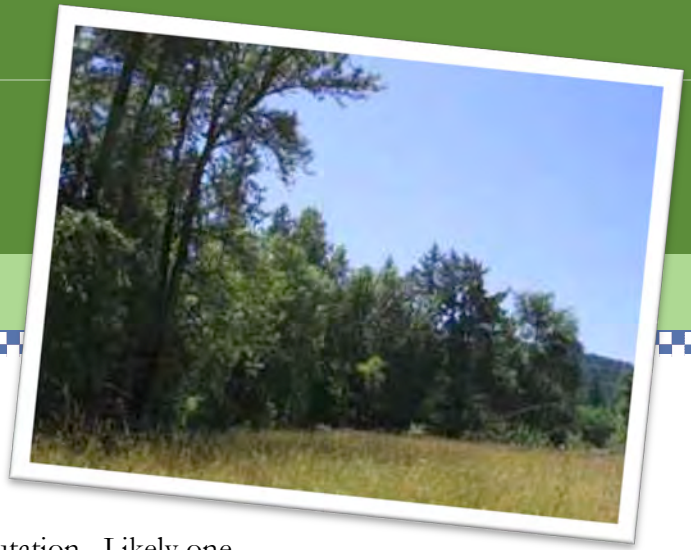


A Healthy Stream Runs Through it



Oregon's farmers and ranchers must achieve healthy streamsid



Issue 1, July 2012

As farmers and ranchers, you care about stewardship of Oregon's natural resources. You also play a critical role in Oregon's reputation as a thriving, clean, beautiful, and conservation-minded state.

Visualize Oregon's landscapes that showcase our state's reputation. Likely one landscape includes a stream or river where Oregonians fish, hunt, irrigate, water livestock, canoe or kayak. To maintain Oregon's reputation, these streams and rivers need to be healthy, and to achieve healthy streams, each stream needs a healthy streamside.

"What does a healthy streamside in Oregon look like?" Anyone who has traveled around Oregon knows that there is not just one answer to this question. Oregon's streamsid

Healthy streamsid



This healthy streamside in Klamath County has few noxious weeds and a mixture of grasses and sedges. The soils at this site won't support willows. This area is in compliance with streamside vegetation requirements because the grazing regime allows vegetation to establish and develop consistent with the capability of the site.



This Wheeler County landowner has managed grazing to allow willows to establish along the stream and maintain a healthy streamside. Given the site conditions, willows, grasses and sedges are expected to grow at this site. This site is in compliance with streamside vegetation



There are no agricultural activities on this site so the landowner already complies with streamside vegetation requirements. He chose to plant trees to shade out weeds such as reed canarygrass and received cost-share to do so. This is an example of the voluntary efforts needed to achieve Oregon's water quality goals.

Need Improvement



This Lincoln County waterway is mapped as a stream. The streamside is in compliance with vegetation regulations because agricultural activities are allowing appropriate vegetation to establish. However, it is not a healthy streamside because plants are mainly invasive blackberry and reed canarygrass.



This streamside in Wheeler County is not healthy because the vegetation consists primarily of invasive plants.



This waterway is mapped as a stream, so it is subject to streamside vegetation requirements. The streamside is not healthy and has insufficient vegetation to comply with the requirements due to weed spraying and channelization to promote agriculture.

The benefits of healthy streamside vegetation can include:

- Stable streambanks
- Cooler summer and warmer winter water temperatures
- Higher summer flows
- Filtration of excess nutrients, bacteria, and sediment in runoff that could pollute streams

Compliance with Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) water quality regulations is a first step to achieving a healthy streamside area. In Oregon, farmers and ranchers are required by law to allow streamside vegetation along rivers and streams to stabilize streambanks, shade streams, and filter surface runoff before it flows into streams. While compliance with this vegetation regulation is required, HOW landowners comply may vary depending on farm operation strategies. Many farmers and ranchers are already meeting the requirements by allowing streamside vegetation to establish and develop naturally.

Achieving healthy streamside vegetation often involves very straightforward changes. It can be as simple as pulling cropping activities back a few feet from the streambank. It can involve changes to grazing timing, duration, or intensity. Depending on your business management goals and priorities, it can mean fencing out an area to permanently exclude livestock and allow streamside vegetation to recover, or after a few years allowing managed grazing again in the streamside area.

Some farmers and ranchers are going further to meet Oregon agriculture's commitment to better water quality by planting vegetation and controlling noxious weeds in streamside areas. In areas where noxious weeds are a problem, planting vegetation and controlling weeds can help achieve healthy streamside vegetation much more quickly.

Some streamside areas along agricultural lands still lack adequate and appropriate streamside vegetation. ODA is working with our partners to help ensure that all agricultural lands bordering streams meet the vegetation requirements and achieve healthy streamside vegetation along agricultural lands.

ODA wants to help make the requirements clear enough to Oregon's farmers and ranchers so you are able to tell whether you are in compliance, and choose how you intend to achieve or maintain compliance on your own. At the same time, technical advice and financial assistance is available if you would like help meeting compliance or "jump-starting" a healthy streamside plant community. ODA staff, as well as local Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Watershed Councils, OSU Extension, and agricultural organizations are ready to help.

This article is the first of a series of articles planned to discuss streamside vegetation. Future topics include costs and benefits of streamside vegetation, whether a waterway is a "stream" subject to streamside vegetation requirements or a "ditch" not required to have streamside vegetation, and the need to gather more data about streamside vegetation conditions along agricultural lands. To subscribe to ODA's water quality listserv and receive future articles, send an email to AgWaterQuality-subscribe@oda.state.or.us, then follow the instructions in the message you receive asking you to confirm your subscription.

To contact the agricultural water quality program at ODA, visit our web site at http://www.oregon.gov/ODA/NRD/Pages/water_quality_front.aspx