



# Caring for the Green Zone Newsletter

VOLUME 1 FALL/WINTER

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## Welcome to Cows and Fish

Welcome to our inaugural newsletter! First newsletter?? That might seem hard to believe since Cows and Fish started 25 years ago. Although we did draft newsletter versions in years gone by, we just never got around to a regular newsletter before, but we realized it was time to let people know about the broad range of work, places, and people we interact with. We encourage you to 'step into the green zone', and join us as we share some of our passion, the work we do and why we do it.

Thank you for joining us on this journey, and for many more journeys, to come.

*Norine Ambrose,*

Executive Director

Development of this newsletter, along with other new communication has been graciously supported by Alberta Ecotrust Foundation, along with our many core funders and supporters

(<http://cowsandfish.org/about/members.html>).

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As you may know, we rely upon grants to do much of the work we do, so if you want to suggest an opportunity, collaboration, or make a donation, please do!

Please sign up for our newsletter if you have not already done so:



### Cows and Fish is Hiring !!!

Check out our website for details [www.cowsandfish.org](http://www.cowsandfish.org)

### Upcoming Events (see [page 3](#) for details)

- Ladies Livestock Lessons/ Farm Women's Round Table and Winter Retreat. January 23, 2016.
- Cows and Fish Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Workshop, Jan 26, 2016, Airdrie, AB
- Landowner Workshop – Riparian management and planning, Date January 19, 2016)
- Westslope Cutthroat Trout Stakeholder Workshop, February 18, 2016, Chain Lakes Provincial Park, M.D. Ranchland, AB
- Grazing School for Women, June 14-15, 2016, Halkirk, AB

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## The 2 Neighbours Project: Bringing Shampoo Sales to Stewardship

By Ken Lewis (Red Deer County) and Kelsey Spicer-Rawe (Cows and Fish)

**"I told two friends, and they told two friends, and they told two friends, and so on, and so on..."**



Some of you may remember that line from a 1980's shampoo commercial. Heather Locklear liked the shampoo so much, she told her friends, and they told their friends and so on, spreading the word through a network of people, resulting in what the shampoo company hoped would be skyrocketing sales and adoption of a new shampoo brand for a large group of consumers. The basic principle behind the commercial is a cornerstone of marketing social change - one of the most powerful forces influencing consumer adoption of new products or actions: peers talking to peers...or in today's lingo, the "social network". This same cornerstone is behind the "2 Neighbours Project" happening in Red Deer

County.

The County and Cows and Fish are engaging 20 of the producers they've worked with in the past, for the 2 Neighbours Project. Those 20 are being encouraged to each invite 2 neighbours to participate in County BMP programs. To help refresh and expand their knowledge of agro-environmental topics, the 20 producers are offered workshops on related topics, like riparian and range health. They are also asked to invite and bring their neighbours to project events, like the Riparian and Range Health Field Day held in August. Like in the shampoo commercial, they are asked to talk to their neighbors about their experience with the County's programs, and encourage their neighbours to contact the County to find out more.

In addition to supporting the peer-to-peer approach to facilitate BMP adoption, the 2 Neighbours Project is helping evaluate the environmental impacts of County programs. Working with the 20 producers, in 2015, Cows and Fish staff completed range or riparian health assessments to provide a baseline condition where BMPs have been in place for a number of years. In 2016 and 2017, assessments will be done on neighbours' lands, providing a baseline of what riparian and range health looks like where BMP adoption is more recent. General comparisons will be made between the two groups, to get an idea of the environmental impacts of BMP adoption (and the programs that support it).

An unexpected added benefit of the project that's already emerging is the network that's developing amongst the project participants. Although many of the 20 producers did not know one another, even at the first project meeting, many were keen to share what they're doing on their farm or ranch, and learn what others were doing too.

This project is funded by the Government of Canada, through Environment Canada's Environmental Damages Fund, as well as considerable in-kind contributions from Red Deer County and Cows and Fish. The project kicked off in Spring of 2015 and runs until Spring 2018.

For many years, Red Deer County has worked with farmers and ranchers, supporting adoption of environmentally beneficial management practices ("BMPs").

To facilitate BMPs, Red Deer County:

- hosts workshops and field days
- provides technical assistance on funding applications
- provides funding to producers to cost share BMP adoption (Conservation Partners program)
- pays producers for increased ecosystem services (e.g. clean water, biodiversity) that are produced when BMPs are adopted.

For more information  
contact

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or

Kelsey Spicer-Rawe

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## On The Road with Cows and Fish

From Cardston to Calgary and from Drayton Valley to Viking and dozens of places in between, we've been meeting with landowners and gathering management and riparian health details from the Peace River Region in the north, to the Milk River in the south. This summer was one of our busiest, with over 200 riparian health sites, on 63 different waterbodies! We visited many streams, as well as many large rivers, lakes and wetlands. We are currently number crunching and writing reports 'until the cows come home'. We look forward to working with landowners and partners to monitor riparian health and inform management.



## Riparian "Recipe"

Winter, the other riparian season. Despite frozen water and banks covered in snow, riparian areas are still affected by our winter activities.



At one time, trees next to the water were considered an ideal place to winter livestock given the shelter from cold north winds and proximity to water which could be accessed through a hole in the ice. A wintering site that includes feeding, bedding and watering needs to be carefully managed, particularly if near surface water. Not only are there risks to nearby waterways from



movement of nutrients, pathogens and sediment but nutrients washed away can be an economic loss to the agricultural producer as a lost opportunity to improve crop or forage yields.

# 2015 Upcoming Events: Details

**Ladies Livestock Lessons / Farm Women's Round Table and Winter Retreat. January 23, 2016. Cochrane, AB.**

Download the poster ([click here](#)) for more details. Topics include a hands-on session on Total Stockmanship with Curt Pate, Contemporary Range Research in Support of Sustainable Pasture Management with Dr. Edward Bork, Verified Beef Program Update and more! Follow updates via: [www.ladieslivestocklessons.blogspot.com](http://www.ladieslivestocklessons.blogspot.com), or Facebook (along with some other women's grazing schools). Contact Kelsey Spicer-Rowe at [kspicer@cowsandfish.org](mailto:kspicer@cowsandfish.org) or (403) 948-8519.

**Cows and Fish Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Workshop, Jan 26 or Jan 27, 2016, Airdrie, AB**

We'll share lessons learned and results from research on program evaluation and monitoring, to help those in the ag and conservation sectors. Contact [riparian@cowsandfish.org](mailto:riparian@cowsandfish.org) or signup here <https://cowsandfishJan2016workshop.eventbrite.com>

**Landowner Workshop – Riparian management and planning, January 19, 2016, Lac Ste. Anne County, AB.**

Learn to use air photos to "read your land" and discuss what that means for riparian improvement project options. Contact Kerri O'Shaughnessy at [koshaugh@cowsandfish.org](mailto:koshaugh@cowsandfish.org) or (780) 427-7940, or Lorraine Taylor at [ltaylor@lsac.ca](mailto:ltaylor@lsac.ca) or (780) 785-3411 and 1-866-880-5722.

**Westslope Cutthroat Trout Stakeholder Workshop, February 18, 2016, Chain Lakes Provincial Park, M.D. Ranchland, AB.** Guest speakers will cover updates on recovery work, riparian health and management work. Contact Norine Ambrose at [nambrose@cowsandfish.org](mailto:nambrose@cowsandfish.org) or (403) 381-5538

*In simple terms, more beaver on the landscape means more water supply.*



Photo Credit: Myrna Pearman

## ***Beaver: Pest or Protector of Water Resources***

*Author: Cows and Fish*

### **Water ... we can't live without it.**

As the reality of a changing climate becomes ever more apparent, we will need to catch and store water more effectively. Have we overlooked a natural ally in our efforts to conserve and manage water? Probably. Consider our Canadian icon, the beaver!

For more than 10,000 years, beaver have been building dams and storing water across the landscape. The cumulative effect of their ponds on water storage, both above and below ground, is enormous. In simple terms, more beaver on the landscape means more water supply. University of Alberta biologist, researcher and author of the *Beaver Manifesto*, Glynnis Hood, found by scanning historical records of beaver populations and climate data that ponds with active beaver lodges had 9 times more water during droughts than ponds without dams.

In addition to affecting water quantity, beaver ponds contribute to an impressive list of valuable goods and services for humans. Ponds trap and store tons of sediment which improves water quality downstream for people and livestock alike. And lastly, their ponds create diverse, productive and unique habitats for creatures great and small.

Beaver dams and ponds check the velocity of streams and dissipate water energy, creating speed bumps for streams. This decreases the risk (and costs) of major flooding and slows erosion. There is a diverse mosaic of vegetation, particularly willows, in



these areas, which protect and stabilize stream banks.

Beaver ponds store surface water and re-charge ground water. This increases water supply and releases water more steadily throughout the year - especially vital during droughts. Much of the stream water captured by beaver ponds is stored underground in shallow aquifers and may re-enter the channel downstream. This keeps water temperatures cooler in summer, benefiting sport fish.

Life is all about water - a substance more precious than gold and likely more scarce as we move into a climatically uncertain future. With their ponds serving as natural water reservoirs, beaver can help us but only if we accommodate their activity and find a balance between the work of this sometimes pesky bucktoothed rodent and our land-use, to sustain both on the land.





## Riparian Fun Fact: “The Ice Cream Plant”

Named for its striking red bark, **red-osier dogwood** (*Cornus stolonifera*) is a signature species of healthy riparian areas across Alberta. Known as the “ice-cream” plant, it is highly preferred forage for wildlife like moose and deer, but also for cattle, particularly during



the winter. Its deep roots prevent erosion and its canopy shades streams.

Learn more about riparian plants by ordering our

[\*A Field Guide to Common Riparian Plants of Alberta\*](#)

## Cows and Fish Fun Fact

Did you know Cows and Fish is a charitable organization?

To support the work we do, please donate on-line at [www.cowsandfish.org](http://www.cowsandfish.org),

[Donate Now](#)



## Frequently Asked Questions:

### What is the difference between a wetland and a riparian area?

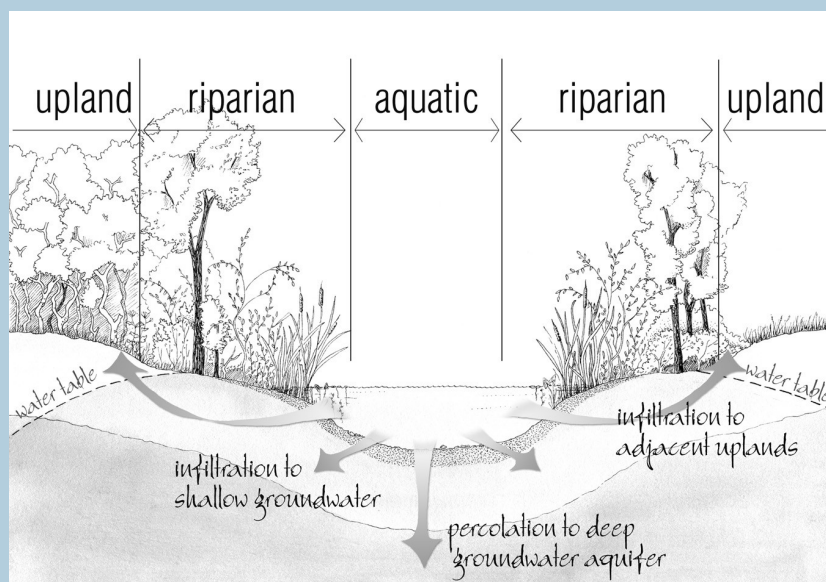
There is often confusion about this topic. Riparian areas and wetlands are commonly referred to as different entities, when in reality all wetlands have a riparian component. Riparian areas

can be associated with both “lotic” systems (i.e. flowing streams/ivers) and “lentic” systems (i.e. standing or still water systems such as all classes of wetlands and lakes).

In simple terms, whenever you have water-modified soils (either from flooding, a high water table or shallow standing water) and

plants that are adapted to these soils, you have riparian conditions. The inner (water) edge of a lentic (standing water) riparian area encompasses the emergent band of cattails, bulrushes or sedges growing along the shoreline of water bodies up to the interface with open, deep water (if present). The outer

(landward) edge of a lentic riparian area extends out to where there is a transition to drier upland soils and plants, beyond the zone of influence of water and hydrological processes from the adjacent water body, often where there is a topographic change and soil types change (although you might not see this unless you dig a soil pit).



Riparian areas encompass the full extent of most bogs, fens, swamps and temporary or seasonal or permanent marsh wetland and lake types, excluding areas of aquatic (permanent open water) habitat. Having an understanding of water-loving (hydrophytic) plant indicator species (i.e. plants that grow in partly or totally water-logged soils) and water-modified soil characteristics (e.g. gleying or mottling from anoxic conditions) can help you better define the boundary of a lentic riparian system.

Although riparian areas make up only a small fraction of southern Alberta in the mineral soil zone, bog, fen and conifer swamp riparian wetland types are a characteristic feature of northern Alberta peatland landscapes.



## A Special Note: Farewell to Amanda



If you have interacted with Cows and Fish very much or for many years, you likely know that Amanda Halawell has been a long-term fixture and integral part of our success. Since 2003, she has worked as our Range/Riparian Specialist, bringing a wealth of range research experience as well as practical knowledge from being raised on a farm near Consort. Amanda has a special talent in talking to people, particularly putting farmers and ranchers at ease, providing thoughtful comments and treating those she engages with as equals. We will sadly miss her top-notch botanical and range health skills and her easy way of inserting humor into her presentations. We wish her well in her new position with Alberta Environment and Parks.



## We love hearing from you!

Please contact Norine Ambrose [nambrose@cowsandfish.org](mailto:nambrose@cowsandfish.org) to follow up on any items in this newsletter.

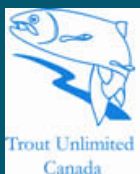
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For full contact information, visit our website at: <http://cowsandfish.org/contact.html>

## Cows and Fish

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