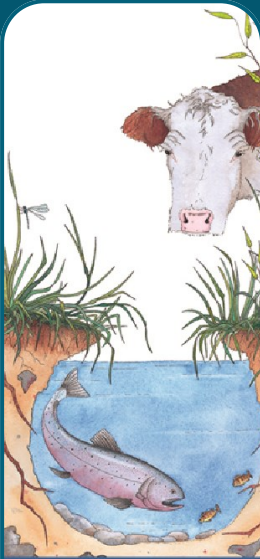


# Caring for the Green Zone Newsletter

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Cows and Fish

## A job in my field!

It's hard to believe that something that started out as an idea has resulted in almost 25 years of riparian programming with a focus on communities in a watershed perspective in Alberta. It's a bit tricky to pinpoint our exact start date but we do know that one of our first presentations was delivered in December 1992, and it grew from there. I was lucky enough to come on board in 1999 as a young person recently out of university thirsty for....well let's just be honest, a job in my field! This summer (2016) marked my 18th year with Cows and Fish, working with producers and communities on riparian awareness, and I can say for certain much of what I know now has come from the job, and people I have met. Over my time here, a lot has changed but the commitment of this organisation and my colleagues to helping people better understand the riparian landscapes has not, and will continue!

*Kerri O'Shaughnessy*, Riparian Specialist

Original development of our newsletter was graciously supported by Alberta Ecotrust Foundation, along with our many core funders and supporters: (<http://cowsandfish.org/about/members.html>).

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!

[Donate Now](#)

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



We'd love to get your feedback and equally importantly, we hope you'll share this with your friends and colleagues.

## Upcoming Events [\(see details\)](#)

- Ladies Livestock Lessons, January 28, 2017. Balzac
- Cows and Fish Riparian Restoration and Management: Strategies and Success Stories Workshop, February 15, 2017. Airdrie
- Cows and Fish Living with Beaver Webinar, March 15, 2017
- Southern Alberta Grazing School for Women, July 25 & 26, 2017. Munson

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# The City of Calgary: Riparian Health in a Big City

By Kristina Wantola (Cows and Fish)



Sandy Beach Restoration 2008

A large city like Calgary is not always associated with riparian areas, but beyond the tall sky scrapers and bright lights is a vast expanse of rivers and streams that run throughout the city. Calgary has taken huge strides in recognizing the importance of riparian areas in development planning, flood mitigation and recreation. Since 2007, The City of Calgary and Cows and Fish have been collaborating to conduct riparian health inventories. In 2014-2015 we conducted revisits of sites within the City to assess post-flood impacts and to measure trends in riparian health scores. This revisit generally showed that *healthy* riparian areas fared better than those that were *unhealthy* before the flood. As part of its new *Riparian Program*, the City of Calgary and Cows and Fish continue to collaborate on monitoring, maintaining and improving riparian health within the City.

Assessing health and communicating the values of healthy riparian areas provides a strong foundation for investing resources in restoration, conservation, or other improvements. The City of Calgary has taken this next step, by restoring areas of concern and value. Since 2008, the City has conducted several restoration projects throughout the City, including those at Sue Higgins Park and Sandy Beach where riparian plantings of native trees and shrubs have restored many of the areas that were left bare by overuse (people and dogs). The City is also using a multi-pronged approach to try to integrate riparian values within land use planning and development processes. Public education and outreach are also a key part of The City of Calgary's current and future plans for riparian programming.

So what's next for the City? Much of the focus thus far has been on larger more prominent areas such as the Bow and Elbow Rivers, but the City recognizes that to get a full picture of health you need to understand as many of the elements of a watershed as possible. As a result, in 2016 the City asked us to focus some of our riparian health work on intermittent and ephemeral streams, which are streams that may only contain water during the early spring or heavy rains. Many of these little streams don't have names and go unnoticed by local residents and developers, but that doesn't mean they aren't important. Even though they are small, they provide the same ecological functions as larger rivers, including recharging ground-water, cycling nutrients, and trapping sediments during heavy rainfall. In fact, a recent major review showed that riparian conditions along small streams in a watershed have a greater cumulative impact on water quality than riparian areas along our large rivers (USEPA 2015). So next time you're taking a walk along one of the many parks in the City, keep your eyes peeled for those little creeks and think about the big impacts that they have.

Healthy riparian areas have many functions, including

- buffering flood impacts by absorbing and storing flood-water,
- dissipating the erosive force of floodwater
- which helps to alleviate flood damage downstream
- recharge ground water,
- and provide fish and wildlife habitat.

Since 2013, The City has completed over 20 bioengineering projects (e.g., timber crib walls, wattle fences, vegetated rip rap) to stabilize river and streambanks and encourage vegetation establishment.



Riparian plantings at Sue Higgins Park, 2010

For more information contact: Kristina Wantola at [kwantola@cowsandfish.org](mailto:kwantola@cowsandfish.org)

## On The Road with Cows and Fish

This past summer was another busy one! We completed over 200 riparian health sites. We spent a week during our annual training to tune our eyes and get back into the field. We met with landowners to gather management information and riparian health details during the summer months, and our staff have spent much of the fall entering data, cataloguing photographs and starting riparian health reports. Large portions of our work this summer were in the eastern slopes of southwest Alberta, in Red Deer County, in the Iron Creek watershed as well as in The City of Calgary.



### Riparian “Recipe”

Off-stream watering sites, permanent or portable, in the uplands, can draw livestock pressure away from riparian areas and achieve better use of upland pastures. Putting them further back from the water’s edge than shown in the picture (above) is a better practice to increase benefits.

Research has shown that over 80% of the time, cattle prefer to drink from an off-site water source as compared to a stream or waterbody.

## Upcoming Events

**Ladies Livestock Lessons**, January 28, 2017. Balzac, AB. Download the [poster](#) for more information! Register [here](#)! Follow us on [Facebook](#). Contact Kelsey Spicer-Rowe for information at [kspicer@cowsandfish.org](mailto:kspicer@cowsandfish.org) or (403) 948-8519.

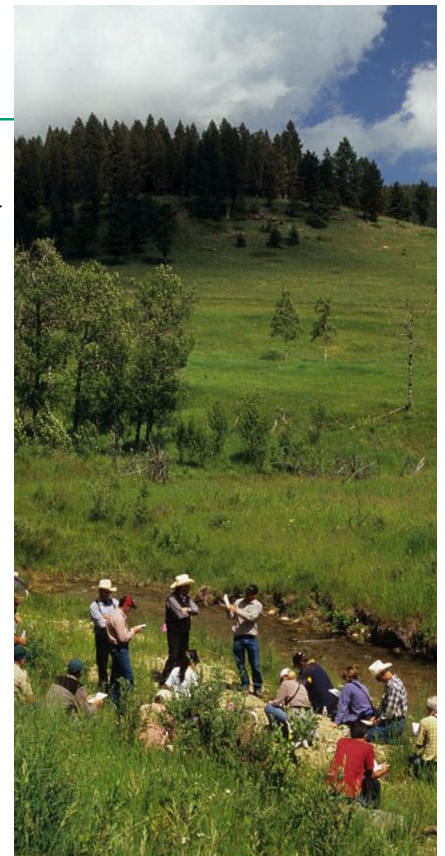
**Cows and Fish Workshop - Restoration and Management: Strategies and Success Stories** February 15, 2017. Airdrie. Register by February 10, 2017 at <https://riparianrestoration.eventbrite.com>

**Cows and Fish Webinar—Living with Beaver**, March 15, 2017—Save the Date. Watch our [website](#) for updates.

**15th Annual! Grazing School for Women** June 13 & 14, Vermilion area, AB. Watch our [Upcoming Events](#) for updates. Contact Kerri O’Shaughnessy for more information at [koshaugh@cowsandfish.org](mailto:koshaugh@cowsandfish.org) or (780) 427-7940.

**Southern Alberta Women's Grazing School** July 25 & 26, 2016. Munson, AB. Poster Watch our [Upcoming Events](#) for updates. Contact Kristi Stebanuk for more information at [kstebanuk@cowsandfish.org](mailto:kstebanuk@cowsandfish.org) or (403) 382-0927.

Looking for a presentation to your local event or workshop? With a few exceptions, when we host our own events, most of the extension and outreach we do is at the request of local communities and partners, so give us a call or email a Riparian Specialist near you. <http://cowsandfish.org/contact.html>. Many of the areas of expertise we speak on are described on our website <http://cowsandfish.org/about/workshops.html>



# Wetlands are not Wastelands

Author: Cows and Fish



Wetlands are essentially lands that are wet. They are low lying areas where enough water collects to support water-loving plants, like cattail, rushes, sedges and willow. Wetlands also have perpetually wet soils because they are either saturated with water year-round or covered with water at least some time during the growing season of most years. Wetlands include the area covered by water and the adjacent area of lush water-loving plants we would call the riparian area, which is part of all wetlands.

Wetlands vary in shape, size and permanence. Sloughs, ponds, potholes, bogs and muskeg areas are all types of wetlands. A temporary wetland may have water only after snowmelt or a heavy rain, whereas a semi-permanent wetland will hold water through most years, but may dry out after several years of drought. A permanent wetland will have water present year round.

Wetlands are not wastelands (this phrase is widespread now on the internet, but we probably owe that phrase to Ducks Unlimited). Wetlands are the connection in the watershed we often cannot see, linking groundwater, surface water in other wetlands, lakes and streams, soil moisture and weather patterns. Wetlands are so closely linked with other parts of the water cycle that drainage can have significant local effects such as lowering the water table, reducing local precipitation and creating greater temperature extremes.

There are many benefits to leaving wetlands and their surrounding riparian areas intact. Some are subtle, such as increased local soil moisture, reduced flooding, more stable stream flow, improved crop production and better water quality. Other benefits are more obvious such as supplying shelter, forage and water for livestock, habitat for wildlife and fish.

In drought some wetlands completely dry up, sometimes for several years in a row. However, even a dry wetland provides many of the same benefits listed above. Seeding a seasonal wetland to crop while it is dry is a risky venture. There is increased danger of frost in the low area and a very high likelihood of flooding once wetter conditions return. Wetland substrates are usually quite impervious, and may be saline, which results in low crop productivity. Several studies have shown that the costs of draining and cropping wetlands are often higher than the crop returns.

What can you do to manage your wetlands on your land, farm or ranch? Consider leaving your wetlands intact including the natural extent of the riparian vegetation and an additional buffer of extra vegetation where possible. Not only will this trap more snow in winter, increasing soil moisture and recharging groundwater supplies, but this buffer will also filter out nutrients found in runoff from yards, pastures or cropped fields, improving water quality in your watershed. Manage grazing in wetlands to prevent over-use and trampling by livestock, and to avoid manure build-up.

Cows and Fish helps landowners and their communities to assess their wetlands and other riparian areas as well as develop management strategies to help conserve these valuable resources.

*For more information on wetlands contact Cows and Fish at 403-381-5538*

## Riparian Fun Fact: “Saskatoon”

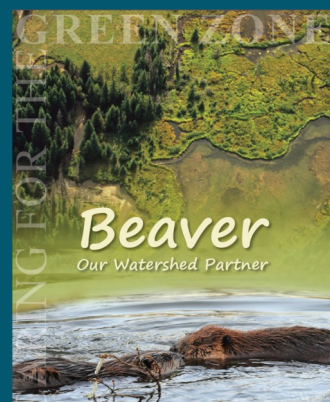
Saskatoon (*Amelanchier alnifolia*) is a tall native shrub with small clusters of white flowers in the spring. Due to its extensive root system, it provides good erosion protection along streambanks and is a preferred species in riparian areas. Not only is saskatoon a good forage species for wildlife and livestock, it produces sweet and juicy purple berries which are a favourite of humans as well, and are delicious in pies, pancakes, jellies or eaten fresh off the branch.



## Cows and Fish Fun Fact

Did you know Cows and Fish has a new document out?

### Beaver: Our Watershed Partner



## Frequently Asked Questions:

**Why are we called “Cows & Fish”?** In the early 1990’s a group of southern Alberta ranchers noticed a change in the landscape their families had been living, working and playing on for as long as many of them could remember. The willows were dying, the creeks were drying and the fish just weren’t as plentiful or common as they had been in the past. They invited Barry Adams (a rangeland biologist) and Lorne Fitch (a fisheries biologist) to walk their pastures and creek bottoms to discuss grazing management past and present, and what they could do better in the future to benefit the livestock, the land, the water and the fish, as well as their livelihoods. And so it began! It became apparent that ranchers and the agriculture community were interested and wanted more information about how to better manage these aspects of their operations, and the importance of the transition zone between land and water (the riparian area) was emerging as a key issue in the beef industry. These same ranchers had some amazing success stories of sound management keeping riparian areas healthy, which we learned a lot from. A group of like minded organisations including Alberta Beef Producers and Trout Unlimited Canada, who became our founding members, began to discuss and implement a program to foster a better understanding of how improvements in grazing and other management of riparian areas can enhance landscape health and productivity, for the benefit of landowners, agricultural producers, communities and others who use and value riparian areas—including fish!

## 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.

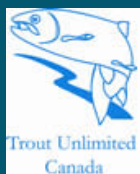
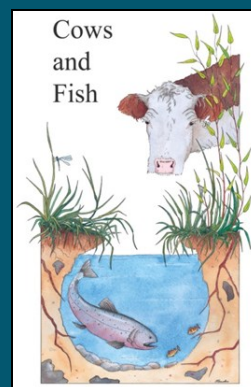
Ph: 403-381-5538 2nd Flr, YPM Place, 530-8th Street South, Lethbridge, AB, T1J 2J8

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

## Cows and Fish

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