



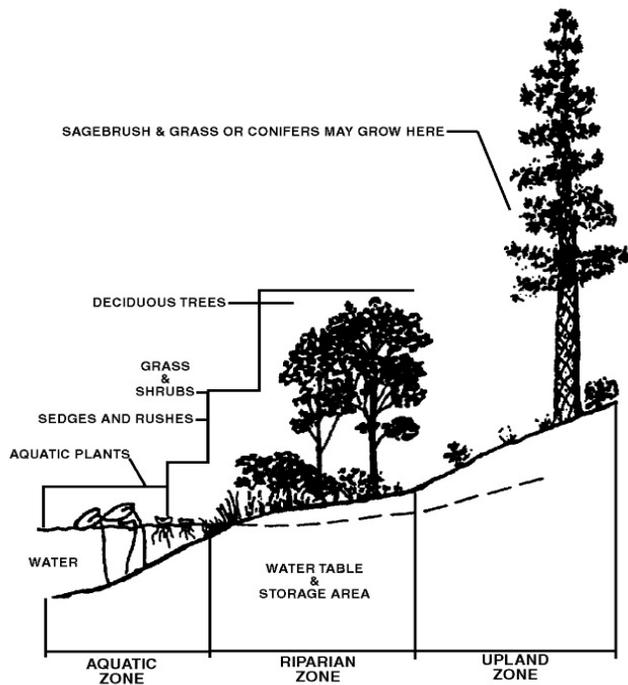
**Watersheds**  
C A N A D A

# The Riparian Zone

## The Ribbon of Life

The Riparian Zone is an area between the upland zone and the shoreline. It forms a corridor between land and water, allowing animals to travel between different biomes. Lining the border of the water, the riparian zone provides distinct rich, moist soils in which diverse plant communities can grow. A healthy riparian zone contains diverse plant species, aquatic and terrestrial wildlife. It helps to maintain water levels, temperature and also prevents erosion.

Figure 1: The Riparian zone defined



Source: Riparian Zone Defined, March 2015, Cowichan Lake and River Stewardship Society, <http://www.cowichan-lake-stewards.ca/Riparian%20Zone%20Regulation.htm#RiparianZoneDefined>

## Functions of a Healthy Shoreline

### Filtering Runoff for Clean Water

Shoreline vegetation helps slow the flow of surface runoff. Their roots absorb surface water, pulling it into the ground. Underground, sediments, nutrients and pollutants become trapped in the soil and absorbed by deeper plant roots.

### Controlling Erosion for Decreased Sedimentation

Trees and plants all have root systems that hold layers of soil in place. They act like glue, stabilizing the shoreline and preventing erosion. Leafy foliage reduces the impact of rainwater, preventing it from striking the soil and washing it away. Plants that grow directly along the shoreline absorb wave energy that would otherwise erode banks.

### Managing Storm Water & Controlling Floods

Flooding occurs when water enters a natural watercourse and exceeds its capacity. This causes it to overflow onto land that is usually dry. Flooding can be caused by heavy rains, ruptured dams or quickly melting snow and ice. Healthy shorelines can help manage these fluctuations. Vegetation slows the flow of runoff, allowing it to be absorbed into the ground instead of running directly into a lake, river or stream.

### Providing Habitat for Plants and Animals

Throughout various lifecycles, up to 90% of fish and wildlife species depend on a healthy shoreline. They utilize this area for sources of food, shelter, migration, breeding and rearing of young. Shoreline vegetation provides a corridor for wildlife when transitioning from land to water. Fallen vegetation that settles in the water provide unique habitat for aquatic life.

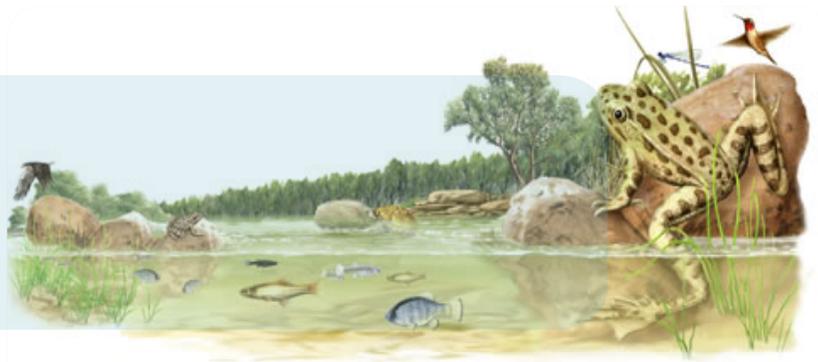
### Cooling Temperature & Providing Shade

Shoreline vegetation is a source of shade for terrestrial and aquatic wildlife. It provides much needed relief from hot summer temperatures and sunlight.



## Restoring the Ribbon of Life

You can help by doing your part



When vegetation is removed from the riparian zone, the integrity of the shoreline is lost. This negatively impacts the health of the waterbody by decreasing the quality of the water and reducing biodiversity. Eventually, the waterbody can become unusable, affecting the hundreds of species that rely on it. Fortunately, there are some easy steps that can be taken to help protect and restore your shoreline.

### ✓ **No-Mow Zones**

Allow your shoreline to become more naturalized by not mowing your lawn close to the shoreline. Try starting 3 – 6 feet away from the shoreline, but the larger the area the better! A “No-Mow” zone allows native plants to seed and reestablish, providing bank stability and habitat to your shoreline. You can also help this process along by planting native trees and shrubs!

### ✓ **Plant Native Shrubs and Trees**

The roots of shrubs and trees will help hold soil in place far better than the roots of your lawn and grass. You can select appropriate shrubs and trees by identifying the soil, light and moisture of your property. Look for native plants that are already growing on your property for ideas of what will grow and establish well.

### ✓ **Keeping it Natural**

The more natural your shoreline, the better it is for the environment! Where it is safe to do so, allow fallen trees and branches to stay on your property, either on land or in the water. This contributes to essential wildlife habitat and the survival of our lakes and rivers for generations to come.

