

Choices

Does This Make Cents?

Are you left wondering if management changes are the right economic decision? Can it be profitable to invest in riparian management? Does it make sense to do so? Consider the following benefits, to help you make that decision. These are benefits many Alberta farmers and ranchers have already experienced with changes in riparian and pasture management.

- ◆ **Animal performance increases with clean water.** This translates into greater weight gains and more return per animal.
- ◆ **Water conservation.** Better management of the water supply makes it go further and provides a measure of drought proofing.
- ◆ **Increased forage production.** Riparian areas can produce substantially more forage (tons/acre) than uplands if they are managed wisely.
- ◆ **Maintain or restore animal shelter.** The woody vegetation of riparian areas provides shelter for calving, protection from winter storms and shade if grazing management sustains the growth of trees and shrubs.
- ◆ **Reduced bank erosion.** Better management increases the stability of shorelines and prevents the loss of some of the most productive and valuable pastures because of lateral or vertical erosion.
- ◆ **Great stability and lower risk.** Moving to a sustainable stocking rate reduces risk, allows maintenance of a herd size through the highs and lows of moisture and forage, and provides long term stability and flexibility to your operation.
- ◆ **Better distribution and utilization.** With increased ability to manage livestock comes a reduced risk of overusing areas (especially riparian ones) and the opportunity to spread use over a pasture to better harvest forage.
- ◆ **Better nutrient management.** Better animal distribution reduces the risk of water contamination, nets higher returns in productivity of forage and reduces need for fertilizer.
- ◆ **Reduced maintenance costs.** Development of off-site and off-stream water supply increases the life span of dugouts and ponds, while reducing maintenance costs.
- ◆ **Reduced disease and death.** Better distribution practices and off-site water development can substantially cut veterinary costs for things like foot rot and reduce animal deaths by drowning.

Some of these benefits are immediate but most are long term ones. That's why, over the short term, the best economic return is often from season-long overgrazing, done year after year, with no grazing plan and investing nothing in management. However, it will catch up with you. The longer you "mine" the grass, the water and the shelter the sooner you lose flexibility, resilience and stability for your land and your operation.

Does riparian management require an investment? Yes! However, it may be less than you think. Your first investment is time and involvement. It could be thinking about the principles you've read here, looking at the examples of successful management and maybe evaluating riparian health for your pastures. Management changes don't have to be dramatic; they can be incremental. If you want to do it, it will get done. A good manager can make any system work; poor management will allow any system to fail. The key is involvement.

Choices to Make

If we continue to argue over the products of riparian areas and which one is more important- fish or cows, cows or water quality, water quality or agriculture- we may be missing the point. When we work toward restoring, or maintaining a healthy landscape

these products, and more, can be part of the benefit package.



This riparian area has lost shelter, forage production, the ability to filter and buffer water and flow may disappear. It may not be the best choice for the future.



We can make other choices. The example to follow may be right across the fence. This kind of riparian area gives us all a future.

