U.S. Department of the Interior • U.S. Department of Agriculture

Keeping Water On The Land Longer

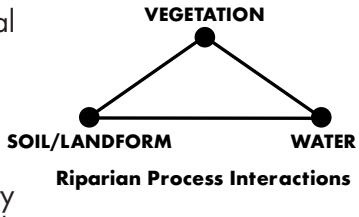
The longer water remains on the land before running off, the more productive that land will be. There are many ways to keep water on the land longer in and near streams. One way is to ensure that the areas next to streams, known as "riparian areas," are filled with the right plants and healthy soil. The plants and soil act together like a sponge, absorbing the water and energy of high flows, slowly releasing the stored water. If we want the land to be more productive, we must manage for these processes in the watershed.

Fostering a Common Vision

Managing for these processes involves working with communities to create a common vision of what their riparian-wetland areas need in order to capture, store, and more slowly release water over time. It is through this learning process that people are rediscovering that the largest fresh-water storage area in the world is not a lake or a reservoir, it is the soil.

The Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service, in partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, are working to help communities understand recovery and maintenance of riparian-wetland areas through a strategy called ***Accelerating Cooperative Riparian Restoration and Management***. The overall goal of the strategy is to develop a critical mass of people who interact with and manage riparian-wetland resources based on a shared knowledge of the attributes and processes that constitute sustainability.

The strategy is designed to address one of the major barriers to achieving healthy riparian systems, the polarity and gridlock created from strongly held values and interests. A critical first step is asking people to temporarily put aside their values and interests and first focus on the physical attributes and processes (the interaction of soil/landform, water, and vegetation) that produce benefits, such as clean water and good quality forage and habitat. One of the principal tools used to do this is the Proper Functioning Condition (PFC) assessment method.



Riparian Process Interactions

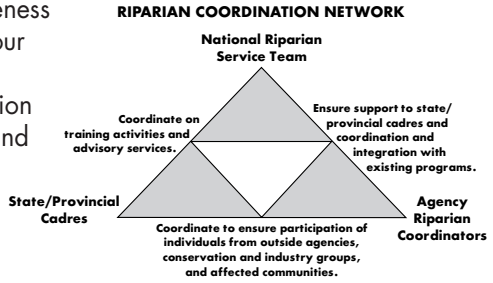
PFC is an assessment method, an on-the ground condition, and a communication tool that provides common terms, definitions, and concepts and also builds understanding among diverse stakeholders. PFC can be applied in a variety of settings to help people discern:

- What is working well
- What may be limiting
- How to prioritize restoration
- How management could be improved
- What further evaluations might be appropriate

The on-the-ground condition of PFC indicates a state of resiliency. Systems that are below PFC are not considered sustainable.

Use of the PFC concepts and the assessment process is facilitating the capacity for cooperative decisionmaking and management that benefits both the land and communities. Success is dependent upon providing respectful learning environments, encouraging relationships, building trust, and creating a common vision.

Becoming Involved

A diverse group of people referred to as the Riparian Coordination Network are implementing this strategy principally throughout the Western United States and Canada. There are several ways you can become involved in and benefit from this strategy:

- Attend or sponsor training on riparian function, management, and monitoring
- Request consulting and advisory services for riparian-wetland resource issues
- Help raise awareness and interest in your local area
- Promote application of the concepts and principles of this strategy
- Become a member of a state/provincial cadre