

Working with Communities and Sharing our Experience

What Have We Learned?

Lesson 1 Producers, local communities and/or watershed groups must drive riparian management planning decisions.

Riparian management is effective and long-lasting when driven by producers and communities. The Cows and Fish process helps communities achieve sound riparian management by providing consistent riparian information delivered through regional and local partnerships, and not by individual agencies. Resource managers are part of the local team to provide technical support, help with financial resources and provide professional expertise.

Lesson 2 Create a team effort!

Without a collective effort by committed people, local producers and communities cannot tap into the resources or technical support they need to address their riparian land use issues. Some important team players include: Agricultural Fieldmen, Agricultural Service Boards, municipal councils, provincial and federal resource managers, conservation and agricultural sector organizations and other organizations that provide significant funding support.

Lesson 3 Ownership of riparian grazing issues lies with the landowners.

A key feature empowering Cows and Fish program efforts has been the declaration of ownership of the riparian grazing issue by cattlemen, through the Alberta Cattle Commission and the Canadian Cattlemen's Association. Resource managers must acknowledge that landowners and industry need to take ownership of riparian issues.

Lesson 4 Get out and talk to producers and their communities.

Get out of the office, the house and truck and get talking and listening! Producers and their communities are the critical link to ensuring our landscapes are maintained and protected. Helping people understand basic ecological principles about the landscape they live on and make a living from is a necessary first step towards healthy watersheds. Producers and communities need to know the benefits to their operation of proper riparian management and stewardship. Someone needs to talk with them, understand what their issues are, and be willing to listen rather than telling them what the issues and solutions might be. Being willing to take the time to listen and share experience builds trust. When people trust each other, doors are opened and solutions are found. To understand our process you need to experience it by getting out and working with people.

Lesson 5 Learn from landowners!

Landowners that are currently managing healthy riparian areas are excellent sources of information and innovative solutions. Their success speeds up the process of finding out what works in that local area. One of the most important things to realize is what makes a good demonstration site and what doesn't. Don't be afraid of sharing your mistakes - there's a lot to be learned when things don't go right. The trick is to not repeat the same mistake twice. When landowners are empowered to take hold of the issues, they find creative solutions to look after their investments, ensuring a productive landscape in the long-term.

Lesson 6 Send a positive message to the general public.

Local partnerships involving producers and their communities as decision makers in addressing critical issues sends a positive message to the general public. Proactive initiatives by the agricultural sector demonstrates their willingness to face the issues, find solutions where needed, and create a healthier environment for everyone. By promoting proactive cooperation rather than conflict, you temper the need for legislation and regulation.

How We Work With Communities



Remember, working with communities on community-based action means working directly with producers and their community to help them take action.

Communities and people are dynamic and each element or activity within the process proceeds at a rate set by community members. However, experience tells us that without implementing awareness activities first, misunderstandings of the need for riparian work in the community can occur. **People need to understand the reason why first, before they are willing to take action on the issues.**

◆ We work on an **invitation basis**. A local producer group, forage association, or government agency invites us to deliver a presentation on riparian areas and their management at a workshop or evening information session. We accept and prepare a presentation on riparian health, function, grazing strategies, and how to identify and address riparian land use issues. We bring people up to speed on what communities are currently working on and existing riparian management tools that are available (see the Tools for Riparian Management Fact Sheet). Most importantly, we customize the talk to the audience, their needs and interests. Presentation length ranges from 15 minutes to 2 hours and may include break out sessions to allow the audience help identify what issues they are facing within their watersheds.

◆ Catching and keeping peoples' attention is important for the message to hit home. Our presentations generally involve captivating imagery depicting our message in real pictures and are designed to **educate as well as entertain**. Two key goals of the presentations are to make people aware and understand the issues, and then take action. Note: We are willing to help others develop and learn how to deliver presentations that have impact.

◆ We try to accommodate most invitations, from municipal planners to naturalist groups to forage associations. Helping people become aware and **understand the issues and ecological processes** behind riparian management is the foundation to making any progress on the ground. Besides, you never know where your allies or keys to success may reside.

◆ The community invites us back for another presentation or planning meeting if the group is interested in either hearing more about riparian management issues or wants to know how to take the next steps. The planning meeting is our opportunity to facilitate group discussion to **help them define where to begin, who to work with and how to get started**. We include information on funding sources, available riparian management tools and how to develop an action plan or strategy to address the issues.

◆ If the group decides they do not want to proceed, we respect their wishes and move on. If we feel there still might be an interest, we speak with key community leaders to help us understand whether they feel additional awareness is needed or desired or whether a different approach is warranted.

Remember, Cows and Fish is a proactive, voluntary process. We do not try to force our message on unwilling groups; the landowners and community must drive the process, including determining if there is a need.



The old proverb "I hear - I forget I see - I remember I do - I understand" is fundamental to achieving success on the landscape.

More on how we work with communities....

◆ If individuals outside of the group want to participate we will **involve other agencies to help the group identify needs and priorities as required.** For example, if producers are interested in off-stream water development and are not involved with demonstration sites, we will refer them to our partners who have the expertise and mandate to work with them.

Our experience shows that with better information, producers and communities can make informed decisions on how to improve, maintain and protect riparian health and still make a living from the landscape.

◆ For groups that have invited us to the planning table, we begin the process of working with them to **develop a strategy and link them with possible funding** organizations or programs, if required.

◆ Remember, **some community meetings will be long and may go late** into the evening or be on a weekend. Spend the time, our experience indicates that the effort is worth it. Showing the community you are committed to their needs goes a long way in establishing a successful working relationship.

◆ We provide **technical assistance and content for funding proposals**, including developing costs for riparian health assessments and demonstration sites. Part of the commitment from the community is to secure the necessary funds for the activities planned. This includes contributing their own time and financial resources to match other partner contributions and grant requirements. We assist with the initial stages of implementing their action plans through technical advice on choosing demonstration and profile sites, delivering presentations at workshops and field days, and undertaking riparian health assessments for their watersheds with community wrap-up and landowner reports.

◆ At this stage, most communities are well on their way to working together on riparian management actions. We continue to **provide technical advice and troubleshoot for the community or group.** However, other partners and agencies will work with the community on individual referrals and other activities beyond the original community-based riparian program activities.

◆ Where riparian health assessments are completed, we will return and **monitor their riparian management progress** in 3 to 5 year increments. This is done at their request, provided the communities are able to secure the necessary financial resources for the monitoring.

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Getting Past the Talk

working with communities

The Secret of our Success

The success of the Cows and Fish program stems from the hard work of landowners and their communities, their willingness to open their doors and share their experiences with us, as well as allowing us to work with them on some new ideas.

We help communities to:

- ◆ raise awareness about riparian areas;
- ◆ recognize riparian issues in their watershed;
- ◆ identify available riparian management tools and technical support;
- ◆ monitor riparian health; and
- ◆ develop and implement voluntary action plans to address the issues.

We simply get together and work with producers and local communities to find out what riparian management strategies work and benefit their operations, while maintaining and protecting riparian health. These management strategies are then shared with others (see our Cows and Fish Process Fact Sheet for more details).



Healthy Landscapes = Healthy Communities

Previous experience has shown us that with better information and an increased understanding of landscape processes, local communities and producers can make better decisions on land use, sustaining agriculture, fish and wildlife populations, watershed function, and good clean water supplies for everyone. Working locally to develop common goals is really about **putting common sense to common practice**, keeping people on the landscape and keeping our watersheds intact. After all, healthy landscapes translate to healthy communities.

Cows and Fish Fact Sheet

Working with producers and communities on riparian awareness

Program Manager: Lethbridge 403-381-5538

Riparian Specialists:

Barrhead 780-674-8262 Camrose 780-679-1289
Lethbridge 403-381-5377

Range / Riparian Specialist: Calgary 403-275-4400
Fax 403-381-5723 ◆ E-mail riparian@telusplanet.net

www.cowsandfish.org

Cows and Fish Supporters

Producers & Community Groups, Alberta Beef Producers, Trout Unlimited Canada, Canadian Cattlemen's Association, Alberta Agriculture, Food & Rural Development, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, Alberta Environment, Fisheries & Oceans Canada, Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration, Alberta Conservation Association

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