

What are riparian areas and why do they matter?



Riparian areas are land beside streams, rivers, lakes and wetlands where the soil and vegetation are influenced by the presence of water (Alberta Riparian Habitat Management Society). Although riparian areas make up a small fraction of the landscape, they are the most productive ecosystem.

When properly maintained, healthy riparian areas provide many benefits to people and wildlife.

- Reduce flood damage
- Improve fish and aquatic habitat by creating cover and shade
- Reduce erosion of stream banks
- Trap sediment
- Promote biodiversity by providing ideal habitat
- Create competition for invasive plants species
- Slow surface water entering groundwater while recharging aquifers

What is the Municipality doing to maintain riparian area health and control weeds?

Currently the Municipality is working to eliminate prohibited noxious and noxious weeds in riparian areas. This has been accomplished through hand pulling, and using a selective herbicide safe for use near water. Staff, contractors, and even hard-working volunteers are all part of this team. Planting of native tree and shrub species will take place in riparian areas along Drum Creek in Hillcrest, and Crowsnest River and Lyons Creek in Blairmore. Planted native species will help to stabilize the river and creek banks and put weeds at a disadvantage by providing shade. A successful trial with live-staking willows has been accomplished on the new walking trail system above Bellevue. This work has been made possible through a grant from the Alberta Conservation Association and the Land Stewardship Centre of Canada received by the Crowsnest Conservation Society in conjunction with the Municipality.

Further Information

www.town.crowsnestpass.ab.ca/home
www.ab-conservation.com/go/default/
www.crowsnestconservation.ca/
www.cowsandfish.org/index.html

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Riparian Area Health

What are riparian areas and weeds?
How do weeds and waste affect riparian area health?
What can I do to help?

What are weeds?

Weeds are plants out of place (invasive species) that have been introduced from another country or region and have few limiting factors such as growing conditions, disease and predation from animals. Weeds are able to outcompete native species (native species belong here; the opposite of a weed) and have the potential to harm the environment.

Usually weeds are spread by humans but can also be transported by wind, water, wildlife and livestock.

There are two important classifications of weeds in Alberta, "Prohibited Noxious" and "Noxious". Prohibited noxious weeds by law are required to be "destroyed" as they are highly aggressive and are uncommon in Alberta. Noxious weeds are unfortunately common in many regions and are required to be "controlled" to limit their abundance and prevent further spread.



Oxeye Daisy
Noxious

Spotted Knapweed
Prohibited Noxious

What can I do to help?

Living close to the riparian area is a wonderful privilege. By maintaining a healthy riparian area it is better protected, wildlife habitat is maintained, increases property values and enhances its natural aesthetic beauty. There are some simple steps that can be taken to improve riparian area health and to prevent weed infestations.

- Leave a wide un-mowed band next to the creek - every extra meter helps. Mowing your lawn right up to the creek destroys plants that reduce erosion, improve habitat and create better water quality, yet many homes are built very close to the creek.
- Be knowledgeable of unwanted weeds as well as desirable native plants. Keep and plant native, woody vegetation.
- Dispose of garbage, grass clippings, toxic substances etc. at the proper facilities (CNP Pincher Creek Landfill, Frank Burn Pit, Toxic Roundup & Large Item Pick-up.) Not on the creek!
- Effectively controlling weeds along creeks to prevent them from taking over the native vegetation.

For more information on weeds, look on the municipal website or the riparian newsletter.

How improper management harms riparian areas

To maintain a riparian area there needs to be a healthy plant community which has deep, fibrous roots that keep the bank intact by stabilizing the soil. Weeds can take over useful native plants where conditions are less desirable (short cut grass, pollutants, poor soil and direct sunlight). Often weeds do not have the same supportive root systems and therefore weed infestations result in riparian area deterioration. Weeds can be used as an indicator for poor riparian area health.



Drum Creek riparian area in poor health in Hillcrest.