

# Cultivating Conservation



## How Local Farmers are Using Nature to Grow Greener

### Using a Riparian Buffer to Protect Against Erosion, Flooding, and Improve Water Quality

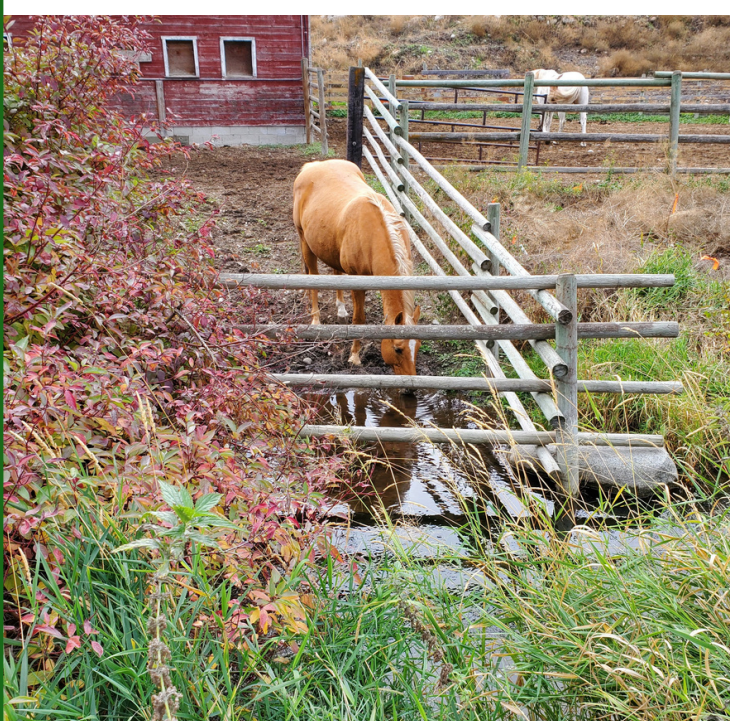
One of the biggest challenges facing ranchers today is land stewardship. Maintaining a healthy environment is key to a viable business model.

Productive grasslands and grazing pastures, access to water, and a positive relationship between livestock and wildlife are all essential to the bottom line of a modern-day ranching operation.

Since 1987, Keith and Marnie Manders have owned Garnet Valley Ranch, a family-run business that raises and markets commercial Angus cattle. For them, caring for the environment is as much a business imperative as it is a personal passion. Five years ago the couple fenced off about 500 feet of Eneas Creek that runs through their 20-acre property located just north of Summerland, B.C.

"When we fenced off the creek, it was twofold: We wanted to keep cattle out but we also wanted to put the creek back to its natural state," says Keith. "Last summer, a friend recommended talking to Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship (OSS) who could help carry the project further. The riparian area around the creek was overwrought with thistle, burdock and other invasive plants. After an initial assessment OSS recommended an overhaul of the area that involved clearing out the invasive species and planting several varieties of native plants.

"Ranchers are naturally stewards of the land. OSS aims to work with landowners in a way that supports their land use needs while also providing important wildlife habitat," says Alyson Skinner, OSS Executive Director. "We are so pleased to be working with Keith and Marnie and offer support for projects that are important to them. Fencing along the creek still allows for livestock access to water with a nose-in and planting native trees and shrubs will mitigate issues like erosion, flooding and invasive plants which can impact water quality."



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"It was a true partnership," says Marnie. "We provided the fencing and physical labour and they provided the expertise as well as the trees, plants and shrubs." When it came time to choosing the plants the Manders were happy to leave that decision in the hands of the OSS professionals, but they also wanted to be sure the birds that visited their property year after year would be taken care of.

"They really kept our focus in mind. We told them about a couple of blue herons that like to hang out in the creek, as well as a duck family that lives here," continues Marnie. "One of the birds that they really focused on, and a bird that fascinates us, is the screech owl. And they even thought about placing lower plants near the fence so our horses wouldn't be able to reach over and eat them. They really knew what they were doing."

With all hands on deck the Manders and OSS staff planted about 350 plants including Nootka Rose, Snowberry, Red Osier Dogwood, Water Birch, native willow species, Chokecherry and Cottonwood trees. Over the next few years both parties will continue to work together to maintain the area and keep the invasive grass down so it doesn't choke out the new plantings. While preserving the natural integrity of their own property is a priority for the Manders, so too is taking care of their leased land. At present they're working on installing a remote water system and well that will use a solar powered pump. They've also built fencing and a corral to collect cattle in order to keep them away from a couple of wetlands on their range.

"That's just the modern way of ranching I think," says Keith. "When you see how resilient those wetlands are and how much environmental value is there, it's worth it. It consumes a lot of time and energy but the flip side is, if you're willing to do the right thing for the environment there's often funding for it."

"Sometimes, blocking off access with fencing presents a challenge when it comes to moving the cattle, adds Marnie. "But you have to balance that with the benefits. Keith and I love to ride. We're out in nature all the time, so that's why we do it."

