

# The Cows & Fish Process

## Our Approach

The key to the success of the Cows and Fish program is a clearly defined and consistently applied approach or **process**. Our success is based on creating partnerships with producers and their communities to effectively address riparian land use issues. This community-based approach allows the community and producers to lead, to identify the riparian land use issues in their watersheds and to develop ways to address those issues.



## Elements of our Process

The Cows and Fish Process is comprised of these five elements. The process is a way to successfully resolve riparian issues and is described on the following pages.

**Our mission is to promote healthy and productive riparian areas for the benefit of livestock producers, their communities and others who value these vital landscapes.**

# The Elements of the Cows and Fish Process

## Awareness

Awareness is the first part of the process. It helps people to recognize what a riparian area looks like, how it functions and the values of this small piece of the landscape. Awareness is also about understanding how we use riparian areas and the options available to improve, protect and sustain this valuable piece of the landscape. Information is provided in a number of forms, including presentations, workshops, field days, videos and written materials.



Awareness creates a better understanding and builds a common language between producers, resource managers, communities and the public about riparian areas and their management. Our experience suggests that timely and relevant information leads to more informed decisions on how to take care of land and water.

## Team Building

Team building links producers, community residents and resource managers to form local partnerships to address local riparian and watershed issues. A team might consist of farmers or ranchers, someone from the municipality or county, someone with a technical or professional background in biology, range management or engineering and someone from a conservation group or agency. Once a team has formed, they work with direction from the local community to organize a riparian awareness program, to initiate a watershed health evaluation and to link the community with technical and financial resources to address and resolve riparian issues.



Team building is a crucial step towards figuring out how to work together and recognizing that the talents, resources and interests of many are required to tackle riparian issues.



# The Elements of the Cows and Fish Process

## Tool Building



Tools are what you use to tackle the tasks of maintaining and restoring riparian health while also sustaining an agricultural operation. Tool building starts with learning what producers and other landowners have done that works. Those successful management stories are shared with other landowners and managers throughout Alberta. At a local level, some of those management techniques are tested using demonstration sites. The community can then evaluate the change in livestock management, monitor riparian health, assess economic costs and benefits and share that information with other producers at workshops and field days. Producers can learn from one another and share experiences with practical, cost-effective ways of managing riparian areas.

Tool-building also involves creating or modifying locally and regionally useful information, holding workshops and other riparian management activities.

## Community-based Action



Community-based action is about working at a local level through all the elements in the process. Community-based action is based on the recognition that communities and agricultural producers are in the best position to assess the need for change, make changes in management and to benefit from those management changes.

Producers and their communities take the lead and drive the process by:

- ◆ informing and educating themselves about the landscape they live on;
- ◆ forming teams to acquire and share technical information about riparian management tools;
- ◆ identifying riparian land use issues;
- ◆ assembling information on riparian health; and
- ◆ developing and implementing proactive, voluntary solutions to maintain or restore riparian condition.

Riparian management activities lead by a community-based process leave a legacy because they are effective and have longevity. Cows and Fish facilitation ensures that the process pathway is followed, consistent messages are delivered, riparian information is shared, where appropriate, and the community owns the process and its outcomes.



# Monitoring

Monitoring is about measuring progress towards a community goal of greater landscape health and sustainable agricultural operations. There are two components to the monitoring component of the process.

## Riparian Health Evaluation & Monitoring

Healthy landscapes sustain us; riparian health evaluation is a measure of the ecological condition or health of riparian areas. Producers and communities are able to gauge the health of their watersheds through baseline riparian health evaluation.

The results of those health evaluations often act as a catalyst for action, allowing producers and other landowners to see where management changes could be made to improve both their operation and the riparian area.

Repeated monitoring in three to five year intervals answers the question "Did we make it?". This long-term monitoring allows producers and communities to evaluate their progress in addressing riparian issues, including tracking the success of demonstration activities.

### Program Evaluation

The success of our program involves monitoring how and why communities and producers change their management practices to meet social, environmental and economic pressures or needs. Evaluation measures the effectiveness of awareness efforts, and provides insight into how to improve program assistance to producers and their communities. Feedback from program evaluation is used to improve the delivery of process elements, to add to or modify tools and to increase the effectiveness of the Cows and Fish program.

*When local, regional and provincial riparian and watershed programming is delivered through this non-government, local, community-based process, it allows producers and local communities to recognize riparian values, measure riparian health and status, consider management options and implement changes through their own decisions.*

*The Cows and Fish process is a framework for action at a local, community level; it also provides a positive message to consumers and the public on the proactive efforts of the agricultural sector to identify riparian issues and develop cost-effective and environmentally sustainable solutions.*

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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, Food & Rural Development, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, Alberta Environment, Department of Fisheries & Oceans, Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration, Alberta Conservation Association

Funding Associates include  
AES, CARD, CABIDF