



Introduction



These are two riparian areas at different locations on the same stream.

Our eyes tell us one looks different from the other. Often we perceive there is a difference, but it may not be clear what is missing from one picture. We may struggle to convey our impressions of the scene to someone else because we lack the words to describe what we see. A riparian area may be green and that may disguise some problems or distract us from noticing some of the missing pieces. It would help us to be able to recognize the missing pieces and describe them to others. That's what riparian health is about, being able to recognize the critical pieces of a riparian area and to measure those pieces. We can then determine if the system is in good condition and functioning as it should. If the system isn't functioning, an understanding of what pieces are missing, or impaired, may help our management efforts, to restore the riparian area to a healthier state.

What do you see?

As you begin to train your eyes, you might notice that the riparian area on the left is missing young trees and shrubs and other deep-rooted plants. On the right these are present and glue the streambank together. That's a good start to an understanding of riparian health.