

Water on Your Land

You may be fortunate enough to have water on your property in the form of a stream, river, wetland, or lake. Regardless of its form, healthy water bodies on your property provide important benefits to you, as the landowner, and to your neighbours who share the watershed with you.

Riparian areas, or the lush, green areas surrounding standing or flowing water, are one of the most important parts of any property. Healthy riparian areas perform a number of key functions including:

- ✓ removing and storing sediments
- ✓ building stable streambanks and shorelines
- ✓ reducing flood damage by storing water and energy
- ✓ recharging aquifers
- ✓ filtering contaminants and nutrients from the water
- ✓ reducing water velocity and the erosive effects of a waterway
- ✓ maintaining biodiversity
- ✓ creating shelter and forage for animals

Healthy riparian areas are beneficial to livestock as well. A source of clean, fresh water will keep your animals in better health and lead to greater weight gain.

To determine where the riparian areas are on your property, look for areas containing water, either seasonally or year round, with vegetation such as cattails that require lots of water. Finally, riparian areas contain different types of soils that can be identified with a soil test.

Once you know where your riparian areas are, how can you tell if they are healthy? Use the checklist on this page to evaluate your riparian area. If you answer ‘yes’ to 10 or more questions, you have a



healthy riparian area. If you answered ‘no’ to 10 or more questions, your riparian area is unhealthy and is not functioning properly. If your score is in between, your riparian area may be healthy, but with problems.

Regardless of your riparian area’s rating, some of the tips and resources on the reverse of this page may be useful in managing your riparian area.

Riparian Health Checklist

More than 85% of the riparian area is covered by vegetation.	Y N
More than 50% of the vegetation is taller than knee height.	Y N
Shrubs such as willow, dogwood or alder are growing along the stream edge.	Y N
Young tree seedlings & saplings are present.	Y N
Native plants dominate the area.	Y N
Noxious weeds make up less than 15% of the vegetation.	Y N
The bank is not eroding or slumping.	Y N
The stream channel is narrow & deep.	Y N
The stream overflows its banks most years.	Y N
Water is clear & does not contain sediment during normal flows.	Y N
The stream banks are not modified by retaining walls or other structures.	Y N
Plants are vigorous & produce steady amounts of forage.	Y N
Wildlife are regularly seen & fish are present.	Y N

Credit: Cows and Fish Project

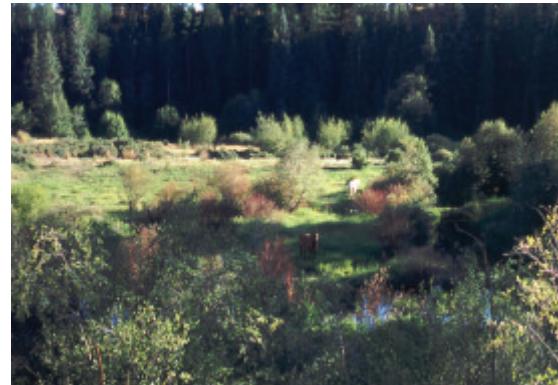
Managing Your Water

Now that you've identified the riparian areas on your property and have an idea of their health, how you manage those areas will determine whether your riparian health will increase or decrease over time.

To get the most from your riparian area consider the following:

- ✓ maintain a buffer area of 10 metres along any shoreline or streambank
- ✓ locate any new buildings or structures away from streambanks and shorelines
- ✓ distribute livestock evenly and avoid allowing livestock to loiter in riparian areas. Use fencing if necessary and locate saltblocks, shelters and other attractants away from the water body.
- ✓ provide off-stream water sources to encourage livestock to move away from streams or wetlands
- ✓ to reduce the risk of contamination, locate corrals or other heavy-use livestock areas downstream from water wells
- ✓ manage grazing within the riparian zone in a manner that allows young trees and shrubs to become established
- ✓ avoid using pesticides or other chemicals within 10 metres of a riparian area
- ✓ test drinking water sources regularly

Once you have identified areas of concern in your riparian area setting management goals can help improve the condition of your stream or wetland. By maintaining healthy areas and working to correct problems while they are



small, reducing or removing pressures from problems areas, encouraging native vegetation and monitoring your progress regularly you will see positive changes over time. Although riparian health won't improve overnight, with rest and proper management conditions will improve.

Here are some other publications to help you manage your riparian area:

Available from the Cows and Fish Project, to order call: (403) 381-5538 or visit www.cowsandfish.org

Caring for the Green Zone:
Riparian Areas and Grazing Management

Caring for the Green Zone: Field Workbook

Caring for the Green Zone: A User's Guide to Health

Available from the BC Stewardship Centre, to order visit:

www.stewardshipcentre.bc.ca

Watershed Stewardship: A Guide for Agriculture

