

# Co-existing with Nature

A watershed is an area of land drained by a waterbody like a stream, river, or lake. The water in the waterbody is directly affected by what happens on the land in the watershed. You are always in a watershed, so what you do on the land affects a waterbody near you, even if it is not visible from where you are.

Unsustainable land uses can pollute a stream, leaving it shallow, hot, full of sediment and algae, and with eroding banks. A degraded stream can increase the cost of producing drinking water, cannot be a good home to fish, and unstable banks can make the stream a hazard. One landowner's actions can cause problems for both upstream and downstream neighbors. It is in your power to positively impact the waterbodies near you.

According to conservationist Kristine Tompkins, "You can't protect a place unless you understand it. You can't know a place unless you love it." Take young people to a stream and allow them to explore and play. Understanding, knowing, and loving a place requires repeated outdoor experiences. Establishing a connection with nature is critical to its long-term protection.



## Become a Blue Thumb Volunteer!

Adopt a stream near you!

To find out more about upcoming trainings:  
[www.bluethumbok.com](http://www.bluethumbok.com)



email: [bluethumb@conservation.ok.gov](mailto:bluethumb@conservation.ok.gov)

### Blue Thumb Office

2800 N. Lincoln Blvd, Suite 200  
Oklahoma City, OK 73105



@BlueThumbOK

[www.bluethumbok.com](http://www.bluethumbok.com)



# Co-existing with Nature

## Protecting Streams and Rivers

Whether you live in a rural or urban area, the chances you are near nature are high! Sometimes it's a pigeon landing on the tree your car is parked under, while other times it's a deer or a fox walking through your property. Most likely, you will hear the rush of running water, be it the large river that cuts the city in half, or the small babbling brook in your backyard. No matter where you live, nature was there first, and let's make sure that it is as healthy as can be.



Humans impact streams, intentionally or not. You can be a part of solving problems such as streambank erosion, turbid water, and excessive algae. This pamphlet will help you become aware of some of these issues and how you can help fix them in your community. After all, we're all upstream of someone.



Oklahoma Blue  
Thumb Water  
Quality Education  
Program

"Stream Protection  
Through Education"

# Being a Steward

Many people don't realize that what happens on their property and what spills or leaks onto pavement can be picked up in rain and carried to local waterways.

Whether you live in town or in the country:

- **leave riparian areas undisturbed**
  - in rural areas leave at least a 30 ft. buffer between the water's edge and your farming/grazing land (or other land disturbing practices)
  - don't mow to the edge of the stream, allow vegetation to grow, protecting streambanks and filtering pollutants
- **leave areas of native plants for wildlife and pollinators**
  - native grasses and plants are drought tolerant, pest resistant, and have deep, fibrous roots that can help prevent erosion (this also allows precipitation to soak in gently)
- **test your soil**
  - before applying fertilizer, have your soil tested at your local OSU Extension Office to know what your soil needs
  - get to know your local Conservation District and learn about conservation planning

If you live in a rural area:

- **do not overgraze**
  - implement rotational grazing
  - don't exceed the land's carrying capacity
- **riparian area**
  - farmers and ranchers can fence cattle and other livestock out of the creek and provide alternative water sources
- **learn about alternative farming practices**
  - try reduced till or no-till methods
  - plant cover crops
- **keep ATVs in upland areas and on designated trails**

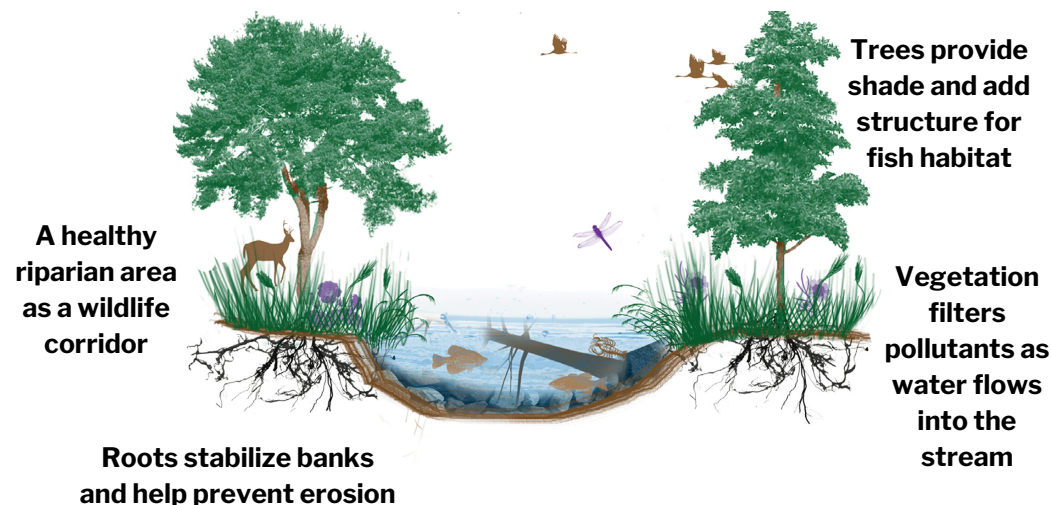
If you live in/near a city:

- **limit your use of pesticides and herbicides**
  - look for alternatives before applying chemicals to your lawn
  - read and follow the label's directions
  - don't apply if rain is predicted
- **install rain barrels or rain gardens**
  - visit with your local Conservation District to learn about rainwater harvesting and reducing runoff

# Riparian Area

## Why it Matters

A **healthy riparian area** provides many benefits to both the aquatic and terrestrial areas around a stream. When you maintain a healthy riparian area, you provide beneficial services to your upstream and downstream neighbors.



An **unhealthy/missing riparian area** causes many problems in a stream. When you remove all vegetation from the stream banks, it can have negative effects on your upstream and downstream neighbors and on your own property.

**The wildlife corridor disappears and more pollutants enter streams**

**Without trees, water temperature increases and fewer aquatic species can be found in the water**

**Without deep roots, soil is more likely to erode into the stream**

**Short or no grass allows pollutants to flow directly into streams**

