

Riparian Buffers Working Group - October 22, 2025 – Summary for Buffers Briefing

During the latest Vegetated Riparian Buffers Working Group meeting, DEEP provided an overview of the resources and staffing currently dedicated to the Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Program, along with comments on the challenges of incorporating new riparian buffer protections.

DEEP Report Highlights

- The topic of riparian buffers spans several DEEP programs, creating overlap and complexity in both regulation and implementation.
- DEEP expressed concerns about the impact on staff resources if new requirements for buffer protections are added.
- From a legal and regulatory standpoint, DEEP noted that this is a complicated issue. Any new standards will require careful thought on how they're implemented at the local level.
- The liaison position for the Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Program is currently filled, but DEEP did not clarify whether that position is fully dedicated to Inland Wetlands and Watercourses work or shared across programs.

Training and Capacity Discussion by Workgroup

- There was significant discussion about training for Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Commissions (IWWCs).
- Several participants offered to assist with training, provided DEEP would sanction or recognize sessions hosted outside of the agency.
- IWWCs want to protect vegetated buffers but need clear, enforceable tools that can withstand legal challenges. The group emphasized that any future guidance/law/regulation must eliminate ambiguity.
- Consensus: DEEP needs additional staffing and resources to effectively support local commissions and implement any new buffer protection requirements.

Needs Going Forward

- Photos of effective buffers. The fearmongering on implementing protections for vegetated strips along our waterways is that property owners will lose access and views and no one will be able to enjoy the water. We need good examples of how buffers enhance waterways and still provide access.