

# Affordable Streamside Improvements



A win-win for  
producers and the  
environment

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Farmers and ranchers value clean water and healthy natural resources but may think they can't afford to improve their streamside areas in order to help protect Oregon's water quality. However, improving streamside vegetation (aka riparian vegetation) can be simple, inexpensive, and only take a little bit of land.

Healthy streamside areas are an important part of achieving the clean water that supports Oregon's diverse agricultural production and other natural resource uses. Oregon law requires farmers and ranchers to allow streamside vegetation to establish to help provide clean water.

Some streamside areas can be improved by pulling back cropping or changing grazing management in order to let vegetation establish naturally. These "passive" approaches to restoration can be a relatively quick and cost-effective way to restore a streamside area.

Many producers have improved the streamside areas on their own, but technical and financial help is available. The local [Soil Water Conservation District \(SWCD\)](#), [Watershed Council](#), or Oregon State University ([OSU](#)) [Extension](#) agent can provide assistance developing and implementing a plan. Financial assistance, cost-share, and grants are available through a variety of programs to help make these plans become a reality. The [Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board \(OWEB\)](#) is a state agency that offers a variety of grant programs to help Oregonians take care of local streams, rivers, wetlands, and natural areas.



Trees were planted and a fence was constructed along this stream in Wheeler County that is enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). This voluntary land retirement program helps agricultural producers protect streamside areas and wetlands while providing them with cost-share and a financial package.



These farmers and ranchers have managed streamside areas to allow riparian vegetation to establish.

“Having a healthy riparian area can go a long way to having a sustainable and economically viable farming or ranching operation,” says Diebel.

“You can have your trees, fish, and farming too!”

A popular funding source is the [Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program \(CREP\)](#), a voluntary land retirement program that helps agricultural producers protect streamside areas and wetlands.

“The cost-share provided by the Farm Service Agency (FSA) and OWEB provides the major portion of the cost of restoration and, along with additional incentives, may cover all costs,” says Lois Loop, from the Oregon FSA state office. Loop also points out that participants in the CREP program also receive an annual rental payment loosely based on the productivity of the acreage that has been taken out of production. “CREP is a good fit for a majority of locations where there is a degraded streamside or an area that has been annually tilled right up to the stream bank,” she explains. As of July 2012, Oregon CREP had more than 40,000 acres enrolled under 1,607 individual contracts located in 34 of the 36 counties.

Improving streamsidelines can also be a relatively low-cost way to address problems that can be expensive for farmers.

“By making improvements to your streamside areas, farmers and ranchers could protect water quality by stabilizing the streambank, filtering nutrients and pollution, trapping sediment, and slowing the heating of stream water,” says Ken Diebel, CREP technician with the Baker SWCD. “In addition to protecting water quality, high quality streamside areas protect valuable farmland by preventing erosion.”

Still not convinced to take the first step toward improving your streamside area? All the potential benefits can outweigh the cost. Diebel points out that streamside areas can provide high quality forage. So with proper grazing management, livestock producers can improve animal health and weight gain.

“OSU ag economists have found that cross fencing to facilitate rotational grazing, providing off-stream water, strategic placement of salt, and herding to benefit streamside areas can pay for themselves because calves gain more weight and cows are healthier and easier to take care of during the winter months,” he explains. “Additionally, healthy vegetation can bind soil in its roots to help prevent streambank erosion and healthy vegetation can also reduce weeds on your land.”

Oregonians value the many benefits that healthy streamside vegetation provides to water quality. Streamsidelines can also add value to an ag operation and the benefits of improving streamside areas may outweigh the costs.