

Protecting Streams: The Riparian Area

The land that borders a stream is known as a riparian area, it plays a vital role in the health of streams and rivers. The trees, shrubs, grasses and flowers that make up the riparian area serve as pollutant filters, bank stabilizers, habitat providers, wildlife highways and water coolers. When we make changes to the riparian area it has a negative impact on the stream and wildlife.

Importance of Trees

- Provide shade which helps lower water temperature
- Provide habitat for terrestrial animals
- Leaves and branches that fall into streams provide food and habitat for aquatic creatures
- Tree roots help hold soil in place resulting in reduced erosion

Importance of shrubs, grasses and flowers

- Provide habitat for animals
- Roots help hold soil in place resulting in reduced erosion
- Serve as filters for pollutants carried by stormwater runoff
- Slows the flow of water to allow water to soak into the ground reducing flooding
- Protects wildlife as it passes through by providing food and cover

A Healthy Riparian System



An unhealthy Riparian System



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Streams that flow through town are typically under the care of the city. Make good decisions and take steps so your urban streams are assets, instead of eyesores.

Streams need their riparian areas, as explained on the front of this handout. Mowing to the water's edge and applying herbicides along the bank leave the stream eroding, hot, and unable to filter pollutants.

Allowing the grass to grow and planting trees improves the water quality and the aesthetic beauty of the area.

Bringing in heavy equipment to "clean out the creek" takes away the stream's ability to offer habitat. This type of scenario leaves the stream ripe for erosion issues.

Next time a rain comes, this will be a mud hole.

Let the vegetation remain along and in the stream. It provides habitat, erosion control and reduces the amount of pollutants entering the stream



Fertilizing to the water's edge is a sure way to add nutrients that will feed algae. Routing parking lot runoff straight to the creek allows oil and other automotive fluids to run into the stream after a rain.

Development to the banks of a stream removes shade, plants that can filter pollutants, and roots that stabilize the bank. Homes and other structures built close to the creek are in danger of flooding. Consider a set-back requirement of at least 30 feet from the water's edge to protect the stream.



Consider replacing concrete runoff channels with grassy bioswales to allow the water to infiltrate.

Large rip-rap does not add any beauty to a stream, and in fact this type of "armoring" the bank just sends the problem downstream. This is noted when observing the condition of the bank past where the rip-rap ends.



Allow the streams that run through your town to be an asset, not an eyesore!



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