

SEED PROJECT IDEA

Better Your Buffer (or Riverfront Area)

The following is a project idea for inspiration—ultimately, the Seed Project you choose should be based on your community's climate resilience priorities. Remember that you will have up to \$50,000 to spend on the Seed Project and about 9 to 10 months to accomplish it, so you may need to carve out a piece of the following action to fit those guidelines, and then work together on a plan for financing the next phase. This project sheet provides a suggestion for which tasks might be completed within the scope of a Seed Project; however, communities may have different starting points or capacity to advance projects and should decide which scope is achievable for them.

Project Description:

This project will improve the resilience of a wetland buffer zone or a riverfront area. Restoring these regulated areas will require compliance with the [Wetlands Protection Act](#), which requires careful review of work that may alter wetlands as well as other resource areas, such as buffer zones (the areas within 100 feet of a wetland) and riverfront areas. Some municipalities may also have bylaws which promote further protection of these areas. Therefore, important aspects of this project will be identifying potential project sites and understanding which action(s) can be taken in each.

Wetland buffer zones and riverfront zones play important roles in ecosystems and provide many free services to nearby communities, such as slowing flood waters, trapping sediment and debris, recharging groundwater, purifying water, and temperature moderation, among others. When these ecosystems are healthy, they can more effectively adapt to climate change and continue to provide the benefits that help nearby community members contend with climate stressors as well (such as cooling benefits and recreational benefits). Increasing the resilience of these zones comes from enhancements which remove stressors or promote health—such as removing and/or reducing pavement, invasive species/pests/disease, herbivory pressure, trash, debris, and/or pollution, and increasing native and climate-adapted trees and other vegetation, restoring soil health, and increasing biodiversity.

Typical features of buffer enhancement may include the following: removal of manmade structures such as pavement, soil amendment and inoculation, replacing turf grasses with native plantings, old growth forest, habitat nest features, interpretive markers, or art. The project can also provide educational opportunities to increase awareness and understanding of climate resilience, biodiversity, stormwater management, heat islands, carbon sequestration and storage and healthy soils. See [Rivergreen Park](#) as an example of these features applied across a riverfront area and buffer zone.

High-level List of Potential Project Tasks:

1. **Form a project team:** Include municipal staff (consider conservation, parks, public works, and planning), key stakeholders (such as residents from Environmental Justice neighborhoods or other priority populations, large landowners, individuals and/or organizations who work in wetland buffer/riverfront areas, people who visit the area, people who have cultural ties to the land), and others working on environmental and climate issues in the community.
2. **Identify potential project sites:** Utilize local knowledge, prior studies and plans, and the GEAR maps to identify wetland buffer zones or riparian buffer zones that may be suitable for the project. Develop a set of screening criteria. This may include, for example, sites that are in or near Environmental Justice block groups or other priority populations; are in or near heat islands; have multiple stressors (e.g., invasive species, pollution); or have opportunities to provide additional co-benefits (e.g., walking trails, water access). Work with the project team and other community members to identify two or three potential sites.
3. **Work with the local community to narrow potential sites:** Vet the potential sites for development restrictions, safety concerns, and permit constraints. Conduct community engagement activities with nearby residents, businesses, community organizations, and Indigenous communities with ties to the site to build community consensus around the sites. Consider providing educational opportunities about riverfront areas, co-benefits of increasing access to green spaces, and climate resilience efforts—so as to build community understanding of the project and the background behind it. Provide opportunities for community members to directly provide their input on what site to select and why. Once the site is selected, begin outreach with those who live adjacent to the site and/or work in businesses adjacent to the site.
4. **Plan and permit the project:** Once the site is selected, hire a wetland scientist and/or landscape expert (potential resource [here](#)) to provide resource area delineation and permit preparation, soil design, plant list, species identification, management guides for stewards, and training to project team leaders. Layout and scale the project for the initial budget and future phases if necessary. Plan the cycles of the project site preparation, development, and establishment. File a Notice of Intent for work within/adjacent to a resource area or [assess exempt activities](#). If the community has identified additional amenities (e.g., structures) beyond planting, the design and permitting process will be more extensive and will likely not be appropriate for a Seed Project because of the larger scope.

Seed Project ends – Subsequent tasks likely to be completed in future project phases

5. **Prepare the site and team:**
 - a. A landscape and ecology consultant, with key stakeholders or stewards, can:
 - Assess site preparation needs such as clean up or invasive species control. Establish erosion control if needed, water source, invasive species removal, litter removal, excavation, bulk materials delivery, and site control.

- Assess soil health (see [Healthy Soils Action Plan](#) and [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) resources) and select compatible species for planting to support diversification and replacement and apply ecological strategies for succession planning.
- Source materials (potential resource [here](#)) including soil/soil amendments, plants/seeds (potential resource [here](#)), and irrigation materials.

b. The project team can:

- Collaborate with Public Works and, potentially business or private donors, for bulk materials and heavy site prep.
- Identify staff to manage community stewards in a 3-year establishment maintenance program. Funding should be allocated in the Seed Project budget to compensate the community stewards to allow a wider variety of people and entities the opportunity to be involved, not just those who can volunteer their time. Community steward roles may be seasonal jobs or part of workforce development programs.
- Coordinate volunteer outreach, advertising, schedule, and donations.

6. **Host the building and planting days:** Building and planting days are what bring the project to fruition. Best practice suggests these events should be at maximum half a day long and focus on a quarter acre. Partnerships with schools, workforce development programs, and community members are a great way to engage and educate the community and create a sense of ownership of the project. Public engagement best practices, such as providing stipends or other compensation, childcare, and interpretation may be needed to support the participation by diverse stakeholders.

- Train event leaders in advance to direct and support community participants—ideally one trained leader per ten participants.
- Start with a safety briefing and project purpose review.
- Provide tools and equipment, first aid, and refreshments.
- Announce follow up events and other ways to get involved with care of nature-based solutions projects.