

Acceptable and unacceptable buffer activities are listed in the boxes below.

— **What can I do in my buffer area?** —

- ☘ can establish foot access to water
- ☘ can remove dead/dying/diseased trees, noxious weeds, and invasive exotic plants
- ☘ can establish reasonable sightlines and vistas

*“It is easier and cheaper to leave existing buffers than to plant new ones .”*

— **What can't I do in my buffer area?** —

- ☘ building activities are not permitted in the buffer area
- ☘ clear cutting of vegetation to achieve sight lines or vistas
- ☘ converting groundcover plants to turf grass
- ☘ filling and grading land
- ☘ applying pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizer is discouraged



Unacceptable removal of vegetation for vista. Source: CBLAD

In June of 1991, Albemarle County became the first (and remains the only) non-Tidewater locality in Virginia to voluntarily adopt a local Chesapeake Bay protection ordinance that requires buffers and limits activities along waterways. Buffers play a critical role in improving the water quality of tributaries that flow into the Chesapeake Bay. With your assistance we can help make the restoration of the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem a reality.

— **Consequences** —

- ☘ A buffer area shall be maintained if present and allowed to establish where it does not exist.
- ☘ If the buffer area is disturbed, the County will require the property owner to plant new vegetation to correct the problem and may impose monetary fines.

If you have questions regarding your buffer area, please contact:

**Natural Resources Manager**  
Department of Community Development  
Albemarle County, VA  
401 McIntire Rd., Charlottesville 22902  
(434) 296-5832 x3264

**Additional Resources:**

Chesapeake Bay Local Assistance Department;  
*Riparian Buffer Modification & Mitigation Guidance Manual*  
(<http://www.cblad.virginia.gov/ripbuffstat.cfm>)

# Buffers and Water Quality

*A property owner's guide to manage riparian buffers and protect water resources*



**Y**ou play a critical role in the health of our streams, rivers, and reservoirs. As a property owner in Albemarle County, you are responsible for the long-term maintenance of riparian buffers along waterways on your land. This pamphlet was designed to provide guidance to help you understand and meet these obligations.

## What are riparian buffers?

A riparian buffer is an area of vegetation adjacent to a stream, reservoir, wetland, or pond that is managed and protected. A healthy buffer consists of trees, shrubs, and ground cover that:

- slows down and filters stormwater runoff to protect water quality
- prevents erosion
- provides shade and habitat for fish and other aquatic life

## Why are riparian buffers important?

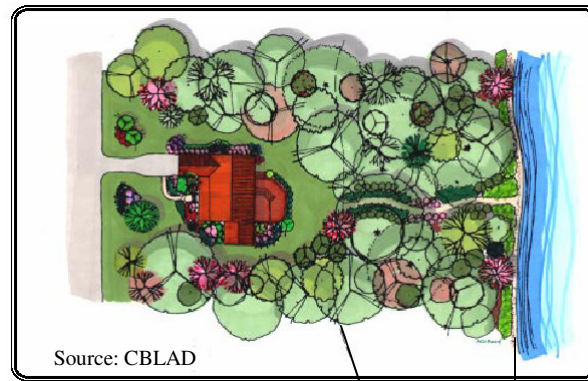
Buffers retard runoff, prevent erosion, and filter nonpoint source pollution. Buffers have a profound impact on the health of streams, rivers, and reservoirs. Buffers protect water quality, stabilize stream channels and shorelines, provide important habitat and food for fish and wildlife, reduce sedimentation and erosion, filter pollutants like nitrogen and phosphorus, and moderate water temperature by providing shade.

## Where are buffers required?

Albemarle County's Water Protection Ordinance requires that buffers be preserved or established along certain water features. Specific requirements depend on where you reside. General guidelines are listed below (refer to map at right):

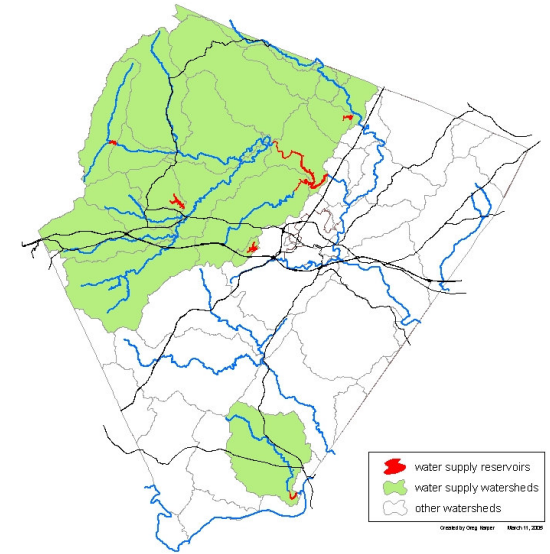
- For lands that drain to public water supply reservoirs and intakes (areas in green), 100-foot buffers are required on both sides of **all** streams, regardless of whether they flow year-round or just part of the year.
- In the remainder of Albemarle County (areas in white), 100-foot buffers are required on both sides of streams that flow year-round.
- On lands adjacent to public water supply reservoirs (areas in red), buffers must extend 200 feet from the 100-year floodplain.
- Around ponds associated with streams requiring buffers, 100-foot buffers are required.
- Other requirements may apply along wetlands floodplains.

## Diagram of buffer area



100 foot buffer

## Reservoir and water supply areas in Albemarle County



*"Buffers can benefit you through increased property values, reduction in noise, and saving land from erosion."*

## How do I maintain my buffer?

- keep existing areas wooded
- allow for native plants to establish
- minimize lawn area; grass root systems are not strong enough to resist erosion along stream banks

The diagram at left shows how you can provide an access path to the water, a view of the water from the house (sight line), and maintain the 100 foot buffer.