



Creeks and Communities:

A Continuing Strategy for Accelerating Cooperative Riparian Restoration and Management

A strategy for accelerating cooperative riparian restoration and management was initiated in 1996 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service and the U.S. Department of the Interior (USDI) Bureau of Land Management, in partnership with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. The strategy was designed to integrate the physical, biological, and social dimensions of riparian-wetland management to achieve results for resources and communities. It was based on the premise that as demands on our natural resources increase, the only effective way to ensure the sustainable production of values and benefits is through strong, lasting, public and private partnerships.

Healthy watersheds and riparian-wetland areas are critical to providing communities with the economic, ecological, and social benefits that come from the reliable availability of adequate supplies of clean water. The storage of water in riparian-wetland areas is important to ensuring a life-sustaining supply of this precious resource. Riparian-wetland areas are also unique features that connect landscapes and communities, providing unlimited opportunities to bring people together to create a common vision for productive and sustainable conditions. While there is growing agreement regarding the importance of watershed and riparian-wetland function, there continues to be considerable disagreement about existing conditions and

appropriate treatments. This disagreement has led to an environment of lawsuits and regulatory approaches, often leaving out the people most affected by the decisions. However, there is increasing evidence that effective solutions arise from the workings of citizens and stakeholders. This strategy was designed to facilitate collaborative approaches, which take time and are greatly influenced by human dynamics, yet offer the greatest opportunity for managing conflict and reducing excessive process and expense.

The goals of the original strategy were to achieve riparian restoration through collaboration and to reduce process requirements for restoration and maintenance of riparian-wetland areas. It addressed the need to bring communities of people together and use common vocabulary and definitions for evaluating the health and condition of riparian-wetland areas. It incorporated fundamental concepts from both the biophysical and social dimensions of riparian-wetland management, as reflected in the use of the Proper Functioning Condition assessment method by the Riparian Coordination Network. Through extensive outreach, effort was focused on laying a foundation of understanding across a large number of people, over a broad geographic area and at multiple organizational scales, with the intent of building capacity for better decisionmaking and collective action. Program

evaluation results indicate success in terms of bringing people together and high levels of satisfaction with the products and services provided. However, the degree to which the outreach, training, and assistance have influenced cooperative restoration and management is less evident. Barriers to both implementation and effectiveness have been identified and provide the basis for adaptations focused on those aspects of the approach that will ensure the achievement of intended results as this strategy continues.

In response to the results of the evaluation, elements of the original strategy have been redefined and refined to improve the strategy's effectiveness. The original goals have been blended into a more focused overarching goal, which is to develop a critical mass of people who interact with and manage riparian-wetland resources based on shared knowledge of the attributes and processes that constitute sustainability. In an effort to better guide program decisionmaking and evaluation in the future, the revised plan outlines a number of

more specific objectives, strategies, and activities. Combined, they reflect the recognition that while teaching riparian-wetland function to a broad spectrum of people is fundamental to meeting the goal of this strategy, additional emphasis must be placed on strategically building the individual, community, and institutional capacity needed to achieve coordinated management. Extended services will include activities that both precede and follow specific assistance. Additional focus on restoration, management, and monitoring will address a broader range of issues along with drawing on tools designed for situation assessment, conflict management, and consensus building. Emphasis will be placed on diversifying the existing skill base of the Riparian Coordination Network through training and recruitment from various disciplines, as well as from private organizations and communities. Finally, the revised strategy addresses program management and accountability by outlining specific activities that guide overall operations.



Healthy riparian areas provide for the sustainable production of multiple benefits.

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