

Conservation Practice Standard Overview

Riparian Forest Buffer (391)

A riparian forest buffer is an area of trees and/or shrubs located adjacent to a body of water. The vegetation extends outward from the water body for a specified distance necessary to provide a minimum level of protection and/or enhancement.

Practice Information

This practice applies to areas adjacent to permanent or intermittent streams, lakes, ponds, wetlands, and areas associated with groundwater recharge.

The riparian forest buffer is a multipurpose practice designed to accomplish one or more of the following:

- Create shade to lower water temperatures and improve habitat for aquatic animals.
- Provide a source of debris necessary for healthy robust populations of aquatic organisms and wildlife.
- Act as a buffer to filter out sediment, organic material, fertilizer, pesticides, and other pollutants that may adversely impact the water body, including shallow groundwater.

Dominant vegetation consists of existing or planted trees and shrubs suited to the site and purpose(s) of the practice. Grasses and forbs that come in naturally further enhance the



wildlife habitat and filtering effect of the practice. Headcuts and streambank erosion should be assessed and treated appropriately before establishing the riparian forest buffer. Specifications for each installation are based on a thorough field investigation of each site.

Common Associated Practices

Riparian Forest Buffer (391) is commonly applied with conservation practices such as Riparian Herbaceous Cover (390), Stream Habitat Improvement and Management (395), Streambank and Shoreline Protection (580), and Tree/Shrub Establishment (612).

For further information, contact your local NRCS field office.