

Summary

AFS Policy Statement #14:
Strategies for Stream Riparian
Area Management
(Abbreviated)

Riparian ecosystems are complex assemblages of organisms and their environment existing adjacent to and near flowing water. They comprise both aquatic and terrestrial components, and provide the structural and nonstructural fisheries habitat components (i.e., streambank vegetation, channel structure, and water quality) required to sustain productive fishery resources. Two essential characteristics of riparian ecosystems are laterally flowing water that rises and falls at least once within a growing season, and a high degree of connectedness with other ecosystems. The first characteristic is related to the fact that the riparian area is juxtaposed to the stream. The second relates to the fact that the riparian area is mainly linear in shape.

Having a high ratio of perimeter to surface area means that the streamside zone will interact extensively with adjacent ecosystems. Therefore, riparian ecosystems along streams form buffers between the stream and the adjacent ecosystem, which may be forest, agriculture, urban areas, etc. These buffers can help control nonpoint source pollution. More than a century of human use and development of land along streams has brought many changes. Throughout North America, many streams no longer retain their once productive characteristics.

Activities which impact riparian ecosystems include livestock grazing, timber harvest, mineral and oil production activities, agriculture, urban development, and road construction. If these competing uses are allowed to continue without sufficient management constraints, adverse fisheries impacts will continue to occur.

The AFS policy regarding stream riparian area management is to:

1. Aggressively foster increased awareness of riparian area fisheries habitat values.
2. Encourage active management for riparian habitat values by state, federal, provincial, and local agencies.
3. Support close coordination and cooperation among state, federal, provincial, and local agencies in managing and improving riparian areas on all public and private lands in North America.
4. Strongly urge that riparian areas be considered unique and distinctively valuable habitat, and that such areas be declared of critical environmental concern.
5. Advocate that riparian areas be managed with the latest scientifically based management practices and that management prescriptions be vigorously applied and enforced to protect fisheries and other resource values for the benefit of all users.
6. Strongly urge that state, federal, and provincial agencies legally recognize minimum instream flows.
7. Encourage continuing research and management of riparian area habitats subject to livestock grazing, mining, energy development, water storage, irrigation

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withdrawals, timber harvest, road construction, and other potentially conflicting land uses.

8. Strongly recommend that all land managers actively work to determine and implement scientifically supported management practices for riparian areas.

9. Take the following actions to increase the awareness of fisheries habitat management required within riparian areas:

- foster cooperative relationships between land management agencies and the private landowners who are responsible for riparian area management throughout North America;
- cooperate with public and private land managers in the planning and management of riparian areas to meet state, federal, and provincial land management agency mandates;
- insist that riparian areas receive special consideration and emphasis as unique and distinctive habitats in the planning and management of state, federal, and provincial lands;
- request that land managers, working with appropriate AFS subunits, develop best management practices for riparian areas and update these practices as new research and management information becomes available;
- work for improved legislation and funding for restoration and rehabilitation of riparian areas on public and private lands;
- work toward obtaining a balance of expertise on land management advisory boards;
- support and encourage the Bureau of Land Management, and state and provincial agencies in stressing adherence to, and responsibility for, the management of riparian areas. Continue to work with the U.S. Forest Service to encourage adherence to riparian area policies and management prescriptions;
- work towards amending the Federal Land Management Policy Act, the National Forest Management Act, the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, the Public Rangelands Improvement Act, and other relevant legislation to strengthen riparian area management and restoration;
- continue AFS Division and Chapter involvement in achieving incentives for private land riparian restoration and management, in achieving grazing fee increases on federal lands, and in generating funds for riparian area rehabilitation;
- insist that riparian area management prescriptions be adhered to and implemented by state, federal, and provincial land management agencies and that they be monitored for effectiveness.