

Looking at my Streambank

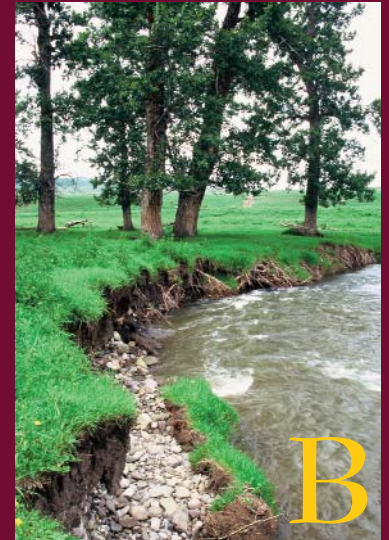
riparian health checklist



Riparian Areas

Riparian areas are moist areas of water-loving vegetation that border a stream, river, lake or wetland. They are very important ecologically, socially and economically. A healthy riparian area helps reduce bank erosion, trap sediments, filter pollutants, improve water quality and provide livestock forage and excellent fish and wildlife habitat.

How do you know if the riparian area along your streambank is healthy? Take a look at the photos at the right. Does your riparian area look like one of these or does it lie somewhere in between? To better assess the health of the riparian area along your river, stream or creek, fill in the checklist below:



Which picture best resembles the riparian area along your streambank? A or B or somewhere in between?



Streambank Riparian Health CHECKLIST

Answer the thirteen questions below to find out how healthy your streambank is. If you are unsure about an answer, leave it blank.



- 1 85% or more of the riparian area is covered with vegetation (of any kind). Yes No
- 2 More than 50% of the riparian plants are taller than knee height. Yes No
- 3 Shrubs such as willow, dogwood and silverberry are growing along or near the stream edge, and grow without a mushroom or hedged appearance. Yes No
- 4 There are young trees and shrubs that will replace the older ones over time. Yes No
- 5 Plants such as Kentucky bluegrass (lawn grass), clovers, dandelion and creeping red fescue represent less than 15% of all the plants growing in the riparian area. Native plants dominate the riparian area. Yes No
- 6 Noxious weeds make up less than 15% of the plants growing in the riparian area (e.g. thistles, scentless chamomile, knapweed and leafy spurge). Yes No



Streambank Riparian Health

C H E C K L I S T



- 7 The bank is **NOT** damaged by recreational activities or livestock. There are no exposed and eroding soils or slumping banks due to these activities. Yes No
- 8 The stream channel is narrow and deep (versus shallow and wide). Yes No
- 9 The stream does **NOT** appear ditched or entrenched and is able to overflow its banks most years. Yes No
- 10 Water in the stream is clear and **NOT** cloudy or full of sediment. Yes No
- 11 There are **NO** retaining walls, rip-rap or other bank stabilizing structures. Yes No
- 12 Wildlife are often seen in the riparian area and fish live in the stream. Yes No
- 13 Plants are vigorous, there is carryover of plant litter and forage production is stable. Yes No

Checklist Summary

How many of these questions did you answer **YES**? and how many did you answer **NO**?

Interpreting Your Checklist

If you answered **YES** to 10 or more of the questions and the riparian area looks like the riparian area in picture A, it is likely that the riparian area is **healthy and functioning well**, which means it is performing key riparian functions such as trapping sediment, buffering the impact of flooding, providing primary productivity and providing fish and wildlife habitat.

If you answered **NO** to 10 or more of the questions and the riparian area looks like the riparian area in picture B, it is likely that the riparian area is **unhealthy and not functioning properly**. Such a riparian area can show signs of erosion, absence of fish and wildlife, increased pollutants entering the water, lack of primary productivity and reduced water quality.

If you answered **NO** to 5 or more of these questions and the riparian area resembles a combination of pictures A and B, the riparian area could be **healthy but with problems**. Some riparian functions may be impaired.

If you would like more detailed information, contact us (see below):

Checklist summaries that indicate the riparian area is healthy, but with problems or unhealthy can often be corrected by changing what you do. For example, producers can provide off-stream waterers that help to reduce trampling and erosion along streambanks and in the riparian area. Evaluate your riparian area again in two to three years - you should see some improvements.

Photo Credits: Lorne Fitch, Liz Saunders, Michael Gerrard

Working with producers and communities on riparian awareness

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Cows and Fish Partners

Producers & Community Groups, Alberta Beef Producers, Trout Unlimited Canada, Canadian Cattlemen's Association, Alberta Agriculture & Rural Development, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, Alberta Environment, Fisheries & Oceans Canada, Agriculture & Agri-food Canada – PFRA, Alberta Conservation Association

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