

THE VARIETY OF LIFE IN THE GREEN ZONE COWS AND FISH

The cottontail rabbit, northern pintail, yellow warbler, western blue flag iris, red-winged blackbird, damselfly, and brook trout all have something in common. They are all residents of **riparian areas** that border lakes, rivers, streams, wetlands, sloughs and springs.

With their lush growth, riparian areas provide shelter and water to many fish, livestock and wildlife species. Almost two-thirds of Canada's rare and endangered species and 80% of Alberta's wildlife species use these areas for all, or part, of their life cycle requirements.

RIPARIAN AREAS – A MAGNET FOR WILDLIFE

Cows and Fish, an Alberta-born organization, is a partnership of many agricultural and conservation-based agencies and organizations - all of which have a stake in healthy riparian areas. *Cows and Fish* works with farmers, ranchers, cottage owners and other interested community members to help them develop their own working solutions to riparian issues.

Using their collective resources and knowledge, as well as the practical wisdom of landowners, *Cows and Fish* helps to put common sense to common practice. Community-based groups decide which riparian management practices work for them, and are the driving force behind all action that is taken.

The maintenance of, and, in some cases, the improvement of riparian areas is important for a variety of reasons. These green zones trap, store and filter water, reduce erosion on shorelines and streambanks, provide forage for livestock, and house and sustain diverse species of fish, birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, insects and plants.

A HEALTHY RIPARIAN AREA MEANS HEALTHY BIODIVERSITY

Biological diversity, or **biodiversity** for short, describes the variety and array of life on Earth. A standard measurement of the biodiversity in an area is the total number of species found in that area. Healthy riparian areas with their tangle of shrubs, trees, cattails and grasses are able to support a wide variety and abundance of species.

The biodiversity in healthy riparian areas is higher than in most uplands in Alberta, and areas with a high level of biodiversity are better able to handle environmental stressors such as drought, floods or disease.

Healthy riparian areas are essential to link a variety of plants, animals and ecosystems together. Animal, plant, fish and insect species travel through riparian systems which, as if acting as meandering trails, join distant pieces of the landscape together.

RIPARIAN AREAS ALSO ATTRACT PEOPLE

Today, recreational, residential, industrial and agricultural activities may have a serious impact on riparian biodiversity. Residential subdivisions, campgrounds, noise and activity, and the removal of vegetation may reduce the variety of species in these areas. As well, some agricultural practices - such as grazing riparian areas for long periods of time, or allowing cattle to continually access water at a shoreline – will damage plant species and soils, and reduce the variety of animal species.

For further information on biodiversity, and to find out how *Cows and Fish* can work with your community to increase awareness on riparian issues and help develop and implement plans of action to maintain or improve riparian health, contact the Program Manager at 403-381-5538 or view the Cows and Fish website at www.cowsandfish.org.