

Living in Town

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 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 an urban area has many benefits. Generally you are close to work, school, shopping and a variety of entertainment opportunities. One of those entertainment opportunities might be spending time in a park enjoying the outdoors. Maybe that park has a stream running through it and you remember playing in just such a stream as a child. The question now is, would you let your child play in that same stream?



The more urban an area, the greater impact on the streams that run through it. However, there are lots of things that can be done to improve our urban streams. For example, the stream above has eroding banks and no



vegetation. In contrast, the stream to the left is also in an urban park, but its banks are not eroding and vegetation is making a comeback. Look inside to discover how you can help your community improve its water quality and make your park visit more enjoyable.

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Being a good steward

Think of all the neighborhoods that exist across our great country! Many people don't realize that what they do to their yard and what they let leak onto driveways and roads has an effect on their community's waterways. Good management of your yard makes for a healthier environment for all creatures, both terrestrial and aquatic.

How a city manages its land also has an effect on the environment. When herbicides and pesticides are sprayed, the aquatic life in nearby streams is affected. Mowing all the way to the edge of the bank reduces shade and the ability of vegetation to absorb pollutants. Plants reduce soil erosion; roots stabilize banks and stems and leaves offer relief from raindrop impact.

Some things you can do in your yard include:

- 6 **Leave riparian zones undisturbed** (the land bordering a waterbody).
- 6 **Read and follow directions before applying fertilizers, pesticides or herbicides to your lawn.**
- 6 **Make your yard a haven for native plants, which benefits wildlife and pollinators.**
- 6 **Build a rain garden to help reduce runoff from your yard.**
- 6 **Visit your local conservation district for information on rain barrels and rain gardens.**
- 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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Why the riparian area 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, 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.

Without a healthy riparian area, the wildlife corridor disappears, and more pollutants enter streams

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



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