

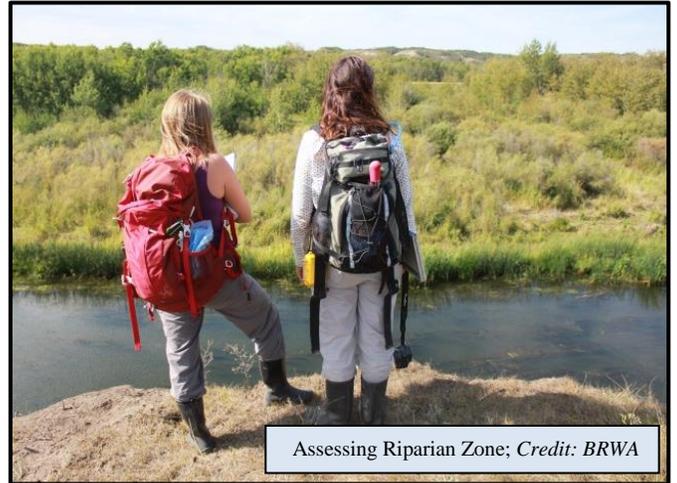
FERRY POINT RIPARIAN RESTORATION PROGRAM

RIPARIAN HEALTH ASSESSMENT

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

What are Riparian Health Assessments?

A Riparian Health Assessment is a tool used to determine the health of a property adjacent to a water body. The Alberta Riparian Habitat Management Society, commonly known as Cows and Fish, has staff that interpret the health of the riparian areas mainly through visual observation of the soil and plant communities. There are different assessments carried out depending on whether the water body is a stream, river, lake, or wetland.



Assessing Riparian Zone; Credit: BRWA

How do they work?

Riparian Health Assessments begin with a landowner consultation. Landowners are asked about various aspects of their land including grazing patterns. Cows and Fish use this background in their site visit. Highly trained staff who conduct the assessments spend several hours walking the site collecting their data and filling out their score sheets. Back in the office, the staff create a report for the landowner on the plant communities present on their land, areas where cattle may be overbrowsing, and suggestions for management options.



Measuring streambank health; Credit: BRWA

How do Health Assessments help the Riparian Area?

The main goal of an assessment is to create awareness and identify problem areas along the riparian area. Once the problem has been identified, landowners can actively make changes and address land use issues. It provides landowners with sound advice regarding land management, so they are well informed before they make any major changes.

For more information on riparian areas and Cows and Fish's health assessments visit:

www.cowsandfish.org.

What's the Cost?

The cost of a Riparian Health Assessment is generally \$2,000, depending on the site and location. Cows and Fish try to offset the cost to the landowners by applying for grants and working with counties and municipalities

CASE STUDY: THE THOMPSON FARM

GETTING A BASELINE

“ I was most interested in this program because it was action based. It progresses beyond theoretical planning to purpose-led action on the land. ”

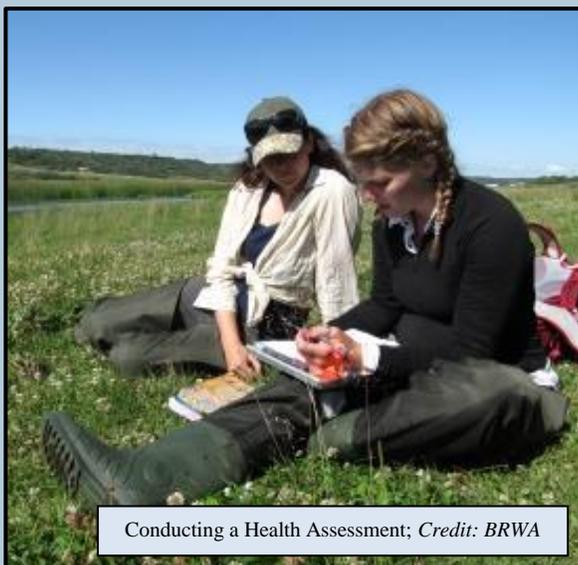
-Erin Murphy-Thompson

The Thompson Farm, comprised of Donald and Lorraine Thompson, as well as their daughter Erin Murphy-Thompson and her husband Casey, is a mixed farm comprised of a cow-calf operation (including pasture management and hay production) and a grain operation. Members of their family have been farming in the Rosalind area since 1902. The river quarter where the riparian project took place was purchased in the 1940's by Erin's grandfather.

The land that was studied in the Riparian Health Assessment had been only very lightly used in the past decade. Erin was curious to see how things had changed from the previous assessment carried out by Cows and Fish. “While one assessment is an interesting snapshot, multiple assessments over a period of time provide some idea of the changes that are occurring in response to natural and human-caused disturbances”

commented Erin.

“The second assessment should provide information that points to what the most glaring problems are and in theory should provide a direction for action.”



Conducting a Health Assessment; Credit: BRWA



Three-flowered Avens; Credit: Erin Murphy-Thompson

Erin and her family are now considering their next steps. As with many Riparian Health Assessment reports from the area, the Thompson farm had some areas of high density invasive plant coverage, as compared to native species coverage. The family is considering organizing a group weed-pull, perhaps enlisting the help of a 4-H group or a group of other cattle producers. The Thompson family now has a baseline to commence to their next pasture management program.