



United States Department of Agriculture

JOINT CHIEFS' LANDSCAPE RESTORATION PARTNERSHIP

Starting from the Top

SUSQUEHANNA WATERSHED RIPARIAN BUFFER ENHANCEMENTS PROJECT



Susquehanna Watershed © Troy Bishopp, Madison County SWCD

Stretching for more than 400 miles, the Susquehanna is one of the longest rivers in the United States. This expansive waterway begins in central New York, an area that has seen industry come and go. Abundant timber was harvested during the Industrial Revolution, and in the 1890s, the cigar industry employed thousands of people, only to all but disappear as trends changed and manufacturing automation improved. Today, forests that blaze with color in the fall and family farms that produce dairy products and crops, including corn and soybeans, dominate the area. The Susquehanna nourishes this pastoral landscape and then traverses several states, providing water for communities and industry while also carrying half of the fresh water that flows into the globally significant Chesapeake Bay. Keeping the river healthy for all who depend on it is critical. This Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership (JCLRP) project enabled new collaborations between agencies, landowners and communities in the northern reaches of the Susquehanna to improve water quality from the start.

PROJECT IMPACT

\$1 million + ALLOCATED

Total awarded through the JCLRP from 2014-2016: \$12.8 million

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation created a program that allocated more than \$1 million in grants for improvements on protected land. This is just one of several additional funding programs that came from networks established by the Joint Chiefs' project. The program stabilized 30,000 feet of stream bank to reduce erosion.

USDA's Forest Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service are working together to improve the health of forests where public forests and grasslands connect to privately owned lands. Through the Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership, the two USDA agencies are restoring landscapes by reducing wildfire threats to communities and landowners, protecting water quality and enhancing wildlife habitat.

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Susquehanna Watershed Project

GOALS



Brook trout © Trout Unlimited



Protect water quality: The Joint Chiefs' project in the Susquehanna co-funded cattle waste storage facilities and installed 322,000 feet of fencing. Keeping cattle out of the river protects water quality by reducing erosion and nutrient imbalances from waste that harm species such as the pearly mussel, hellbender salamander and brook trout, while also supporting the working lands of local farmers.



Protect aquatic habitat: A maintenance and planting team was added to the state-run Trees for Tribes program, which works to reduce erosion into streams by providing native plants at low or no cost to communities and landowners. Through the Joint Chiefs' project, 11,500 trees and shrubs were planted by Upper Susquehanna Coalition staff and local volunteers, improving water quality and wildlife habitat.



Stream restoration on a local farm. © Troy Bishopp, Madison County SWCD

When asked to describe a typical day on the job, Lydia Brinkley chuckles.

Brinkley is the riparian forest buffer coordinator with the Upper Susquehanna Coalition, a position that was funded by the Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership. With a complex array of players, funding opportunities and policies, Brinkley toggles between scientists, trainers and field technicians, each day.

"When I came on board, programs to help better manage land along waterways were not being highly utilized," Brinkley said. "People were confused about who was responsible for enrolling land in buffer programs and which agency administered particular steps of the process, so we started holding meetings with all the partners to get us and them on the same page."

Brinkley serves as a clearinghouse for technicians, landowners and others. If they want to know more about reducing the chemical runoff on cropland into the river, and what funding is available to try more-effective management practices, she can help with that. She can also tell them how to get the permits to construct stream buffers and find native trees to plant, and much more.

Dennis DeWeese with the Natural Resources Conservation Service said that having a coordinator has led to increased buy-in and efficiencies. "Landowners don't always understand the need to protect the river—and some are skeptical about government programs," DeWeese said. "The alignment has made outreach to landowners more effective because the path to improving how they manage their land can be clearly outlined. This successful effort has resulted in more investments by non-federal partners, multiplying the impact of the Joint Chiefs' funding."

"The best outcome of our work here is improved coordination," Brinkley said. "I'm proud that I am seen as a resource throughout the watershed. If somebody has a project and they don't know what program might fit, they can call me. They don't have to feel stuck."



Lydia Brinkley © Troy Bishopp, Madison County SWCD

Key Partners

Farm Service Agency
New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, Division of Forestry
Northeast Brook Trout Joint Venture
State University of New York, College of Environmental Science and Forestry
Trout Unlimited
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Upper Susquehanna Coalition