



Common Concepts behind the Measurements

What are the Key Pieces?

Riparian health evaluation knits together physical (soils and hydrology) and vegetation features, because no one factor or characteristic provides a complete picture of site health or trend in health. These evaluations rely heavily on vegetation characteristics because many vegetation features integrate the effects of soil and hydrologic factors which form and operate in riparian areas. Plants are more visible than soil or hydrologic characteristics. They may provide an early indication of riparian health, help you see the past history of use and help you to understand the successional trend on the site.

There is a close relationship between physical and vegetation features. Riparian reaches with significant changes in hydrology and soil will show changes in plant community structure and potential. Changes in vegetation, the “glue” of riparian systems, may have a rebounding effect on hydrology and soils as well.



How Much is There?

Many of the measurements deal with the element of “coverage”, that is, how much of the riparian area measured is covered, influenced or affected by vegetation or structural changes. The categories are usually expressed in percentages of the reach area. For example, in the illustration below, weeds cover about 3% of the riparian reach. Of the total canopy cover of trees, 16% is composed of seedlings or saplings. These measurements allow you to assign a score.

