

Concept of Riparian

Riparian is viewed from many perspectives. Older and more classical riparian interpretations identify primarily woody vegetation associated only with lotic systems. Recent interpretations include a broader view involving both lotic and lentic systems, surface and subsurface water influences, and natural forces and human-induced activities that affect the woody and emergent vegetation. Although riparian areas are closely associated with water and topographic relief, they are mapped independently from either wetland or upland. Riparian areas lack the amount or duration of water usually present in wetlands, yet are "wetter" than adjacent uplands.

Riparian plant species may be on the National wetland plant list (Reed 1988) or be true upland species expressing greater vigor due to increased water compared to upland situations.

Lists of plants and soils associated with riparian areas have not been developed across the area of applicability. The unavailability of these lists does not preclude subsequent development of area wide or site specific plant and soils lists as regional requirements dictate. Although some riparian plant species are included in Reed (1988), as individuals they do not all function as hydrophytes.

The definition and conventions that follow apply primarily to areas of the western United States where mean annual evaporation exceeds mean annual precipitation (Figure 1). This focus does not diminish the equivalent values of similar streamside or riverside communities throughout the country that are important fish and wildlife habitats.

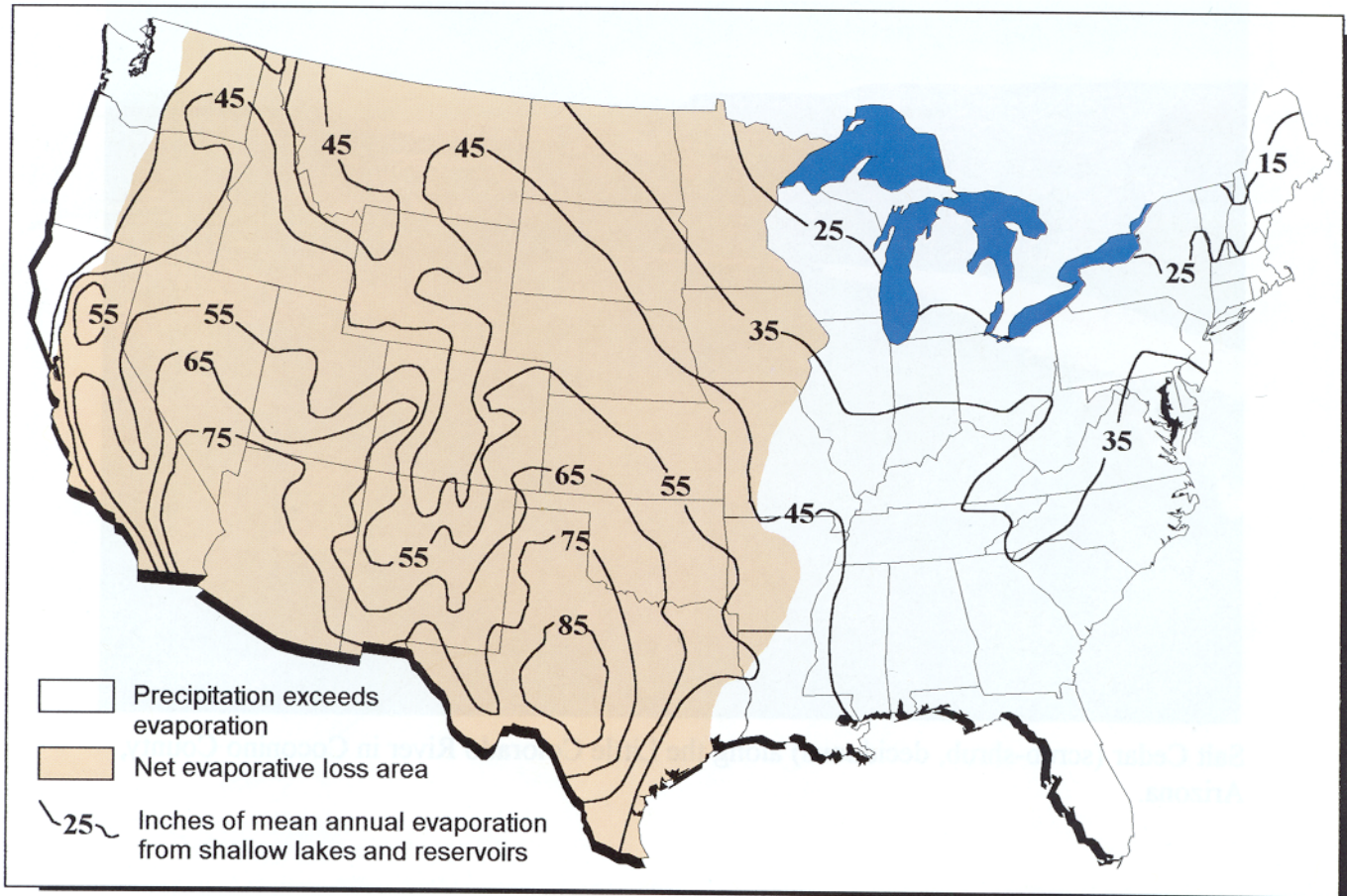


Figure 1. The area of applicability for the Fish and Wildlife Service's riparian definition and mapping conventions is shaded. In this broad region, mean annual evaporation exceeds mean annual precipitation. From U.S. Department of Agriculture (1981).