

Living on the Land

Protecting streams and rivers

A stream reflects the activities that take place within its watershed, which is an area of land where the water under it and draining off of it goes into one stream. Everyone lives in a watershed, so what you do on the land effects a waterbody near you.

Pollutants and non-sustainable land uses can leave a stream shallow, hot, full of sediment and algae, and with eroding banks. A degraded stream does not make for good drinking water, it cannot be a home to fish, and unstable banks and flash floods can even make the stream a hazard. One landowner's actions can cause problems for both upstream and downstream neighbors.

As Blue Thumb staff members travel the state they frequently see examples of abused waterbodies. This publication was developed to help landowners better understand the impacts they have on Oklahoma's streams and rivers, and provide information on ways they can help protect water resources.

Blue Thumb is a water quality education program that supports volunteers who monitor streams and help educate the public about stream and river protection. If you find this publication helpful and you would like to know more visit www.bluethumbok.com, or contact a Blue Thumb staff member.

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Living in a rural setting has many benefits; privacy, space and the chance to enjoy the natural resources on your property. However, with these benefits comes the responsibility of being a good neighbor and a good steward of those natural resources.

One of the most important things you can do for yourself, your neighbors and everyone living

downstream of you is to *protect any streams or rivers that flow through your*

property. You have a choice, your stream or river can be raw and eroding (top picture) or it can function properly and offer habitat (left picture). Look inside to discover how you can be a good steward.



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Being a Good Steward

Whether you are new to the country or have been here awhile, keep in mind what it means to be a steward of the land.

6 Leave riparian zones undisturbed (the land bordering a waterbody)

- 6 Leave at least a 30' buffer between the water's edge and your farming, grazing or other land disturbing practices
- 6 Fence cattle and horses out of the creek and provide alternative water sources for them

6 Do not overgraze

- 6 Consider implementing a rotational grazing regime
- 6 Don't exceed the land's carrying capacity

6 Learn about no-till farming

6 Keep ATVs in upland areas and on designated trails

6 Leave areas in native plants for wildlife and pollinators

- 6 Native grasses have deep fibrous roots that can help prevent erosion, both in the field and along a streambank

6 Get involved in conservation planning

- 6 Visit your local conservation district
- 6 Visit your county's OSU Extension office
- 6 Find groups that encourage proper land management

6 Become a Blue Thumb volunteer!



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



An unhealthy, or completely missing riparian area causes many problems in a stream. When you remove all vegetation from your bank, it can have negative effects on your upstream and downstream neighbors.

