Work with funding agencies and foundations to encourage bonus points and other incentives to prioritize buffer related projects.

Work with UNH Cooperative Extension on working with ecological landscaping for landscape professionals.

Conduct outreach to key state-level decision makers to raise the profile of this issue and catalyze action towards increased protection for buffer. This may include the creation of a legislative working group.

Conduct a study to determine the cost of protecting an acre of buffers vs. restoring an acre of buffer.