

Zygmunt Farms Committed to Riparian Forest Buffers

By Ain Welmon

For some farmers, a stream running through a crop field may appear to be a troublesome issue. For others, like Edward Zygmunt, it presents an opportunity to control erosion and establish wildlife habitat on his property in Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania. Zygmunt enrolled in USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) to assist him with this project.

CREP provides technical and financial assistance to eligible farmers and landowners to address soil, water, wildlife, and related natural resource concerns on their lands in an environmentally beneficial and cost-effective manner. The program is administered by the Farm Service Agency (FSA), with NRCS providing technical land eligibility determinations, conservation planning, and technical assistance for practice implementation and maintenance.

Zygmunt established two acres of riparian forest buffer in 2004 and had an amazing success rate for his buffer establishment. The minimum survival rate is 70 percent, while his forest stand was closer to 95 percent. Zygmunt credits his success to the extra time and care he gave to his trees. He went above

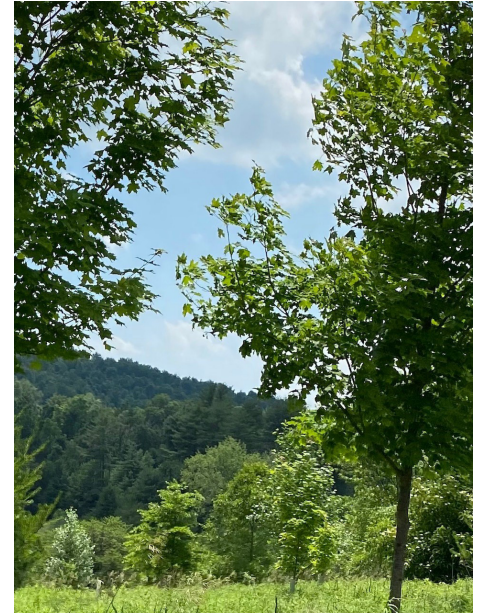
and beyond from the minimum checking on the tree shelters and stakes.

"Proper care of your buffer during the first few years of establishment will make all your hard work pay off. Controlling vegetation around the trees to minimize rodent habitat, eliminating competing invasive plants like autumn olive and multi-flora rose, and maintaining tree shelters and stakes will almost guarantee the survival of every tree and shrub you plant," said Zygmunt.

Zygmunt fixed downed, damaged, or leaning shelters every week, and spent extra hours over the recommended time for maintenance on his buffer to ensure a high survival rate. He also replaced any down and dead trees or shrubs and controlled competing vegetation.

"I also planted trees in areas where they have the most opportunity to grow. If a tree likes its feet wet, I plant that type of tree there," said Zygmunt. Doing those things and doing the recommended mowing and herbicide applications aided Zygmunt in having a successful riparian forest buffer.

"Watching our riparian forest buffer grow over the years has given my wife and I a great sense of pride and satisfaction. Knowing that in our own small way, we helped



Forest stand on Zygmunt property.

to protect the water quality in our local stream, improve wildlife habitat, and save our important soil resources brings a huge smile to our faces. The financial and technical assistance we received from NRCS, FSA, and their conservation partners made it all possible," said Zygmunt.

"The benefits of the buffer have been wonderful. The riparian forest buffer has created shade to lower the water temperatures and reduced stream bank erosion. I am extremely pleased with the project, and maintaining the buffer's function and appearance," said Zygmunt. "NRCS has been an invaluable partner and I would definitely recommend the agency to other farmers thinking of doing similar conservation," said Zygmunt.