

Benton County Riparian and Wetlands Project Frequently Asked Questions

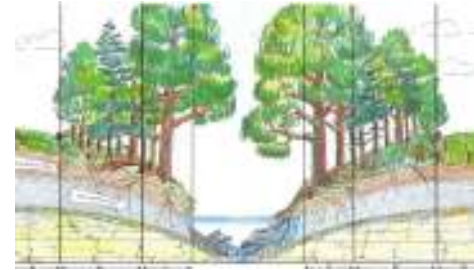


How do I get involved to find out more information, and provide further input?

Up to date Landowner Resources and other Information on the project is available on the Benton County Riparian and Wetlands Project Website: www.co.benton.or.us/cd/riparian
You can also sign-up to join the project e-mail list at: www.co.benton.or.us/maillist
You can also call the Benton County Water Projects Coordinator at 541-766-6085

Why is the County doing this project?

The County initiated the Riparian and Wetlands Project in accordance with State mandates and to achieve local goals, as well as improve water quality and quality of life in Benton County. Under the Oregon Statewide Planning Program, local jurisdictions are required to plan for various natural resources through a number of state-mandated goals. Goal 5 states that cities and counties shall inventory, evaluate, and protect riparian corridors along fish-bearing streams. Goal 6 requires that land use plans ensure that water quality will be maintained. The county chose to initiate the project when it did, because Benton County's Comprehensive Plan (2007) states that the county shall 'adopt a protection program for significant riparian areas within 18 months of adoption of the plan amendments'. Additionally, the county's comprehensive plan includes policies that state the county shall place high priorities on maintaining natural resources and protecting and promoting clean water.



What is a riparian area and why is it important?

Riparian areas are the land located adjacent to streams. They frequently have moist, fertile soils that support a variety of plants and vegetation only found alongside streams. Riparian areas are important for a number of reasons, including:

- Providing wood and nutrients for habitat, food and shelter for a number of species
- Shading streams. Cool water is healthier for many native fish species.
- Helping prevent erosion by holding soil in place with their roots.
- Filtering out runoff pollutants such as fertilizers, pesticides, and animal wastes before they enter waterways.
- Reducing flooding during and immediately after storms.

Will this project affect my property value?

No part of the Riparian and Wetlands Project is intended to adversely affect property values. By participating in maintaining riparian areas on private property, property values have been shown to increase in cases where the natural and scenic beauty of the property has been preserved. The development code developed to support these policies will outline lower-impact land uses and activities in riparian areas. The code provisions will be structured to reduce any possible negative impacts to property values. In addition, a Riparian and Wetland outreach guide on ways that land owners can enhance and gain grant funding for riparian areas on their property will be provided by Benton County.

Who will be affected?

The new regulations will apply to all land in Benton County outside of Urban Growth Boundaries; however, farming and forestry practices will be exempt. The affected streams are State of Oregon inventoried fish-bearing streams under the Goal 5 'Safe Harbor' inventory outlined in the Draft Riparian and Wetlands Inventory Report. Additional incentives and protections improve water quality may be proposed near

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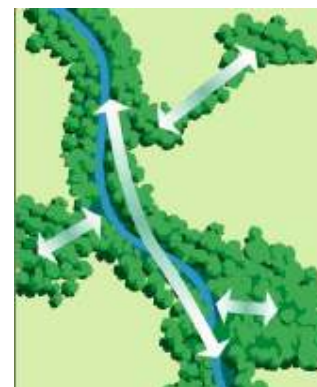
smaller streams (not currently mapped as fish-bearing) to meet current water quality requirements.

What new regulations will go into effect?

Under the 'Safe Harbor' option of the Statewide Planning Goal Goal 5, a 50'(ft) buffer is to be established around fish-bearing streams with a 75' requirement for the Willamette River. A 50' building setback prohibiting new building structures within this area is already a requirement under the County's development code to protect structures. Any new rules will seek to maintain the natural integrity of the riparian buffer; however, the development code will include exceptions for vegetation removal such as invasive species, and will outline low impact land uses, such as recreation. Additionally, a buffer may be required along non fish-bearing streams to protect water quality.

Why does temperature and dissolved oxygen matter to water quality?

Oxygen is a naturally occurring element in water. A good level of dissolved oxygen is essential for aquatic life like salmon, which depend upon oxygen for survival. Levels of dissolved oxygen vary between seasons or even time of day as temperature levels increase and decrease. Increased water temperature will cause more oxygen to evaporate out of the water and consequently reduce dissolved oxygen levels. Increased water temperature can be caused by removal of vegetation from alongside stream banks. Pollutants and toxins that enter waterways can also affect the chemical structure of the stream which can result in lower levels of dissolved oxygen.



What is the purpose of a buffer?

A buffer is intended to preserve the natural integrity of the riparian area. The riparian area serves as a transition between the stream or river and the land use. A healthy riparian area is necessary for protecting waterways from pollutants and runoff from land, and protects the land from the potentially harmful effects of flooding. Buffers are effective ways for maintaining clean, healthy waterways, habitats and recreational value.

What is the difference between a setback and a buffer?

A setback refers to the development standard in Benton County that does not allow for development or placement of buildings within 50 feet of a stream corridor. A buffer is designated as the 50 feet adjacent to a stream that is intended to remain in its natural state for the purpose of maintaining a clean and healthy waterway.

Why was a buffer width of 50 feet chosen?

The 50 foot and 75 foot buffer widths are the appropriate distances for riparian protection set by the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development under the Goal 5 Safe Harbor inventory method. 50 feet corresponds to rivers and streams with a flow of less than 1,000 cubic feet per second, and the 75 foot buffer width corresponds to rivers with a flow of greater than 1,000 cubic feet per second (in Benton County this applies only to the Willamette River). The State has determined that these are the minimum buffer widths that can be implemented around streams and still provide a functional buffer between the water source and urban land uses.

Does this mean I can't use my land if streams are present?

No. Current uses will be allowed and a range of future uses that don't impact the overall function of buffers will continue with education and support from Benton County.