



Indianapolis

Department of Public Works



A GUIDE FOR STREAMSIDE PROPERTY OWNERS

WHAT IS A RIPARIAN PROPERTY?

Riparian properties are primarily lands that are adjacent to streams, creeks, rivers or other bodies of water. These properties have a connected relationship with the waterways and can enhance or degrade the water quality. Riparian property owners can play a critical role in preserving and enhancing riparian areas, leading to the improvement of water quality for human, plant and animal life.

HOW DO RIPARIAN PROPERTIES AFFECT WATERWAYS?

When it rains, storm water picks up and carries pollution as it runs off rooftops, parking lots, lawns and other surfaces. Insecticides, herbicides, fertilizers, oil, pet waste, sand, gravel, soil and litter are all common pollutants that are carried by the water as it flows over land surfaces, and can degrade our waterways.

Ultimately, these pollutants can cause loss of aesthetic and true value of properties, and affect natural habitat and fish populations. Since riparian properties reside next to rivers and streams, they can most directly affect water quality.

WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE STREAM ABUTTING YOUR PROPERTY?

Healthy Streams

- Cool water
- Clean, clear water
- Thriving aquatic life
- Stream bank with healthy, native vegetation and shade
- Litter-free stream banks

Unhealthy Streams

- Warm or stagnant water
- Discolored, odorous water (algae present)
- Bare, unvegetated stream bank with little or no minimal erosion
- Trash and debris on stream banks

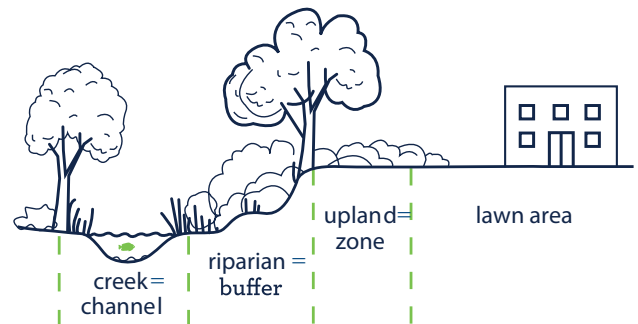
WHAT CAN RIPARIAN PROPERTY OWNERS DO TO HELP IMPROVE WATER QUALITY?

One effective way for riparian property owners to enhance water quality is to create and maintain a riparian buffer zone, or naturalized areas along stream banks. Naturalized planting areas or riparian buffer zones along stream banks stabilize and prevent erosion of soils, filter and trap pollutants and provide for improved infiltration of storm water into the soil. Riparian buffer zones can typically be established and maintained at a low cost while providing significant water quality benefits.

GET STARTED – CREATE YOUR OWN RIPARIAN BUFFER ZONE

- Establish a “no mow” area along your stream bank that is ideally 30 feet or wider
- Plant trees, shrubs and long stem grasses in your buffer zone
 - o Native plants are best and reduce the need for insecticides, herbicides and fertilizers – all common storm water pollutants
 - o Shrubs grow fast and can help create the buffer zone more quickly
 - o Native prairie grasses, such as Indian Grass or Switch Grass, help maintain views

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- Periodically pick up litter and eliminate the use of insecticides, herbicides and fertilizers in the buffer area.
- Integrate your buffer zone into a comprehensive storm water management system for the entire property.

BENEFITS OF A RIPARIAN BUFFER ZONE

Buffer zones create economic, social and environmental benefits.

The specific benefits include:

- Captures pollutants naturally and prevents them from getting into waterways
- Improves water quality
- Protects aquatic and animal life
- Reduces property loss from soil erosion
- Protects drinking water supplies
- Increases property values
- Helps in the process of securing state and local permits
- Reduces maintenance time and costs
- Provides noise control and privacy
- Reduces greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide
- Enhances and beautifies the community


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