

## SHEDDING LIGHT ON WATERSHED ACTION COWS AND FISH

Do you know which watershed you live in? Everyone lives within a watershed, and everyone is linked to one another through a watershed. You can think of a watershed as the sum of many streams, channels, drainages, wetlands, ponds and lakes. It is an area of land that catches and collects rain and snow, and then drains into a wetland, stream, river or lake.

### *Healthy Watersheds Equal Healthy Communities*

Alberta is divided into many watersheds. There are nine large watersheds, or drainages, within the province – each containing smaller watersheds within them. For example, the North Saskatchewan watershed, which ultimately drains east into Hudson's Bay, can be divided into many smaller watersheds such as the Iron Creek watershed.

Many different rural and urban communities may exist in one watershed. Add two or three communities together, and most of your local watershed will be found within those boundaries.

Through their watershed, great numbers of people are linked together. When a watershed is healthy, the effects trickle down into the surrounding communities. It is crucial that a watershed and its riparian areas - the areas of lush vegetation bordering rivers, streams and lakes – are functioning well, but that is too daunting of a task for an individual to tackle.

Although it is important for individuals to do what they can to ensure good watershed and riparian health, maintaining the condition of a watershed should be the effort of many people from the many communities situated in that watershed. Because watersheds and their riparian areas filter water and improve its quality, provide animal and fish habitat, reduce the impact of flooding and support agricultural production, their functions benefit everyone.

### *Getting to Know Your Neighbours*

Watershed and riparian health is greatly affected by what your neighbors do and what activities may be occurring upstream, far from your property. Likewise, management practices on your property impact the areas downstream from you. Factors having an influence on the soundness of these areas are residential development, road construction and the use of culverts, logging activities, continuous grazing and certain cultivation techniques.

Assessing activities, measuring their impact and evaluating the condition of riparian areas can link people in a watershed, and help them to work together on a common goal of improving or maintaining the health of riparian areas in their watershed. When a community works together, the individual efforts pay big dividends on a watershed scale.

*Many Hands Make Light Work*

*Cows and Fish* is a voluntary stewardship program that works with agricultural producers, cottage owners and concerned community members on watershed and riparian awareness and management plans. *Cows and Fish* enables local communities and producers to make better decisions about land use, agricultural practices, fish and wildlife populations and good clean water supplies in their watershed.

A number of resources are available from *Cows and Fish*, and include 'Caring For the Green Zone' booklets, colourful fact sheets, a field workbook to help determine the health of a riparian area, and a user-friendly website, [www.cowsandfish.org](http://www.cowsandfish.org), which gives detailed information on many topics.

To arrange a presentation or workshop in your watershed, or for further information, contact the Program Manager at 403-381-5538.