



RiparianCARE: Conservation and Restoration Efforts

2023-2025 Program Guidelines

1. Overview

Poor water quality is an important issue in the Battle River and Sounding Creek watersheds. Long-term water quality monitoring shows that high nutrient levels (phosphorus and nitrogen) are of particular concern, regularly exceeding water quality guidelines for the protection of aquatic life. Various factors contribute to these high nutrient levels and water quality in general; the health of riparian areas is one such factor. Riparian health assessments carried out in recent years show that many riparian areas in the Battle River and Sounding Creek watersheds are in fair to poor health. An Index of Biological Integrity (IBI) study conducted in 2006-2007 also confirmed that biological integrity of the Battle River is impaired in many locations. Several sites tested within the Buffalo Trail program area received an IBI score of between 0-40%, which indicates areas where there is little to no fishing and many fish species at risk.

Land use in the program area is predominantly privately owned annual and perennial crop and pastureland. As such, agricultural beneficial management practices on private land may have a great influence on the health of riparian areas in this part of the watershed. The RiparianCARE program is a focused effort to engage landowners in the Battle River and Sounding Creek watersheds to undertake beneficial management practices along the Battle River, Sounding Creek, tributary streams, and other water bodies in the program area to improve riparian health, water quality and fish habitat.

Interested landowners are invited to complete an application form that describes what they would like to do on their land. The application form includes an estimate of project costs along with a description of the project and its impact. Applications will be reviewed by the RiparianCARE Program Advisory Committee and successful applicants will enter into a formal agreement with Battle River Watershed Alliance (BRWA).

The BRWA will work with our partners to host landowner meetings, complete riparian health inventories and provide technical advice on management changes and restoration work as part of the RiparianCARE program. Funding for this program is provided through the Government of Alberta's Watershed Resiliency and Restoration Program.

2. Projects Eligible for Funding Support

Any projects that meet the purpose of the RiparianCARE program may be eligible. Projects may include, but are not limited to:

- a) Riparian health assessments
- b) Fencing (including cross-fencing) to manage livestock access to water bodies, banks, shorelines, riparian areas, or native range.
- c) Creating permanent cover (e.g. trees, shrubs, perennial forages, grass) buffer zones adjacent to water bodies or riparian areas.
- d) Developing off-site watering systems.
- e) Providing alternative shelter for livestock (alternatives to using riparian or native range trees/willows/shrubs).
- f) Converting non-native vegetation to native shrubs and trees adjacent to water bodies or riparian areas.
- g) Planting native trees and shrubs in riparian areas and native range where none exist.
- h) Controlling weeds in riparian areas or in native range.
- i) Manure management around surface water or shallow groundwater (including soil and manure testing as part of a manure management plan).
- j) Building bridges or other approved crossings to manage how livestock or ATVs/snowmobiles cross water.
- k) Septic/sewage system improvements (where the septic/sewage system is currently having negative impacts on surface water or shallow groundwater).
- l) Any other idea that a landowner has, that meets the purpose and intent of the program, may be eligible.

To be eligible, **the project must be effective for its intended purpose**. For example, if the project is a fence with a purpose to keep cattle out of a wetland for certain periods, then the fence needs to be designed, built and maintained such that cattle are kept out of the wetland during those periods. Length of project and maintenance period will be determined on a case-by-case period.

3. Eligible and Ineligible Expenses

Capital Items associated with an approved project, for which the landowner has a receipt of expense made, can be eligible for funding through the RiparianCARE program. Expenses will be approved on a case-by-case basis as part of the funding agreement. Eligible program funds may include:

- Project materials (e.g. fenceposts, wire, bridge decking, water pumps, grass seed, native tree/shrub seedlings, windbreak planting, etc.)
- Contracted labour for the project (e.g. engineers, fence-builders, surveyors, etc.)
- Contracted or rented equipment for the project (e.g. tractor, post-pounder, backhoe, etc.)

Items that are ineligible for RiparianCARE program funds include:

- Any cost not associated with the approved project

- Any cost for which a landowner does not have a receipt of expense made
- Any cost that has been covered by another funding program
- In-kind labour for the project (landowner time involved in implementing the project)
- In-kind equipment or materials for the project (items used to implement the project that the landowner purchased before April 1, 2023 – see retroactivity note below)

Note: Retroactivity

- Expenses made before a project is approved **MAY be eligible if they were completed since April 1, 2023.**
- HOWEVER: the landowner must understand that he/she runs the risk of **not receiving** project funding for expenses made before a project is approved.
- The intent of this “Retroactivity Clause” is to support new projects (for example, a project done a couple of months ago) completed before the landowner realized there was a funding program, or to help cover costs of materials that may have been purchased some time ago (for example, fence posts), but happen to be going in the ground as part of a new project.
- Retroactive projects may not apply for funding if they had previously received funding for the project through other sources.

4. Shared Investment

RiparianCARE is a shared investment program. There is a limited amount of funding to be shared amongst all interested parties. Landowners are expected to share in the planning and implementation of their project. The BRWA may not be able to cover all costs associated with a project.

5. Riparian Restoration Project Application Decision Making

Applications will be reviewed by the Advisory Committee on an ongoing basis throughout 2023-2025.

All project applicants will be kept confidential to the Advisory Committee until the project has been approved and the landowner has given permission for their name to be shared.

6. Program Priorities

If required, preference for funding will be given to higher-priority projects, as determined by the Advisory Committee and/or based on environmental considerations. Priorities include but are not limited to:

- a) Effect of proposed project on meeting the RiparianCARE program goals
- b) Protecting habitat/ecological function vs. restoring habitat/ecological function
- c) Current state of riparian area and potential for improvement
- d) Project size; number of acres it will help improve; number of livestock involved in project
- e) Project location in relation to RiparianCARE program priority areas

- f) Willingness of landowner to share and demonstrate what has been done and lessons learned through the project (e.g. tours, articles)
- g) Ease of access to the project for education and awareness opportunities
- h) Value of habitat for fish and wildlife
- i) Previous work done to improve management practices and/or previous riparian health inventory
- j) Project costs
- k) Potential for further projects and improvements

7. Permits and Approvals

It is the responsibility of the landowner to ensure that they have all required permits and approvals from any and all regulatory/permitting agencies. BRWA or our partners will not be responsible in any way for permits and approvals for any project under this program.

8. Participating Landowner Responsibilities

- Landowners will acquire and maintain all required permits, approvals, permissions, etc. for the project
- Landowners will be responsible for all up-front costs associated with a project. BRWA will reimburse for those project costs which are deemed eligible project expenses, once a funding agreement is in place.
- Landowners will be responsible for maintaining the project such that its intended purpose is accomplished for a length of time suitable for the project and agreed upon by all partners.
- Landowners will be responsible for all ongoing project maintenance (including costs).
- Landowners will provide reasonable, periodic access to project staff and our partners, for Riparian Health or Range Assessment or Inventory or other ecological assessments of the project area (this will include photographing the project site). Landowners will be given at least 48 hours notice.
- Landowners will consider requests by BRWA staff and/or project partners to include the project in presentations or printed material, tours/field days/demonstrations, etc., on a case-by-case basis.
- Landowners will complete their project and send in receipts by March 1, 2025.
- Landowners will not hold BRWA, project partners or funders liable for project failures due to unforeseen circumstances.