

## RIPARIAN

## B U F F E R S

### WATER'S LAST DEFENSE

In 2015, SCCD distributed a Social Indicators Survey to select urban and rural residents. The purpose of the survey was to help improve planning and evaluation of watershed projects by identifying the awareness, knowledge, values and beliefs of individuals regarding issues and management practices within the community. Approximately 50% of respondents were unfamiliar with riparian buffers.

Riparian buffers are strips of vegetated land located between areas of land use and a waterbody. The buffer provides a natural filtration of pollutants that move across the landscape during a runoff event. In a healthy ecosystem, almost all snowfall and rainfall is retained within the living plant material, litter, and topsoil, with minimum runoff. Bare ground and hard packed soils, such as on overgrazed rangeland or roadways and parking areas, act to prolong and intensify drought conditions because almost all precipitation runs off the landscape. This not only deprives the system of moisture but provides a clear path for bacteria and other pollutants to enter the waterbody. Portions of the Tongue River and several of its tributaries have been identified as having bacteria concerns.

Riparian buffers should be well vegetated with a mix of perennial grasses, forbs, and woody plants of several species and age classes. Often these natural features are missing in developed and residential areas and on farms and ranches.

Vegetation also helps controls erosion and provides wildlife habitat. Once established, a riparian buffer is relatively easy to maintain and can return measurable water quality benefits.

Both urban and rural residents can play their own part in protecting water quality with the following practices:

### RURAL RESIDENTS AND LIVESTOCK OWNERS

- Fence off riparian areas to protect and encourage native plant growth within the buffer area and allow the riparian pasture to be managed separate from uplands
- Locate feeding, watering and shelter areas away from waterbodies to minimize livestock access and prevent overuse of streams and riparian corridors
- When necessary, graze riparian areas during the dry season when runoff potential is minimal
- Leave a space along streambanks when haying or farming adjacent areas

### URBAN RESIDENTS

- Leave a space along streambanks when mowing, burning and weed-eating adjacent areas
- Allow grasses and forbs to grow naturally along the waterway and/or plant willows or other woody species to help re-vegetate bare areas
- Pick up after your pets-in your yard, parks, and along the pathways, especially near water

### WANT TO INSTALL A BUFFER? FENCE OFF THE CREEK?



Through federal and state grants, the SCCD offers financial assistance for projects that benefit water quality in the Tongue River Watershed. Typical projects include installing fencing or stockwater systems to minimize livestock access to waterbodies and relocating corrals or animal feeding areas away from waterbodies. SCCD also offers assistance for replacing eligible septic systems to eliminate sewage discharges.

If you would like to apply for cost-share funds through one of SCCD's many water quality improvement programs, we encourage you to contact SCCD or visit our website at [www.sccdwy.org](http://www.sccdwy.org) to determine if the project is eligible and to learn more about the application process. In the event that you are ineligible for cost-share funds, the SCCD and NRCS can still provide technical assistance.



Sheridan County Conservation District  
1949 Sugarland Drive, Suite 102  
Sheridan, WY 82801  
(307) 672-5820 ext. 3  
[www.sccdwy.org](http://www.sccdwy.org)

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*The mission of the Sheridan County Conservation District is to protect Sheridan County's land and water quality through assistance programs, information and outreach, monitoring, and planning.*



## TONGUE RIVER RESTORATION PROJECT

If you live in or near Dayton, you may have noticed a large project underway in the Tongue River this fall. The project included a combination of rock structures, wood enhancements, and channel realignment. These techniques are meant to stabilize eroding banks while also improving habitat and overall stream function. This project would not have been possible without the NRCS, Wyoming Game and Fish, The Nature Conservancy, the Wyoming Department of Agriculture, the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality, the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust, Sheridan County, Wyoming Community Foundation Padlock Donor Fund, and the 16 landowners.



## TONGUE RIVER WATERSHED MONITORING

SCCD conducted monitoring on five mainstem and seven tributary sites in the Tongue River Watershed in 2019. Monitoring allows us to document changes in water quality over time. Landowner support and access permission is vital to continuing local efforts to improve water quality.

Thank you to all of the landowners who provided us access in 2019 and in other years. Your support of our ongoing efforts in the watershed is greatly appreciated.

## ANNUAL TONGUE RIVER WATERSHED STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 20TH, 6 PM  
RANCHESTER TOWN HALL  
145 COFFEEN STREET, RANCHESTER

The Tongue River Watershed Steering Committee, which is comprised of landowners and interested parties, provides input and recommendations to the SCCD for implementing resource programs within the Tongue River Watershed. The meeting is open to anyone living in or interested in the Tongue River Watershed.

Please join us on February 20th, your input is always welcome!