

Management of Riparian Areas and Riparian Buffers in Connecticut Through NRCS Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program



What are Riparian Areas and Riparian Buffers?

Riparian area is a term used to describe the land adjacent to water. These habitats occur along watercourses or at the fringe of water bodies, such as lakes and ponds. Typical examples include floodplains, streambanks, and lakeshores. Riparian vegetation performs many important functions including shoreline and streambank protection, water quality protection, fish and wildlife habitat, and flood control. A riparian buffer is a section of a riparian zone or an adjacent upland area where vegetation is managed or restored in order to protect the adjacent water resource, and/or to maintain valued ecological attributes of the riparian zone.

Why Should We Manage Riparian Areas?

Riparian areas are an important ecological component of the landscape for the habitat they provide as well as their function as a hydrological connection between land and water. Riparian habitats are located in the transition zones between upland and aquatic communities. These transition zones often have higher plant and animal species richness because they represent both communities. The linear nature of riparian areas along streams also provides travel routes for wildlife. Aquatic diversity, including fish habitat for cold water species such as trout and salmon, is often dependent on the quality of the riparian area.

Loss or degradation of riparian areas is a serious ecological problem. Intensive agriculture and urbanization are among the prime reasons for loss and degradation of riparian areas. Land disturbances and landscaping practices along these areas has also enabled non-native invasive plants (such as Multiflora rose and Japanese barberry) to invade and often overtake riparian areas. As the native vegetation is displaced, so are the functions it performs.

Riparian areas can also influence the quantity and quality of water in a stream through interactions with surface runoff, sub-surface flows, and shallow groundwater flows that pass through riparian zones before reaching surface water.

(more)

In Connecticut, nonpoint source water pollution is a problem that threatens the quality of water resources such as streams, wetlands, lakes, ponds, and Long Island Sound. Most nonpoint source water pollution occurs when water flows over agricultural fields, parking lots, industrial sites, roads, lawns, and landscaped areas picking up pollutants that often end up reaching streams and other surface waters. Protecting and restoring riparian areas can help reduce the impacts from nonpoint source pollution on our waters.

Who is NRCS?

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture that promotes conservation of natural resources on private lands.

What is WHIP?

The Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) offers technical and financial assistance to protect, enhance, restore, and develop fish and wildlife habitat. Contracts are typically 5-10 years, although in some cases 15-year contracts can be developed. WHIP provides property owners and land managers with advice on managing or restoring important types of wildlife habitat. Riparian areas are one of those habitat types.

Who Can Participate in This Program?

Private landowners, land trusts and other land preservation organizations, fishing and hunting organizations, scout troops and other non-government organizations, and tribal organizations may apply for WHIP.

How Do I Get More Information?

For information about WHIP or other NRCS programs, visit our website at www.ct.nrcs.usda.gov/programs, or contact your local USDA Service Center (listed below).

NRCS accepts applications for the WHIP Program year round.

Connecticut USDA Service Centers

WINDHAM COUNTY
Brooklyn Service Center
(860) 774-0224

LITCHFIELD & FAIRFIELD COUNTIES
Torrington Service Center
(860) 626-8258

NEW LONDON COUNTY
Norwich Service Center
(860) 887-3604

NEW HAVEN & MIDDLESEX COUNTIES
Wallingford Service Center
(203) 269-7509

HARTFORD & TOLLAND COUNTIES
Windsor Service Center
(860) 688-7725