



The Newsletter of the Shermans Creek Conservation Association
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Riparian Buffers? What Are Riparian Buffers?

Shermans Creek runs the length of our picturesque Perry County. Much of the Creek runs through forestland, with trees and forest plants on its banks. A large section of the Creek runs through farmland, with fields on one or both sides. And it also flows through developed areas, with houses, lawns, and development butting right up to the water.

Take a look at the Shermans Creek the next time you see it. What is growing beside it? How do you think that affects the Creek itself?

Riparian buffers are the plants growing beside a stream. They link the land and the water together. Whether your waterfront slice is Shermans Creek or a small, intermittent tributary, the water in the main stream is affected by what happens on your home turf. In fact, even if we don't own stream-front property, we all need to be concerned – even that storm drain at the bottom of your driveway or street eventually leads to a waterway.

The good news is that plants protect your property by slowing runoff and allowing it to soak into the ground, reaching wells and reducing flooding. Roots help hold the soil and control erosion. Trees cast their shade over the water to keep it cool for fish and frogs, and provide perching places for birds. Buffer plants can provide seasonal blooms and autumn color to beautify your yard while attracting butterflies and birds.

The bad news is that residential neighborhoods can be a major source of pollution. Water flowing over roads, lawns, and yards picks up sediments, lawn fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, heavy

metals, and other pollutants that don't belong in the water. Americans have always loved waterfront parks, with neatly trimmed grass. But disturbing the streamside to expand a lawn, create a view, or build a boat landing invites trouble.

What trouble? Consider *erosion*. Cutting stream bank vegetation destabilizes the shoreline and can lead to loss of land. The area between the water's edge and the top of the bank must stand up to scouring currents, fluctuating water levels, moving ice, flooding, and surface runoff from higher ground.

Then there is *flooding*. Land development increases runoff from impervious surfaces such as roofs, roads, sidewalks, and driveways. Rainwater can run off lawns twice as fast as from forests. More water reaches the stream faster than it would naturally, causing it to flood during heavy rains, and causing it to run low or even dry out during dry spells.

One more concern is the *loss of habitat*. The stream's edge is prime real estate for birds and other wildlife. Backyard bird feeders are no substitute for good plant cover and natural food. And clearing trees exposes waters to more sunlight, raising water temperatures, additional stresses for fish and their food supplies.

Be sure to notice the banks of Shermans Creek the next time you drive by. And if you are a property owner, consider what you might do to protect our Creek. Simple changes can make a big difference!

SCCA Web Site: www.shermanskreek.org.

The Backyard Buffer

A boundary between the natural and man-made worlds for Shermans Creek Watershed

Permanent vegetation along your stream bank provides a “living filter” for both surface and subsurface water running off the land. It also provides your home landscape with privacy and the pleasure of watching wildlife and birds.

The flood and erosion “insurance” provided by a riparian buffer is all the more important now that weather patterns seem to be changing. Pennsylvania is seeing a definite shift toward heavier storms that deliver several inches of rain in a single day. Sturdy plantings on your stream bank are the best protection you can provide for your own property and your neighbors. . .and for the Susquehanna River and the Chesapeake Bay, as well.

No stream is too small to benefit from a buffer. In fact, the smaller the stream the more your buffer will help. It is those many little streams and tributaries that make up our creeks and rivers.

Beginning your buffer:

- Spend sometime outside during a heavy rainstorm. Watch your property to see where the water goes. Your buffer will do the best job of filtering runoff when the water spreads out and does not flow straight into the stream in a channel.

- Re-grade the land, or use stones or landscape timbers to divert runoff into flatter areas where it can soak in.
- If your land receives storm water runoff from a road, an engineer’s advice is useful.
- If you have an unstable bank, deal with this first. Remember that a buffer will provide good insurance for your riverbank.

The “no-mow” option:

Or you can begin a buffer by starting a wildflower meadow on the waterside of your lawn. Eventually you can allow these wildflower islands to expand until they create a continuous garden to the water’s edge. This “no-mow option” is an easy, cheap approach – if you want to keep part of your yard as a wildflower meadow, mow once every two to three years, except along the immediate stream bank. If you don’t mow, and also plant one or two berry bearing shrubs or trees, you will attract more birds to perch in your yard and they will distribute seeds through their droppings.

Remember that a riparian buffer is a right-of-way for the stream. Be sure to protect your property and the Creek by not building in the floodplain, and consider retaining the natural beauty of a wooded shoreline.

Caring for your Buffer

The best care is the least care when it comes to a stream buffer. Resist the urge to tidy up. A natural forest floor, with its “litter” of fallen leaves and twigs, helps the buffer break down pollutants and soak up water. Raking or removing them defeats the purpose. Fish appreciate natural woody debris that falls into their stream because it provides hiding places and creates resting pools. Remove only debris that could form dams and cause flooding.

Watch your buffer for signs of erosion or channeled runoff. Keep pet droppings from washing into the stream. Remember that Nature will probably rearrange your efforts to some degree, and that as the buffer grows, natural succession will replace shorter-lived plants with more shade tolerant, long-lived plants.

What Can a Riparian Buffer Do for You?

The benefits are many, both in time and money, and as a benefit to the overall environment of the watershed.

- Less time spent mowing lawns and maintaining yards
- Less money spent on fertilizer, pesticides, herbicides
- Reduced air conditioning costs if the house is shaded by buffer plants
- Reduced heating costs if buffer plants provide winter windbreak
- More stable shoreline, avoiding the costs of bank stabilization
- More interesting birds, butterflies, and wildlife to watch
- Better fishing
- Cleaner safer, more attractive water for recreation
- Safer, more reliable drinking water from on-site wells
- Better flood protection
- Possible tax benefits from conservation easement on buffer area
- Increased property value
- Better privacy provided by buffer plants.

Attention to all Residents of
Shermans Creek Watershed,
Fishing Creek Watershed,
and Little Juniata Creek Watershed

Your input is needed at public meetings coming up in February. These meetings will be discussing the proposed *Southern Perry County Watershed Conservation Plan of Shermans Creek, Fishing Creek, and Little Juniata Creek and their Tributaries*.

The first meeting will be at the **Duncannon Borough office at 7:00 p.m. on February 6th**. A second meeting will be in **Blain at the Forestry office on February 9th at 7:00** for those in western Perry County.

Please join us – we are looking for ideas, suggestions, and reactions from all residents of these watersheds. Information: 582-3376.

Meetings & Events

SCCA Meetings are held at 7pm at the Carroll Township Building on Rambo Hill Road.

February Public Meetings
(See related article)

March 26 SCCA Meeting

April 22 Earth Day Week

May 19 Creek Cleanup

May 21 SCCA Meeting

Shermans Creek Cleanup

Sponsored by SCCA

Saturday, May 19th, 8:00 am to 1:00 pm

Watch the local papers for more information, or call Linda Sieber at 582-3376

Lunch will be provided by SCCA.

Be sure to wear creek shoes or sturdy boots and work gloves

Note: If you have a canoe, please bring it along!

Shermans Creek Conservation Association

Membership Form

Name _____

Address _____

Town _____

Telephone _____ E-Mail _____

I am interested in helping out with programs and projects _____

_____ Individual Membership \$10.00

_____ Family Membership \$15.00 _____ Organization \$40.00

_____ Donation *All donations are tax deductible.*

RETURN COMPLETED FORM AND CHECK TO: SCCA Membership
385 Dark Hollow Road
Shermans Dale, PA 17090
(717) 582-3376

Mission Statement

The SCCA is a non-political association founded by a group of residents interested in the quality of Shermans Creek.

The SCCA's main concern is the quality of life and the healthy economic development of the Watershed. We hope to maintain a natural environment while providing for the inevitable development of our rural area.

The SCCA is dedicated to protecting the Creek and to providing environmental education to the residents of the Watershed

www.shermanscreek.org .