



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Wildlife Enhancement Activity - Managing Riparian Zones for Fish and Wildlife

Conservation and Management of Riparian Zones for Fish and Wildlife. Intact riparian zones with a natural and diverse mix of herbaceous and /or woody vegetation of different ages are havens for wildlife and sources of food and habitat features for fish and other aquatic species.

Benefits: Riparian zones are key natural habitats for hundreds, if not thousands of species of plants and animals. Sound management of riparian areas protects habitat for both fish and wildlife and also improves water quality. Implementation of targeted conservation measures can improve fish and wildlife habitat in riparian zones of rivers, streams, isolated wetlands, ponds, floodplain wetlands, and lakes. Species such as ground-nesting birds, neotropical migrants, fish, amphibians, bats, turtles, pollinators, and myriad other species will benefit from riparian zone management that enhances food, water, cover, and connections between the riparian zone and other habitats in agricultural landscapes.

Criteria for Managing Riparian Zones for Fish and Wildlife: The producer shall implement and maintain the minimum width of riparian zones designated below (I or II), and implement at least one additional management action specifically for improving or protecting natural riparian zones and their functions associated with fish and wildlife habitat. Riparian zones will be fully vegetated with native or naturally occurring non-invasive or noxious vegetation, or if such vegetation is lacking it must be planted to the extent described below. Non-native invasive species are not suitable and must be under an active management plan to eradicate them.

I. Non-forested riparian zones. Riparian zones in non-forested landscapes shall be planted with a diverse mix of native shrub and/or herbaceous species suitable for the site and providing vegetative cover throughout the riparian zone on the property. The riparian vegetation adjacent to ponds, lakes or streams less than 15 feet wide shall extend at least 35 feet out from the bank. For streams and rivers greater than 15 feet wide, the riparian vegetation shall extend 2.5 times the bankfull width of the channel or cover the entire active floodplain, whichever is less. In addition, the landowner must implement at least one of the following actions:

- (a) Manage herbaceous plants or shrubs to provide overhanging vegetation on stream banks and hiding cover for riparian and aquatic species.
- (b) Limit livestock grazing to short periods of time that does not interfere with nesting, spawning, or other reproductive needs of fish and wildlife, as designated by the local FOTG. A grazing management plan specifying suitable dates and minimum vegetation height will be included as part of the contract.
- (c) Establish fencing to control livestock and other disturbances in order to protect riparian vegetation, stream banks, and water quality.



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II. Forested riparian zones: Riparian zones of streams, ponds, or lakes in historically forested landscapes shall be planted with a diverse mix of native trees, shrubs, and herbaceous species suitable for the site and providing vegetative cover throughout the riparian zone on the property. The riparian vegetation adjacent to ponds, lakes, or streams less than 15 feet wide shall extend at least 35 feet out from the bank. For streams and rivers greater than 15 feet wide, the riparian vegetation shall extend at least 2.5 times the bankfull width of the channel or cover the entire active floodplain. The site will be protected from grazing, or, where appropriate livestock grazing will be limited to short periods of time that do not interfere with nesting, spawning, or other reproductive needs of fish and wildlife, as designated by the local FOTG. A grazing management plan specifying grazing dates and minimum vegetation height will be included as part of the contract. In addition, the landowner must implement at least one of the following actions:

- (a) Manage trees and shrubs to provide overhanging vegetation on stream or lake banks, provide shade to the stream, and provide dense cover for riparian and aquatic species.
- (b) Establish wildlife friendly fencing to protect sensitive or recovering riparian vegetation, stream banks or shorelines, and water quality.
- (c) Establish or maintain standing dead trees (snags) for cavity nesters and other wildlife at a density of 2/acre.
- (d) Leave in place fallen trees or flood-deposited wood to provide cover habitat for amphibians, and native pollinating bees.
- (e) Provide a source of large wood for natural recruitment to the stream channel by limiting selective harvest of trees to that part of the riparian zone that is at least a distance of one mature tree height from the water's edge.
- (f) Where appropriate install bat boxes, duck boxes, or other artificial nesting structures suitable for the site.

Operation and Maintenance: Any use of the riparian zone must be managed to protect fish and wildlife habitat. Practice criteria and applicable considerations for fish and wildlife must be applied. Practices appropriate for this enhancement include the following: Fence (Code 382), Prescribed Grazing (Code 528), Stream Habitat Improvement and Management (Code 395), Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management (Code 644), Riparian Herbaceous Cover (Code 390), Riparian Forest Buffer (Code 391), Use Exclusion (Code 472), Prescribed Forestry (Code 409) and Forest Stand Improvement (Code 666). Manage forested riparian areas to sustain a diversity of tree, shrub, and herbaceous species, provide snags for wildlife, recruit wood to the stream channel, provide shade to the stream corridor, and maintain stable banks.



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Structures and acres will be maintained as prescribed under the practice used. Up to 2 structures per acre of riparian habitat may be installed. This enhancement is limited to 10 structures per contract or all acres of riparian habitat in the enrolled property.

References:

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