

Cultivating Conservation

Growing More than Crops



Along Eneas Creek, LocalMotive Farm demonstrates how agricultural production and healthy natural habitats can share the same landscape.

For farms growing vegetables and other ground crops, the strips of native vegetation bordering creeks and wetlands can provide benefits well beyond the water's edge. These areas, known as riparian buffers, support pollinators, shelter beneficial insects, protect soil and water, and contribute to a healthier, more resilient farm ecosystem.

In the Okanagan and Similkameen, where water is precious and natural valley-bottom habitats have become increasingly fragmented, retaining these green corridors is particularly important.

Nature's pest management team

A healthy riparian buffer is home to far more than trees and shrubs. Native plants provide food, shelter and overwintering habitat for an incredible diversity of insects, including many that benefit agricultural production.

Lady beetles, lacewings, hoverflies and parasitic wasps are natural enemies of common crop pests such as aphids and caterpillars. By retaining diverse native vegetation alongside agricultural fields, growers can help support these beneficial insects throughout their life cycles.

Riparian buffers also provide habitat for native bees, butterflies and other pollinators. Even when crops don't depend directly on insect pollination, supporting diverse insect communities contributes to a more balanced agricultural ecosystem.

Willows: An early-season boost for pollinators

Native willows are among the most valuable plants in a riparian buffer, particularly in early spring.

Before many wildflowers or crops begin blooming, willow catkins provide pollen and nectar for emerging bees and other insects. Willow pollen is a valuable source of protein, helping bees feed developing young and build their populations early in the growing season.

Although some willow species are pollinated partly by wind, insects also play an important role in willow pollination. Many native bees actively seek out willow flowers, making these shrubs an important early-season food source. As the growing season progresses, other native shrubs and wildflowers take over, providing a succession of floral resources that help sustain pollinators and beneficial insects.



Long before most crops are blooming, native willows are already feeding the pollinators that keep our agricultural landscapes healthy.



Why riparian buffers are good for farms

Natural pest control: Diverse native vegetation supports beneficial insects that can help suppress agricultural pests.

Pollinator habitat: Flowering shrubs, willows and wildflowers provide food and shelter for bees and other pollinators.

Streambank stability: Deep-rooted native vegetation holds soil in place, reducing erosion and protecting productive land.

Water quality: Vegetated buffers help intercept sediment, nutrients and runoff before they enter waterways.

Flood protection: Maintaining a riparian buffer and floodplain can provide better flood protection for your crops.

Climate resilience: Riparian vegetation provides shade, helps maintain cooler stream conditions and supports moisture-dependent habitat in our dry climate.

Biodiversity: Riparian corridors connect habitats across the agricultural landscape, supporting birds, amphibians, insects and other wildlife.

Nature-based Solutions in Practice

At LocalMotive Farm, the relationship between cultivated fields and the natural vegetation bordering Eneas Creek offers an opportunity to highlight the value of keeping riparian habitat intact on working farmland.

For ground-crop producers, retaining native shrubs and other streamside vegetation can help sustain beneficial insects and pollinators close to production areas while protecting the creek and its banks.

It's an example of a simple but important nature-based solution: recognizing that the natural areas surrounding our crops are part of a healthy, functioning agricultural landscape.

Small buffers, big benefits

Protecting a riparian buffer doesn't necessarily require major changes to farm operations. Retaining existing native vegetation, allowing natural regeneration, managing invasive plants and avoiding unnecessary disturbance can all contribute to healthier riparian habitat.

Where buffers have been degraded, planting locally appropriate native willows, shrubs and flowering plants can help restore ecological function.

Across the Okanagan and Similkameen, every protected creekside corridor contributes to a larger network of healthy habitats.

For growers, these natural areas are more than the edges of a field. They're valuable allies in building productive, resilient farms.

For more information on applying nature-based solutions to your farm, visit our website at www.farmstewards.ca