

2020 PRAIRIE DOG CREEK WATERSHED ANNUAL NEWSLETTER

RIPARIAN

B U F F E R S

WATER'S LAST DEFENSE

In 2015, SCCD distributed a Social Indicators Survey to select urban and rural residents. The purpose of the survey was to help improve planning and evaluation of watershed projects by identifying the awareness, knowledge, values and beliefs of individuals regarding issues and management practices within the community. Approximately 50% of respondents were unfamiliar with riparian buffers.

Riparian buffers are strips of vegetated land located between areas of land use and a waterbody. The buffer provides a natural filtration of pollutants that move across the landscape during a runoff event. In a healthy ecosystem, almost all snowfall and rainfall is retained within the living plant material, litter, and topsoil, with minimum runoff. Bare ground and hard packed soils, such as on overgrazed rangeland or roadways and parking areas, act to prolong and intensify drought conditions because almost all precipitation runs off the landscape. This not only deprives the system of moisture but provides a clear path for bacteria and other pollutants to enter the waterbody. Many streams in the Prairie Dog Creek watershed have been identified as having bacteria concerns.

Riparian buffers should be well vegetated with a mix of perennial grasses, forbs, and woody plants of several species and age classes. Often these natural features are missing in developed and residential areas and on farms and ranches.

Vegetation also helps controls erosion and provides wildlife habitat. Once established, a riparian buffer is relatively easy to maintain and can return measurable water quality benefits.

Both urban and rural residents can play their own part in protecting water quality with the following practices:

RURAL RESIDENTS AND LIVESTOCK OWNERS

- Fence off riparian areas to protect and encourage native plant growth within the buffer area and allow the riparian pasture to be managed separate from uplands
- Locate feeding, watering and shelter areas away from waterbodies to minimize livestock access and prevent overuse of streams and riparian corridors
- When necessary, graze riparian areas during the dry season when runoff potential is minimal
- Leave a space along streambanks when haying or farming adjacent areas

URBAN RESIDENTS

- Leave a space along streambanks when mowing, burning and weed-eating adjacent areas
- Allow grasses and forbs to grow naturally along the waterway and/or plant willows or other woody species to help re-vegetate bare areas
- Pick up after your pets-in your yard, parks, and along the pathways, especially near water

WANT TO INSTALL A BUFFER? FENCE OFF THE CREEK?



Through federal and state grants, the SCCD offers financial assistance for projects that benefit water quality in the Prairie Dog Creek Watershed. Typical projects include installing fencing or stockwater systems to minimize livestock access to waterbodies and relocating corrals or animal feeding areas away from waterbodies. SCCD also offers assistance for replacing eligible septic systems to eliminate sewage discharges.

If you would like to apply for cost-share funds through one of SCCD's many water quality improvement programs, we encourage you to contact SCCD or visit our website at www.sccdwy.org to determine if the project is eligible and to learn more about the application process. In the event that you are ineligible for cost-share funds, the SCCD and NRCS can still provide technical assistance.

The mission of the Sheridan County Conservation District is to protect Sheridan County's land and water quality through assistance programs, information and outreach, monitoring, and planning.

ANNUAL PRAIRIE DOG CREEK WATERSHED STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 13TH, 6 PM
PRAIRIE DOG COMMUNITY CENTER
702 HIGHWAY 14, EAST OF SHERIDAN

The Prairie Dog Creek Watershed Steering Committee, which is comprised of landowners and interested parties, provides input and recommendations to the SCCD for implementing resource programs within the Prairie Dog Creek Watershed.

The meeting is open to anyone living in or interested in the Prairie Dog Creek Watershed.

Please join us on February 13th,
your input is always welcome!



2020 PRAIRIE DOG CREEK WATER QUALITY MONITORING UPCOMING THIS SUMMER

SCCD will be conducting water quality monitoring in the Prairie Dog Creek Watershed this May through September. Interim monitoring has occurred in this watershed every three years since 2011. The purpose of monitoring is to document changes in water quality over time. Some pollutants, such as bacteria, can vary in response to a number of different factors, including changes in water temperature, water quantity, and runoff conditions. A long-term data set can help with the big picture, rather than isolated instances and locations.

In past years, monitoring has included sites on Prairie Dog Creek, Meade Creek, Wildcat Creek, Dutch Creek and Jenks Creek. Landowner support and access permission is vital to continuing local efforts to improve water quality. If you've provided access in the past, we would like to thank you and kindly ask that you consider allowing access again in 2020. We will begin reaching out and sending consent forms in the upcoming months. Your support of our ongoing efforts in the watershed is greatly appreciated.