



What is Riparian Health?

. . . and why do we need to measure it?

The word “health” conveys an impression of something in properly functioning condition - things working well. If health is applied to us, it relates to the ability of our bodies to perform certain functions within a measured set of standards. Our bodies undertake functions like respiration, circulation, digestion, filtration, cell repair, movement and many more. If these functions are occurring, within some standards, we consider ourselves healthy. In a similar way, landscapes, including riparian areas, perform certain functions. “Riparian health” means the ability of a reach of stream, a lakeshore, a wetland or a watershed (composed of many different riparian areas), to perform a number of key ecological functions. We’ll describe all of these functions in “What do riparian areas do?”. Some examples of these functions include maintenance of biodiversity (building habitat), creation of primary productivity (forage, shelter) and water quality improvement (filtering and buffering water).



Why do we need to measure riparian health?

Because we don't all “see” the same thing!



When we look at a riparian area, what we see and how we interpret our observations is often based on our backgrounds, experiences and perceptions. Even though we may be standing on the same streambank or lakeshore, we don't often “see” all of the same things, or the total picture. Because of our own unique focus we interpret the scene differently and sometimes argue with others over their perception of the riparian picture versus our own.