Protecting Your Stream

Franklin Soil and Water Conservation District

Conservation Series

Stream Stewardship

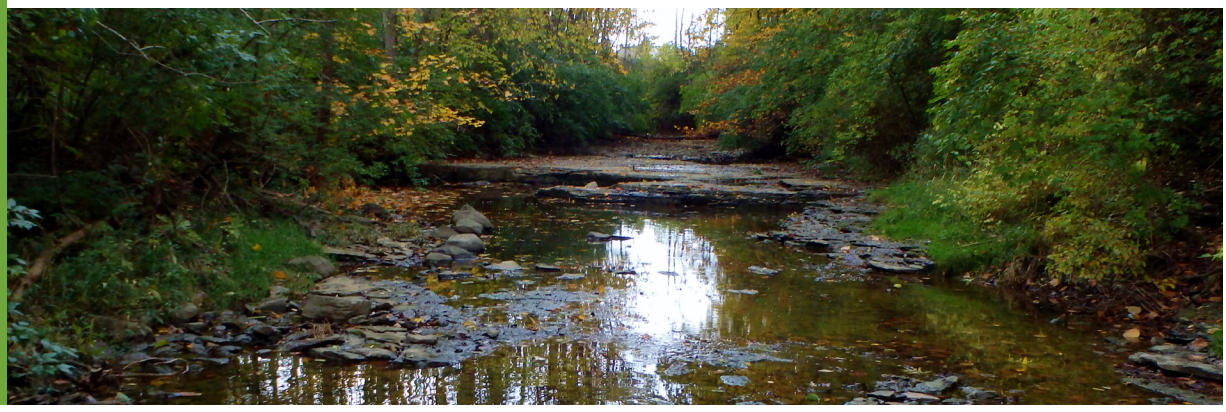
As a streamside landowner, you have a special opportunity to positively influence the quality of your stream and promote local stream health. Stewardship is the means by which you can empower yourself, friends, and neighbors to take ownership of your stream to ensure that its waters remain clear and its banks stay well-vegetated and protected from erosion. Practicing stream stewardship is simple and easy to do. It can have a huge impact on the quality of your life and the life of the creatures that live in your stream.

3 Simple Steps

Establish a Streamside Buffer
One key component to stream health is allowing vegetation to grow along the stream bank. Designate a "No Mow" or "Conservation Zone" adjacent to the stream, at least 15-25 feet wide. The zone will encourage the growth of plants and reduce the impact of pollutants from stream bank erosion and surface runoff. Plant native trees and shrubs within the area to establish a vigorous root zone that will hold the soil in place and provide shade along the stream. Vegetaton is always better with stream buffers.

Refrain from Dumping Yard Waste
The placement of grass clippings, raked leaves, cut limbs, and other vegetative debris on the bank, or within the channel, contributes to stream bank erosion and poor water quality. Yard waste reduces available oxygen for fish and other aquatic life by depleting the oxygen in the stream as it decays. It also reduces stream capacity which will contribute to potential flooding of property.

Use Fertilizers and Pesticides Correctly
Fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides can contribute to poor water quality, especially when applied incorrectly. It is important to calibrate your spreader according to the package label. Avoid spreading fertilizer near the bank and on sidewalks and driveways which can convey the chemicals directly into your stream.



Common Questions

Why can't we just keep grass mowed to the stream?
Non-Native turf grasses, such as Kentucky bluegrass, do not grow roots deep enough to hold the soil in place. Native vegetation can prevent stream bank erosion in three ways;

- Plant roots hold the soil together and increase overall bank stability by forming a soil binding network.
- The exposed stalks, stems, branches and foliage provide resistance to the stream and runoff flow reducing the flow velocity.
- The impact of rain drops on the soil initiates erosion. Tree and shrub foliage deflects rain drops, reducing their impact on the bank.

What if my neighbors think I am neglecting my lawn?
If your neighbors are concerned about weeds, a management plan can be developed to create a buffer with more desirable species. A buffer can take on a formal or more "wild" look, depending on preference. Contact us for a list of appropriate vegetation for streamside environments.

Why use bio-engineering to help stabilize the stream bank?
Bio-engineering is the use of natural materials (living and non-living) to stabilize slopes and stream banks rather than using conventional methods. A combination of boulders, tree roots and vegetation is used in a variety of ways to fortify eroding banks and re-establish natural stream habitat. Bio-engineered stabilization projects are visually attractive while providing food, shelter, and cool clean water necessary for healthy stream function and good water quality.

What native trees and shrubs should we place near the stream?
Native trees, shrubs, and grasses that tolerate wet conditions should be grown near the stream. These include trees such as cottonwood, eastern sycamore, red maple, swamp white oak and box elder. Some suitable shrubs include dogwoods, viburnums, spicebush and buttonbush.

What is a stream corridor?
A stream corridor, also known as a riparian corridor, is the area of land adjacent to and including a stream. It encompasses the stream channel, floodplain area, wetlands, forests, and grasslands associated with stream ecosystems.

How big should the stream corridor be?
The recommended minimum width for water quality is 50 feet or 2.5 times the stream bank width, whichever is greater. Three hundred feet of corridor is recommended for good wildlife habitat. Though suburban and urban landowners may not have enough space available, residents should try to have the widest streamside buffer possible.

Doesn't the fertilizer on the side walks and driveways just go down the sewer and get treated?
No. Sidewalks, driveways, and roofs all drain to the storm drain which empties into the neartest stream. Fertilizers or nutrients can promote excessive algae growth that robs oxygen from fish and other aquatic life as it decays.

Franklin Soil and Water Conservation District
Creating Conservation Solutions for Over 70 Years

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