

# Facing the Issues



## What are Riparian Areas?

Riparian areas are portions of the landscape strongly influenced by water. You can recognize them by the water-loving plants along rivers, streams, lakes, springs, ponds and seeps. These green zones are one of the most ecologically diverse and productive landscapes in the world. Healthy riparian areas are crucial for sustaining a majority of fish and wildlife species, maintaining functioning watersheds, providing good water quality and supply, forage for livestock, and supporting people on the landscape.

## What are the Issues?

Today, riparian areas are seen to be among the most valuable, productive, and vulnerable areas for the agriculture sector. Issues around riparian health and management also extend beyond agriculture and include recreational, industrial and urban land use. One major issue is water quality; others include increasing agricultural sustainability, restoring biodiversity and buffering the impacts of floods and droughts. We need to meet growing public concern with a proactive, cooperative and community-based approach to address and correct riparian management issues. If we work together those actions will demonstrate good stewardship of shared resources.



## What is Cows and Fish?



The Cows and Fish program is a partnership established in 1992 to foster a better understanding of how improvements in management on riparian areas can enhance landscape health and productivity, for the benefit of ranchers, farmers and others who use and value riparian areas. Our purpose is to create a better understanding about ecological processes and land use for both rural and urban audiences.

Previous experience tells us with better information and understanding about landscape processes, local communities and producers can make better decisions on land use to sustain agriculture, fish and wildlife populations, recreation, watershed function, and clean water supplies for everyone.

# What Does Cows and Fish Do?



- ◆ Our focus is on developing and delivering a successful **awareness and education program**. In a ten year period, since 1992, over 22,000 producers, land managers, and the public have been reached through workshops, presentations, field days, and demonstration site tours across the province, increasing their knowledge about riparian areas and management.

- ◆ The program, through local community effort, has established demonstration sites throughout the province to illustrate and evaluate riparian grazing strategies, and a monitoring program to define the costs and benefits of riparian grazing. We have produced numerous awareness and education materials. Thousands of copies of *Caring for the Green Zone: Riparian areas and grazing management* have been distributed throughout western Canada and the U.S.A. The success of the Cows and Fish program has been based on **putting common sense to common practice**. Simply put, it's first getting together and working with ranchers and local communities to find out which grazing or other management strategies work and benefit their operations and which don't, while maintaining and protecting riparian health. Secondly, it's sharing this information so that other producers and land owners can benefit from that experience.

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- ◆ Our emphasis is to help producers, producer groups, municipalities, and local communities address riparian management issues on a watershed basis by **obtaining baseline information on riparian "health" or function**. This riparian health assessment provides a "state of the environment report" enabling producers and others to partner with local land managers to identify and effectively develop plans to address specific land use issues. Tools developed from this work include a Riparian Health Assessment Field Workbook and a Riparian Classification Manual.

- ◆ The most powerful tool is the ability to **work with producers at the local community and watershed level**. Working locally to develop common goals and objectives for entire watersheds is rewarding - it helps keep people on the landscape. Cows and Fish helps people develop their own approach to riparian and rangeland management specific to their area.

- ◆ Lastly, riparian management tools developed with the community allow people to improve landscape health, for their benefit and for others who use and enjoy these green zones. A key feature empowering the Cows and Fish program to help facilitate this process is the **declaration of ownership of the riparian grazing issue by cattlemen**, through the Alberta Cattle Commission (ACC) and the Canadian Cattlemen's Association (CCA). Successfully restoring and maintaining riparian health will be based on the collective efforts of ranchers, farmers, cottage owners, industry, rural and urban people and agencies. Many of these people are working together on local efforts; will you join them?

*Our riparian health assessments provide landowners with a "state of the environment report"*



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Working with producers and communities on riparian awareness

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## Cows and Fish Partners

Producers & Community Groups, Alberta Cattle Commission, Trout Unlimited Canada, Canadian Cattlemen's Association, Alberta Agriculture, Food & Rural Development, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, Alberta Environment, Department of Fisheries & Oceans, Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration, Alberta Conservation Association

Funding Associates include **Canada**  
AESA, CARDF, CABIDF, Habitat Stewardship Program