

Riparian project targets grain farmers

Saskatchewan Conservation Learning Centre Inc., located south of Prince Albert, recently received approval for a four-year project entitled “Riparian Management in a Cultivated Landscape” through the Greencover Canada Technical Assistance Program. The objective is to promote and demonstrate the environmental impacts of beneficial management practices associated with riparian areas to grain, oilseed and pulse producers.

The target area is farmland adjacent to watercourses in the Carrot River basin. The headwaters are in the Wakaw and Kinistino areas and the system travels northeast before emptying into the Saskatchewan River at Manitoba. It includes tributaries such as Burnout Brook, Sandhill Creek and Little Bridge Creek, north of Melfort and Tisdale, numerous wetlands and 1600 miles of conservation and development works.

Working with individual landowners will be a key component of this project. Three sites will be established with co-operators to demonstrate some beneficial management practices:

- Maintain and establish perennial buffer strips and grassed runways of either grassed or woody vegetation;
- Inter-pothole seeding of forage or agroforestry crops around wetlands or beside creeks;
- Proper design of seeding and regrassing runways to prevent further gullyng;
- Fall or winter rental grazing of stubble plus ungrazed or unhayed buffer strips, inter-pothole areas and grassed runways which would include development of winter watering site and fencing fields;
- Stockpiling and grazing of five forage species selected for buffer strips;
- Impact of conventional, minimum and zero till systems on nutrient and sediment retention;
- Selection of annual crops adjacent to riparian areas that provide sufficient standing stubble and crop residue to prevent sediment and nutrient loss.

The sites will serve as focal points for extension activities and allow producers to see differences in management under similar climatic, environmental and soil type conditions.

Producers in the Carrot River watershed will be contacted and involved in discussions on:

- Current farming practices adjacent to watercourses and wetlands;
- Potential beneficial management practices for their operation;
- What encouragement would be required for voluntarily adoption of beneficial management practices;
- Development of demonstration sites on their land.

In order to encourage producers to adopt these practices, environmental benefits will be demonstrated and economic opportunities through adoption of beneficial management

practices or diversification into new perennial crops (without diversifying into livestock) investigated.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

Producers interested in participating in the project are encouraged to contact the Conservation Learning Centre at 306-953-2796.

Most riparian management and extension activities in Saskatchewan have been targeted to livestock producers and mixed farmers. However, there are areas where agriculture revolves solely around annual cropping. With larger equipment and the emergence of precision farming, producers are viewing wetlands and the meandering nature of creeks and rivers as a hindrance.

These areas perform valuable environmental functions such as above-average production of biomass, sediment trapping, nutrient filtration, stream and wave energy dissipation, erosion control, streambank stabilization and groundwater recharge. These functions improve water quality and provide wildlife habitat.

Land management in a highly cultivated landscape adjacent to watercourses can have a significant impact on nutrient and sediment retention. The implementation of grassed runways and other erosion control techniques reduces sediment and nutrient loss but benefits are difficult to demonstrate. Environmental benefits are often sacrificed to increase annual crop production.

The Conservation Learning Centre is conducting the riparian project in partnership with Saskatchewan Watershed Authority, Saskatchewan Soil Conservation Association, Saskatchewan Agriculture, Food and Rural Revitalization, Saskatchewan Conservation and Development Association and Ducks Unlimited Canada. Greencover Canada Technical Assistance Program is funded through a federal-provincial agreement between Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and Saskatchewan Agriculture, Food and Rural Revitalization.