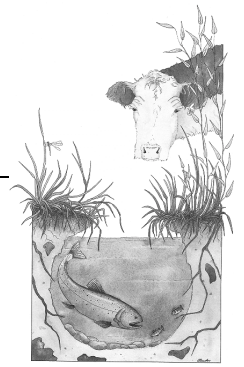


Cows and Fish

Alberta Riparian Habitat Management Program



Lorne Fitch

Getting Past the Talk: Working with Communities

The Cows and Fish Process in Action

Background

The Cows and Fish program's "secret to success" has been born from the hard work of landowners and their communities, and their willingness to open their doors to either share their experiences or allow us to work with them with new ideas. Our "way of doing business" or process is fundamentally about following basic principles on how to create successful partnerships at the community level to understand and identify what riparian land use issues are in their watersheds, identify what riparian management tools and technical support might be needed, complete riparian health monitoring, and develop and implement non-legislated voluntary action plans to address the issues. (REFER to PROCESS FACT SHEET)

This process is simply getting together and working with producers and local communities to find out what riparian management strategies work and benefit their operations while maintaining and protecting riparian health. These management strategies are then shared with others. Previous experience tells us with better information and understanding of landscape processes local communities and producers can make better decisions on land use sustaining agriculture, fish and wildlife populations, watershed function, and good clean water supplies for everyone. Working locally to develop common goals is really about "putting common sense to common practice" to keep people on the landscape and our watersheds intact. After all, healthy landscapes translate to healthy communities.

Working with Communities: Sharing our experience

Lesson 1

Resource managers and others must acknowledge that riparian management activities must be driven by producers, local communities and/or watershed groups to be accepted, effective and long lasting. The Cows and Fish process ensures consistent program messages are delivered through regional/local partnerships (producers, community members, etc.), and not by individual(s) agency mandate(s). Resource managers are part of the local team to provide technical support, awareness of the issues and help funnel financial resources and professional expertise for community work.

Lesson 2

Without a collective effort by committed people, including the likes of Agricultural Fieldmen, municipal Agricultural Service Board's (ASB), municipal council's, provincial and federal land managers and departments (AENV, AAFRD, PFRA, etc), conservation and agricultural sector organisations (ACA, ACC, CCA, TUC) and significant funding support (AESA, NSWCP, CABIDF, ACA, CARDF) local producers and their communities can not tap into the resources or technical support they need to address their riparian land use issues.

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Lesson 3

A key feature empowering Cows and Fish program efforts has been the declaration of ownership of the riparian grazing issue by cattlemen, through the Alberta Cattle Commission (ACC) and the Canadian Cattleman's Association (CCA). Simply, it's an understanding that landowners need to take ownership of the issues before progress is made.

Lesson 4

You've got to get out and talk to producers and their communities. They are the critical link to ensuring our landscapes are maintained and protected. Helping them understand some basic ecological principles about the landscape they live on and make a living from is a necessary first step. Someone needs to talk with them and understand what their issues are, by being willing to listen rather than telling them what the issues and solutions might be. Producers and communities need to know what will be/are the benefits to their operation from proper riparian management and stewardship. Being willing to take the time to listen and share experience builds trust. When people trust each other doors are open to find the best solutions for the issues.

Lesson 5

Working with communities is about taking action and being committed to seeing the activities through to the end. Get out of the office, the house and truck and get talking and listening – communicate with people on their turf (operation, watershed, etc.). To fully understand our process you must experience it by working with it. The old proverb “I hear - I forget, I see - I remember, and ***I do - I understand***” is fundamental to achieving success on the landscape.

Lesson 6

Textbooks are not the only source of information. There is a large source of practical experience in working with landowners to find innovative solutions. Landowners that are currently managing healthy riparian areas are wonderful sources of information and their success speeds up the process of finding out what works in the local area. In addition, working with landowners to help them understand the issues empowers them to look after their investments in their operation (time, money, land) and to ensure the land will be productive in the long-term. This empowerment leads to creative ideas and ways to find solutions including a willingness to demonstrate what riparian management strategies work and what don't. One of the most important things to realise is what makes a good demonstration site and what doesn't. Don't be afraid of sharing your mistakes, there's a lot to be learned when things don't go right. The trick is not to repeat the same mistake twice.

Lesson 7

Local partnerships involving producers and their communities as decision makers in developing action plans to identify where to begin, who to work with, and what approach to take to address critical issues sends a positive message to the general public. Proactive initiatives by the agricultural sector demonstrates their willingness to face the issues, find solutions where needed, and create a healthier environment for everyone. This willingness to face the issues values cooperation over conflict, tempering the need for legislation and regulation.

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A Basic Description of How We Work with a Community

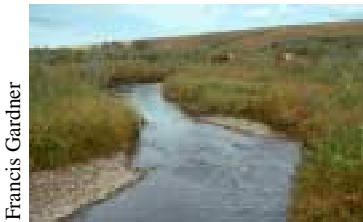
Remember, working with communities on community-based action means working directly with producers and their community through all elements of the process.

Please keep in mind communities and people are dynamic and each element or activity within the process can proceed sooner or later than portrayed in this example. However, experience tells us that without implementing awareness activities first, misunderstandings of the need for riparian work in the community can occur. People need to understand the reason why first, before they are willing to take action on the issues.

- We work on an invitation basis. A local producer group, forage association, or government agency invites us to deliver a presentation on riparian areas and their management at a workshop or evening information session. We accept and prepare a presentation in whole or in part on riparian health, function, grazing strategies, and how to identify and address riparian land use issues (Our process). All presentations bring people up to speed on what communities are currently working on and existing riparian management tools that are available (refer to Riparian Management Tool Fact Sheet) Most importantly, we customize the talk to the audience, their need and interest. Presentation length ranges from 15 minutes to 2 hours and may include break out sessions to allow the audience to help identify what issues they are facing within their watersheds.
- Our presentations generally involve captivating imagery depicting our message in real pictures and designed to educate as well as entertain. Catching and keeping people's attention is important for the message to hit home. Two key goals of the presentations are to make people aware and understand the issues, and then take action. Note: We are willing to help others develop and learn how to deliver presentations that have impact.
- Keep in mind – we try to accommodate most invitations, from municipal planners to naturalist groups to forage associations, as helping people become aware and understand the issues and ecological processes behind riparian management is the foundation to making any progress on the ground. Besides, you never know where your allies or keys to success may reside.
- If the group is interested in either hearing more about riparian management issues or wanting to know how to take the next steps, they will invite us back for another series of presentations or a planning meeting. The planning meeting is our opportunity to facilitate group discussion to define where to begin, who to work with, how to get started – including funding sources and available riparian management tools (workshops, field days, riparian health assessment, demonstration and profile sites, Green Zone document, etc.), and how to develop an action plan or strategy to address the issues.
- If the group decides they do not want to proceed we respect their wishes and move to the next group. If we feel there still might be an interest we will first speak with key community leaders to help us understand whether they feel additional awareness is needed or desired or a different approach is warranted. ***Remember Cows and Fish is a proactive voluntary process. We do not try and force our message and gain another platform to speak with the group because we feel there is a need.***

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- If individuals outside of the group still want to participate we will screen potential and involve other agencies to deal with the referral process and identify needs and priorities. For example, if producers are interested in off stream water development and are not involved with demonstration sites, we will refer them to our partners with the expertise and mandate to work with them (PFRA, AAFRD).
- For groups that have invited us to the planning table, we begin the process of working with them to develop a strategy and link them with possible funding organizations or programs if required.
- Remember: some of the community meetings will be long and may go late into the evening or be on a weekend. Again, our experience indicates the effort is worth it. Showing the community you are committed to their needs goes along ways in establishing a successful working relationship.
- As part of helping the local partnership or community group define what riparian management tools they need or want to implement, we provide technical council and content for funding proposals including costs for riparian health assessments, demonstration sites, etc. Part of the commitment from the community is to secure the necessary funds for the activities planned including contributing their own time (In-kind) and financial resources (Cash) to match other partner contributions and grant requirements (has ranged from 25 to 75%). In addition, we assist them with the initial stages of implementing their action plans by providing technical advice on what demonstration and profile sites to develop, delivering presentations at workshops and field days, completing riparian health assessments for their watersheds including community wrap-up and participating landowner reports.
- At this stage we will continue to provide technical advice and trouble shoot for the community or group. However, other partners and agencies will continue working with the community on individual referrals and other activities beyond the original community-based riparian program activities.
- If riparian health assessments were completed in their watersheds, we will come back and monitor their riparian management progress upon their request in 3 to 5 year increments, provided the communities are able to secure the necessary financial resources for the monitoring at least their portion of the cost share.



Francis Gardner

Our experience shows that with better information, producers and communities can make informed decisions on how to improve, maintain and protect riparian health and still make a living off the landscape.

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