

## *COWS AND FISH – PARTNERING WITH LANDOWNERS AND THEIR COMMUNITIES*

Although riparian areas make up less than 5% of Alberta’s landscape, their importance is greater than their presence on the landscape would indicate. These sensitive, lush, green zones, called riparian areas, which border lakes, rivers, streams, wetlands and springs are key to good water quality, protecting shorelines and streambanks from erosion, providing habitat for fish and wildlife, and producing forage for livestock.

### *HEALTHY LANDSCAPES MEAN HEALTHY COMMUNITIES*

Riparian areas support a diverse range of uses – recreational, agricultural, industrial, and residential – and therefore are best utilized and enjoyed when they are healthy.

*Cows and Fish* is a partnership of organizations and agencies, all of which have a stake in the health of riparian areas. Since 1992, *Cows and Fish* has been working with communities to promote a better understanding of how improvements to and maintenance of riparian areas are beneficial to everyone.

Any community-based group can partner with *Cows and Fish* to access information and advice, arrange presentations and workshops and develop a plan to improve the health of their own riparian areas. By working directly with farmers, ranchers, cottage owners and communities on riparian land use issues, *Cows and Fish* leaves the decision making up to group members, and all riparian stewardship action is tailored to each group’s area, needs and concerns.

### *THE COWS AND FISH PROCESS – GETTING STARTED*

Five components are instrumental in the success of the *Cows and Fish* process; **awareness** is the first. Through awareness and understanding - by way of presentations, workshops, field days, videos and written material - a common language is developed between group members. This common language helps in the success of each group’s plan.

With **team building**, individuals with varied backgrounds and strengths are linked to work toward a common goal of identifying, addressing and resolving riparian issues. **Tool building**, the third component, starts by learning what riparian management practices have been successful with farmers and ranchers and other landowners. Information and experience is shared among group members and with other groups throughout Alberta.

By using **community-based action**, producers and their communities are the driving force behind the work that is done to improve or maintain riparian health. By evaluating and **monitoring**, the fifth component, groups are better able to address issues, recognize where changes could be made to improve the riparian system, and eventually see the success of their project.

### *HARD WORK OF LANDOWNERS AND COMMUNITIES SPELLS SUCCESS*

Much of the success of the *Cows and Fish* program lies in the fact that they don’t force their message on unwilling groups. Ranchers, farmers, cottage owners and communities determine on

their own if there is a need for action, then invite *Cows and Fish* into their community, and determine the course that their plan will take.

In doing so, the public receives the message that community-based groups can be successful in facing issues and finding solutions to make the landscape healthier for everyone.

*IT ALL BEGINS BY SEEING A NEED*

Many resources – brochures and booklets - are available from *Cows and Fish*. As well, their user-friendly website, [www.cowsandfish.org](http://www.cowsandfish.org), is full of information and success stories. To speak to a representative, contact the Program Manager at 403-381-5538.