



Nonpoint Source Pollution
Management Program

January 2011

Riparian Areas

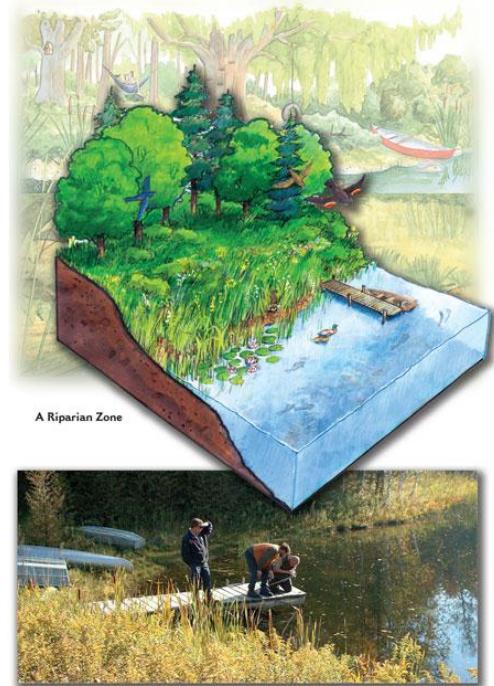
What are they?

Riparian areas are the green areas found along the edges of rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, and wetlands. Generally, they extend 100-500 ft. from the water's edge and are marked by a significant change in the vegetation.

What are their functions?

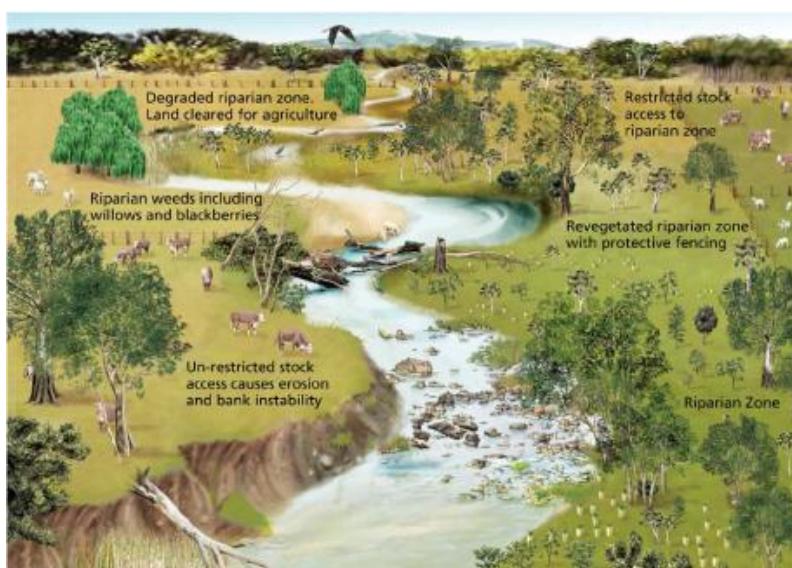
Riparian areas provide several valuable functions. They provide space, shelter and food for the plants and animals that live there. Leaf litter and insects that fall into the water provide food for aquatic life. Riparian vegetation provides shade for aquatic plants and animals and land-dwelling creatures. In addition, they provide transportation corridors for the animals.

Riparian areas are becoming more popular for human use as well. They are used for fishing, hiking, camping, picnicking, and biking.



How do we affect them?

Improper riparian forest management, such as clear-cutting, removes trees and kills roots that would normally hold bank soils together. Riparian areas are lost through the development of lake or riverside properties in urban areas. Typically, vegetation is removed and the bank is armored to protect it from erosion. This usually accelerates the damage on the opposite shoreline of a stream. Rural land uses, such as improper grazing and excessive cultivation, encroach upon the riparian area reducing its ability to protect the surface water.



Can they be helped?

Yes, through proper grazing and land management practices, riparian areas can be restored to their original function. However, more drastic measures may be needed if the damage is extreme. These methods include shaping the bank, planting vegetation similar to what was there originally, and using other natural materials to secure the soils. This can be a very labor-intensive and costly process.