



NRCS PROGRAMS and ACCELERATING COOPERATIVE RIPARIAN RESTORATION

The goals and objectives of the interagency strategy for Accelerating Cooperative Riparian Restoration and those of many programs administered by the NRCS, are complimentary and very closely linked. The strongest tie is through recognition of the importance of strong, lasting, public and private partnerships, ensuring decision making at the local level by the people most affected. Establishment of a common vocabulary and definitions provides a means to communicate more effectively about this important resource. Focus is on those opportunities where there is a high probability for positive change with a reasonable investment. Voluntary restoration of private lands is encouraged.

Because riparian areas often pass through or are shared by numerous landowners, it is important to create a foundation for collaboration, emphasizing a watershed context for successful restoration. The principal tool used in this particular interagency strategy, is the assessment for determining Proper Functioning Condition (PFC) of riparian-wetland areas. It is an interdisciplinary examination of the physical processes, requiring values to be set aside, as a first step toward developing a common understanding and fostering agreement. An extensive community based training program is an important component, designed to build relationships and enhance conservation education. The communication aspects of this approach, as well as the fundamental nature of the PFC assessment, are creating an awareness that will lead to increased demand for the type of technical assistance provided by NRCS.

Most programs administered by NRCS, and more specifically the conservation programs of the last farm bill, require development of a conservation plan. Integration of the PFC methodology with the procedures required by the Field Office Technical Guide and the components of the SWAPAH assessments, is being successfully accomplished at the field level. NRCS is providing technical guidance in the use of PFC with infra-red aerial photography, as well as co-sponsoring the PFC User's Guide technical reference in partnership with the BLM and Forest Service. The PFC assessment is also included in the Interagency Stream Corridor Restoration Handbook.

Many of the same agencies and organizations on the National Conservation Buffer Team are supportive of, and participating in this collaborative approach. The National Conservation Buffer Initiative emphasizes benefits derived from the many functions riparian buffers serve. Some of these include trapping sediment, slowing runoff, enhancing infiltration, and filtering nutrients. Adequate participation in conservation programs depends on many people understanding the basic physical processes that occur in riparian-wetland areas. NRCS involvement in the interagency cooperative approach is essential for providing accurate information regarding options available through the Environmental Quality Improvement Program(EQIP), Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program(WHIP), Wetlands Reserve Program(WPR), Emergency Watershed Program(EWP), and the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program(CREP).