# *Riparian Notes*

***Note Number 1, December, 2003*** ***Steve Nelle, NRCS, San Angelo, Texas***

## Adoption of Riparian Buffers

The enrollment of land in Riparian Buffers with Continuous CRP continues to grow in Texas. As of September 30, 2003, FSA records indicate that about 17,500 acres have been enrolled in Texas. If the average width of these buffers is 250 feet, this amounts to over 500 miles of creeks and rivers protected with Riparian Buffers. While this may not be much in comparison to the total miles of creeks and rivers in Texas, it represents a good start. The intent and goal of the practice is to transform degraded and nonfunctional riparian areas into well vegetated, properly functioning riparian areas.

A properly functioning riparian buffer will be accomplishing the following things:

- Banks and channels will become more stable with the right kinds and amounts of vegetation resulting in less erosion
- The high energy of flood flows will be dissipated by riparian vegetation, especially woody vegetation
- Water velocity will be slowed down, allowing more sediment to drop
- Sediment will be trapped and stabilized by riparian vegetation
- Excess nutrients, will be utilized by riparian vegetation; contaminants or pathogens (if any) will be broken down or destroyed by microbial activity in riparian areas
- Organic materials will be trapped by riparian vegetation providing a more favorable situation for additional plant establishment
- Riparian banks and floodplains, when properly vegetated will act as a sponge to absorb and store a portion of flood flows. This water will then be released slowly to improve the hydrology of the stream after a runoff event
- The diversity of vegetation will provide improved habitat for wildlife and aquatic species

The on-site and off-site environmental benefits of Riparian Buffers are great. The financial incentives to landowners are generous. This combination makes Riparian Buffers one of the best conservation tools currently available.

***Riparian Buffers***

*Good for the land*

*Good for landowners*

*Good for America*