

Why a Healthy Riparian Area is Important to Livestock Farmers

Water Quality

There are a number of diseases and infections associated with poor water quality and livestock. When key functions of a riparian area have been compromised, a watercourse can be left vulnerable to pathogens

Availability to clean water dramatically effects the productivity of livestock. Cattle and other livestock are healthier and make greater weight gains when they have access to clean water. Studies show, cattle will drink from a trough 8 times out of 10, even if they have access to surface water.

Healthy, well vegetated riparian areas can be good at removing sediments, as well as microbes, nutrients, and pesticides attached to sediments, leaving a watercourse which provides clean drinking water for livestock.

Erosion

A river, brook, or stream can develop an incredible amount of energy and that energy can exceed the counter action provided by the bends in a meandering watercourse, leaving banks vulnerable to a rate of erosion that may have detrimental effects on the size and functionality of pastures.

How to Ensure a Healthy Riparian Area

Some measures that can be taken in effort to maintain and restore riparian areas to their natural functions are as followed:

- Avoid or minimize grazing during vulnerable times (e.g. when shorelines are saturated they are more vulnerable to rutting)
- Leave enough vegetation to protect plants and soil, conserve moisture, and trap sediment
- Give plants time to rest when growing conditions are favourable to rebuild roots & energy supply
- Spread the grazing load over the landscape
- Reduce manure build up in riparian area
- Consider alternative water sources

What is a Riparian Area?

A riparian area is the ribbon of land running parallel to rivers, streams, brooks, lakes, or wetlands. They are the transitional zones between the water and the drier, upland areas. They are often described as “wetter than dry, and drier than wet”, which speaks to their physical characteristics and also hints to their function.

A healthy riparian area will facilitate the growth of trees, shrubs, and grasses that grow along a water course. They are also home to many species of birds, fish, amphibians, insects and mammals.

Functions of a Riparian Area

Aside from being a vital component to the health and natural function of a watercourse, numerous benefits are made possible when the following foundational ecological functions are occurring in a healthy riparian area:

- Traps and stores sediment
- Builds and maintains banks & shorelines
- Filters run-off entering the water source from upland areas
- Maintains biodiversity
- Dissipates energy associated with high waterflow, thereby reducing erosion
- Recharges aquifers
- Stores water and energy

