



Riparian Health A Wake Up Call

Some of the changes to a landscape occur slowly, over periods of time beyond an individual's memory. Because of this, sometimes we fail to notice that change, even deterioration, has happened.



This 1890 photograph of Willow Creek is an image of health; woody vegetation is abundant and diverse.



Almost 100 years later, this same site on Willow Creek shows substantial change, although some remnant woody species still persist.



This 1920's photograph of Sylvan Lake is an image of health; the water was clear, clean and enjoyed by many.



In recent times many central Alberta lakes show signs of water quality problems.

These changes may affect us, our lives, livelihood, health and recreation. When we begin to recognize riparian condition it is a start towards changing the trend from one of decline to stability and perhaps improvement in health. If you drink water, farm or ranch, have a lakeside cottage, swim, fish or watch birds, riparian area health is important to you. Riparian areas make up a small portion of the landscape, but are much more important to us than their small size would indicate.



Riparian Health - Why Does it Matter?

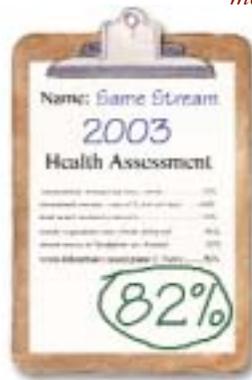
We depend on not only our own health to sustain us, but on the health of the environment in which we live. Riparian health matters for the same reason our own health matters! Healthy, functioning riparian areas offer us:

- ♦ Resiliency - the ability to bounce back from floods, droughts and human-caused problems;
- ♦ Ecological services - a long list of goods, benefits and values; and
- ♦ Stability - landscapes that maintain themselves, persist and are sustainable.

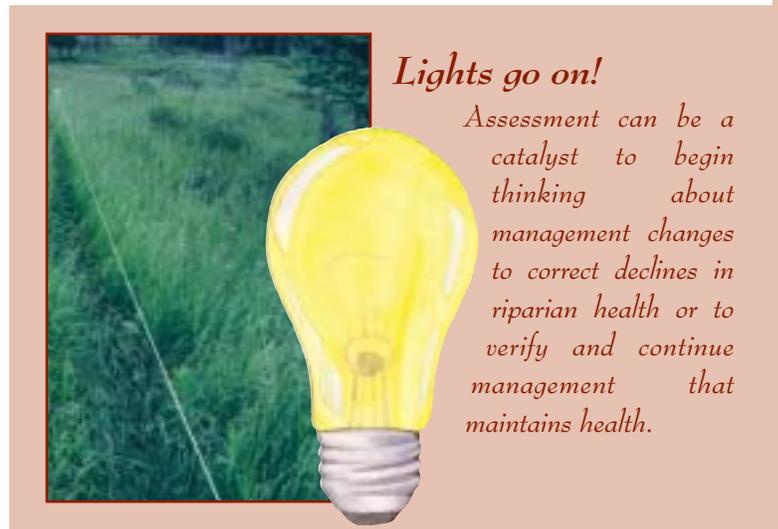
Why focus on riparian areas? They are the focus because of their agricultural benefits, the biodiversity values they represent and for concerns about water quality. Some riparian areas have declined in their ability to perform the ecological functions that relate directly to these benefits and values. Often the health of these valuable landscapes has changed over time, even though that decline isn't obvious. We need to understand the current status of riparian areas to improve or maintain their health. The **first** step is to determine the condition or health of the site. Once we know the health of a site, we have a way to link management actions and changes to improve or maintain ecological function.



Riparian health evaluations provide a standard method to allow landowners, resource managers and others to quickly assess current health and to identify the presence, scale and magnitude of issues and problems.



Riparian health evaluations can be repeated, over time, to monitor changes that may result from natural variation or management actions and choices.



Lights go on!

Assessment can be a catalyst to begin thinking about management changes to correct declines in riparian health or to verify and continue management that maintains health.



Riparian health evaluations are an educational tool, to allow those that use, manage and value riparian areas to better understand key functions, identify a way to measure those functions and to serve as a vehicle for better communication among riparian users. Sometimes even the cows join in.

Riparian health matters!