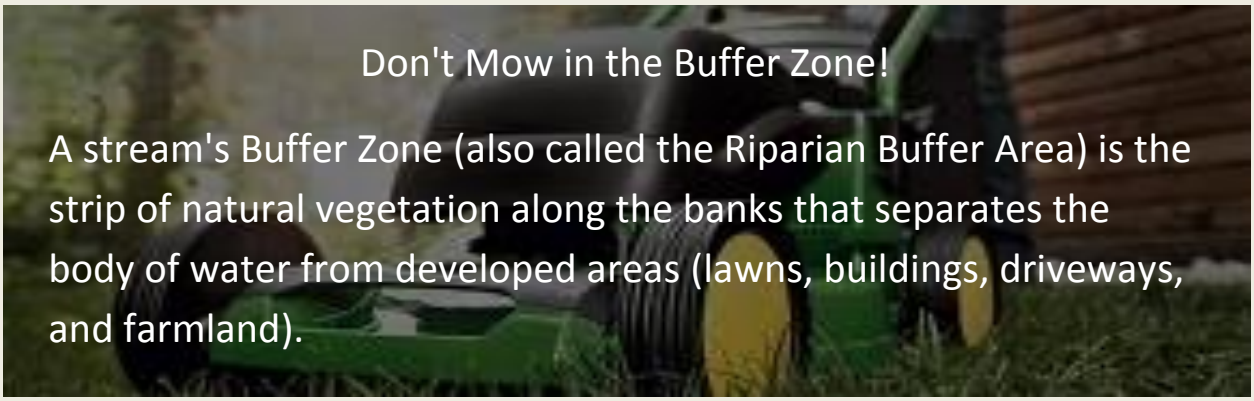
Maintaining Natural Buffers Along Waterways



Don't Mow in the Buffer Zone!

A stream's Buffer Zone (also called the Riparian Buffer Area) is the strip of natural vegetation along the banks that separates the body of water from developed areas (lawns, buildings, driveways, and farmland).

RESIDENTIAL BUFFER ZONES

Problem:

Mowing right to the stream edge may look nice and neat... but it's ACTUALLY creating a disaster, faster! If you eliminate a Buffer Zone's natural plants and bushes, you also lose the root systems that hold the soil in place. The result... the banks erode faster... they de-stabilize... they crumble and cave-in.

Simple Solutions:

1. Keep your stream's Buffer Zones "mower-free".
2. If your Buffer Zones are healthy... MAINTAIN THEM!
3. If your Buffer Zones are degrading...IMPROVE THEM by reducing the bank slope, plant bushes & trees, and restricting mowing.

For existing urban backyards, a 5-foot Buffer Zone on each side of the stream is essential.
For intermittent streams in larger backyards, a 50-foot Buffer Zone on each side of the stream is recommended.
For permanent streams, a 75-foot Buffer Zone on each side of the stream is not only ideal, it's smart!

AGRICULTURAL FILTER STRIPS

A filter strip is a type of herbaceous buffer strip that removes contaminates from overland flow. Filter strips are established in environmentally-sensitive areas to:

1. Reduce suspended solids and dissolved contaminates in runoff,
2. Reduce suspended solids and associated contaminates in irrigation tailwater.

Benefits to your farming operation:

- Less nutrient contamination in irrigation supply,
- Help prevent soil loss,
- Adding certain types of seeds can attract pollinators or beneficial insects that help control pests that harm.

Other Benefits:

- Can provide food and shelter for wildlife.
- Can improve the appearance of the field.

Filter strips are established from a mixture of seeds that can withstand partial burial from sediment deposition and will be tolerant to any herbicides used on the farmland. Filter strips should not be used as a travel lane for livestock or equipment.

"Permanent buffers can be planted with native or non-native grasses and forbs (herbaceous flowering plants), trees, shrubs, even hay for livestock. Plants along the edges of streams reduce the risk of the banks collapsing and dumping tons of soil into the channel. Vigorous plant roots filter dissolved nitrogen as water seeps downhill toward the stream."

(Laura Krouse and Robert Broulik are Linn Soil and Water Conservation District commissioners and they are joined in this column by commissioners Larry Jons, Dan Abel and Sue Ellen Hosch.)

For more information on this article click the link, Des Moines Register .

Additional Buffer Links:

- https://www.nature.org/media/centralapps/recommended-shale-practices-ecological-buffers.pdf

** Contact the Wayne SWCD to learn more about the programs available on filter strips and to see how your farming operation could qualify for technical and financial assistance! **